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“Castro...By Any Other Name”

by

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Mention the name Castro in most social circles and one automatically thinks of Fidel and the Republic of Cuba. From this point forward, however, the name spoken in the same breath as Cuba will not be Castro, but Raul. Raul is also a Castro, but he is not his brother and there will always be only one (Fidel) Castro.

We should look a little closer at the change that has taken place in Cuba's administration. Questions are arising about potential changes to the Cuban government's now that Fidel Castro has in essence resigned his position as Supreme Leader of the country. Conjecture is being thrown out that Raul will begin reaching out to the United States in hopes of repairing the rift that has existed since Raul and Fidel Castro overthrew the Batista Government in 1959.

Prior to the taking of the country, Fidel had flirted with and visited the Communist Soviet bloc of nations learning their ways and yearning to apply the same ideology to his country, given the opportunity. Several times he and Raul were thrown into prison only to be released by President Batista. His apparent compassion toward the brothers and other would-be "saviors of the people" would ultimately lead to his downfall in 1959.

Although Fidel was the apparent mastermind behind the infamous Revolution, it was younger brother Raul who put the teeth in Fidel's bite for control over the people. It was Raul who first met one of Fidel's most famous comrade in arms, Che' Guevara, and was responsible for bringing him into the inner circle of the revolutionary fighters. Raul was also, as the news media called him, an "ardent executioner," meaning he seemed to take pleasure in meting out the "justice" of Fidel on those whom Fidel deemed traitors.

It was Raul who personally oversaw the execution of hundreds of members of the military and police units after the victory over Batista. During the pre-victory days while fighting in the mountainous regions of Cuba, Raul gained a reputation as a short-tempered, quick to shoot and ask questions later commandante' of revolutionaries that fought on a second front in the Sierra Cristal Mountains of Northern Cuba. He was especially violent toward anyone suspected of being friendly with the Batista forces or showing themselves to be pro-American. He supposedly hated America and what it stood for at the time. According to a *Time Magazine* article Raul's justice against suspected collaborators with Batista security forces was "swift and severe" using firing squads to quickly remove them from this earth.

1960 vintage newsreels out of Cuba in the '60s show Cuban civilians and military lined up in

front of deep trenches or walls and being done away by a shot to the head. The bodies were then buried in mass graves. As I watched I was mentally transported back to Germany and Poland of the 1930s and '40s and the millions of Jewish lives that were taken using the same vicious techniques.

After power was consolidated, Fidel began the purging, via the bullet, of anticommunist revolutionaries and Raul was the man that carried out the purge. Fidel appointed Raul to the head of the Armed Forces of the country and he reorganized the Army after the pattern of the Soviet military. That which had been the "Rebel Army" became the FAR or "Revolutionary Armed Forces." It was in this position that he came up with the FAR's motto and insisted that all his soldiers adhere to it—"At your orders, commander-in-chief, for no matter what, no matter where, and under all circumstances."

Raul's past would indicate he will continue to run the country as his brother has in the past. However, there are many who think age, 77 years old in June, has mellowed Raul, which he somewhat evidenced with recent comments about the amount of money the average Cuban worker makes each month—\$15. Raul has stated in written and spoken words that this is a "paltry" sum and complained publicly that Cuba's production of food staples needs to increase by over two-thirds. These are not iron-clad guarantees that he is "mellowing" but it is a good inkling that he might just want to start a dialogue with the United States.

He has alluded to the possibility that once the "exile friendly" administration currently in the White House has been replaced, he might support a "coming together on trade and tourist issues between the two countries." Who knows, maybe we'll someday be able to travel to and fro from old Havana as many of our predecessors did in the '40s and '50s. I wouldn't be running out and buying your tickets yet, however.