Fidel Castro: A Revolutionary Soldier

Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz was born on August 13th 1926 in Birán, then Cuban province of Oriente. His father Ángel Castro Argiz, the son of poor farmers from Galicia was a landholder and sugar cane tenant. His mother Lina Ruz Gonzalez came from a peasant’s family in Pinar del Rio province.

He learned to read and write at Biran rural public school and continued elementary school at the private schools La Salle and Dolores in Santiago de Cuba. He started secondary school at the Dolores school and finished them at Colegio de Belen, a Jesuit-run institution in Havana, where he graduated in Arts and Letters in June 1945.

The Jesuits from Belen said “Fidel distinguished himself in all subjects related to the arts... He was a true athlete, He has earned the admiration and affection of all. He is going to study law and no doubt will fill the book of his life with brilliant pages. Fidel has the makings, and will not be lacking artistically”

In September 1945 he enrolled in the degrees of Law, Social Sciences and Diplomatic Law in the University of Havana. There he immediately got involved in the political struggle as part of the students movements and held different positions at the Cuban University Students Federation (FEU Spanish Language acronym). He was an outstanding member of several progressive and anti-imperialist students’ organizations such as the Committee for the Independence of Puerto Rico, founder of the September 30th Committee and the Committee for the Independence of the Dominican Republic, where he acted as President.

He organized and engaged in countless acts of protest and demonstrations against the country’s political situation as part of his political activities during those years. He was beaten up and jailed several times by repressive forces.
During the Bogotazo. Fidel is the first one on the left.

Between July and September 1947, while taking the third year at Law School he enrolled in the expedition organized to fight Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo regime. The expedition trained at Cayo Confites in Oriente province. He was promoted to Lieutenant, Head of Platoon and later Head of Battalion Company. The Dominican Republic bound expedition was intercepted by a Cuban frigate after it sailed off. Fidel jumped overboard with his gun to prevent being captured. He considered it a disgrace that the expedition was seized without a fight.

He came in contact with Marxist ideas while he was a university student.

A sympathizer of the progressive Cuban People’s Party (Orthodox) he actively participated in the Party’s poetical campaigns since 1948, specially in those promoted by its main leader Eduardo Chibas. He fostered the most radical and combative stands among the young membership of the Party. After Chabad’s death Fidel intensified his efforts to uncover Carlos Prio’s government corruption.

After his participation in the anti-Trujillo expedition he traveled to Venezuela, Panama and Colombia as a student’s leader to organize the Latin American Students Congress to be held in Colombia. Fidel was in Colombia when the popular uprising caused by the assassination of Colombian leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán took place in April that year. He joined that struggle with resolve and survived just by chance.

In March 1949 he led a protest in front of the US Embassy in Havana to show the popular outrage for the blemish and disrespectful acts committed on the Monument of Cuban National Hero by US Marines.

Fidel graduated as Attorney at Civil Law and Bachelor of Diplomatic Law in 1950. He devoted his efforts to the defense of the poorest and most humble sectors of the people in his law office.

When Fulgencio Batista led a Coup d’état on March 10th 1952 he was among the first to denounce the reactionary and illegitimate de-facto regime and called for its overthrowing.
This is one of the first photos of Fidel after the attack on the Moncada Barracks, taken at the Vivac in Santiago de Cuba. The picture is the property of Ernesto Ocaña, photographer for the Diario de Cuba. 

He organized and trained a numerous contingent of over one thousand youth, mostly workers, employees, and students mainly from the ranks of the Orthodox party. On July 26th 1953, he led a group of 160 of them in the attack to the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba and Carlos Manuel de Cespedes in Bayamo in an action meant to start the arm struggle against Batista’s regime.

They could not achieve their goal since the element of surprise failed. Fidel was taken prisoner by the tyranny’s repressive forces days after the military setback and was kept in solitary confinement for 76 days. He was later tried and sentenced to 15 years in prison. In a court room full of regime forces and no access to the public he assumed his own legal representation before the court that tried him, and pronounced his speech known as “History will absolve me”, where he outlined the program for the future Cuban Revolution.

“No weapon, no force can ever defeat a people determined to fight for its rights. There are countless historic examples, both past and present. The case of Bolivia is very recent, where by the use of dynamite sticks mining workers overthrew and crushed regular army regiments” he said.

He continued to denounce the oppressive regime from jail while tuning his revolutionary plans and perfecting his comrades theoretical and ideological preparedness.

As a result of a strong pressure and popular campaigns he was released in May 1955. During the following weeks he engaged in a vigorous work of agitation and denounce. He founded the 26 of July Movement to peruse the revolutionary struggle.
In July 1955, after it was clear that the anti-Batista struggle could not be undertaken by legal means Fidel left for Mexico to organize the armed insurrection in exile. Under very difficult economic conditions and subject to close surveillance and persecution by Batista's agents he carried out intense organization and preparation activities. He also kept an active campaign to raise awareness about the purposes of the revolutionary movement and the ideas supporting it. He travelled to the United States where he established together with his comrades in exile “patriotic clubs” to provide political and economic support for the revolutionary struggle. He was in Philadelphia, New York, Union City, Bridgeport and Miami.

With the motto “In 1956 we will be free or we will be martyrs” Fidel, Raúl, Juan Manuel Márquez, Ernesto Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos and other outstanding revolutionaries trained by taking long walks through the streets of Mexico city, climbing mountains and learning about hand to hand combat, guerrilla warfare and shooting practices.

On June 20th 1956 the head of the 26 of July Movement, Che Guevara and other members of the group were detained, and the “casas campamento” (safe houses) were discovered and a considerable quantity of weapons were seized.

After they left Mexican precincts the revolutionary conspiracy stepped up. They bought the Granma yacht in which they sailed off to Cuba in the early hours of November 25th 1956 from Tuxpan River, with 82 combatants on board, whose average age was 27 years.
In the Sierra Maestra. The photo was published in the February 17, 1957 edition of the American newspaper The New York Times which also ran an interview the journalist Herbert Matthews did with Fidel. After a seven days journey they landed on December 2nd 1956 in Las Coloradas, south west coast of Oriente province. The Batista forces located the landing and sent troops to attack the expedition members. On December 5th the Tyranny’s army caught Fidel and his men by surprise in Alegria de Pio. The revolutionaries were decimated, several of them were captured during the persecution and many were murdered on the spot.

With the valuable cooperation of peasants, Fidel was joined by Raul in Cinco Palmas and regrouped the revolutionary forces. He then went to Sierra Maestra mountain range to continue the revolutionary struggle.

On January 17th 1956 he led the first armed assault against Batista’s army in La Plata where he came out victorious. The Rebel Army started to grow and strengthen.

As Commander in Chief of the Revolutionary forces, he led the military actions as well as the 26 of July Movement during the 25 months of struggle. He had Column Number 1 “Jose Marti” under his direct command and he personally participated in almost all important operations, combats and battles that took place during the war in the territory covered by the Rebel Army First Front.

After severe blows dealt to the tyranny’s elite troops, they, through their main commanders acknowledged the rebel victory in the very theatre of operations in Oriente province on December 28th. At daybreak January 1st 1959 Fidel defeated with a General Strike followed throughout the entire nation an attempt coup d’état sponsored by the US government. He entered victorious in Santiago de Cuba that very day and on January 8th he arrived in Havana.

He kept his rank of Commander in Chief of the revolutionary forces when the struggle ended. On February 13th 1959 he was appointed Prime Minster of the Revolutionary Government.

He led and participated in all actions undertaken to defend Cuba and its Revolution against foreign aggressions and the activities of counterrevolutionary activities in Cuba, especially the defeat of the United States CIA organized Bay of Pigs invasion which ended in Giron Beach Cuban victory in April 1961.

On behalf of the Revolutionary power he proclaimed the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution on April 16th 1961.
Fidel at a ceremony in El Cacahual on December 17, 1961. The photo was taken by Liborio Noval. He led the Cuban people during the dramatic days of the Missile Crisis in October 1962.

He was the Secretary General of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations and later Secretary General of the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution. Since the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party was established in October 1965, he became its First Secretary General and member of the Politburo, where he was reelected in his post during the five Congresses held since. During the Sixth Congress April 16th to the 19th 2011 he relinquishes his possibility of being reelected due to health reasons.

He was elected a member of the National Assembly of Peoples Power representing Santiago de Cuba municipality in successive terms since the establishment of the Assembly in 1976 and also since then until 2008 he held the post of President of the Council of State and Council of Ministers.

He presided over 50 Cuban official missions to 50 different countries.
He received over a one hundred high decorations both foreign and Cuban as well as numerous academic honors, dictations in Higher Education institutions in Cuba, Latin America and Europe.

He masterfully led the participation of hundreds of thousands of Cuban combatants in internationalist missions in Algeria, Syria, Angola, and Ethiopia and other countries. He promoted and organized the contribution of thousands of Cuban doctors, teachers and technicians who have rendered their services in over 40 third world countries. He also arrange and promoted scholarships for tens of thousands of students from these countries in Cuba. He was central in the establishment of comprehensive programs for Cuban collaboration in different Latin American, African and Caribbean countries as well as the founding in Cuba of Schools for Medicine, Sports and Physical Education and other degrees for students from Third World countries.

Fidel promoted the worldwide scale battle of Third World countries against the existing international world order, especially the external debt, the squander of resources as a result of military expending, neoliberal globalization and also fostered unity and integration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

During an appearance on the Mesa Redonda TV program on Cuban television

He was the leader in the determined action by the Cuban people to face the blockade imposed by the United States for more than forty years and the economic consequences of the collapse of the Eastern European socialist block and encouraged the tenacious efforts by the Cubans to overcome the severe difficulties resulting from these factors, its resilience during the so called Special Period and the resumption of Cuba’s economic growth and development.

For many years of Cuban Revolution he encouraged and led the Cuban people in its endeavor to consolidate its Revolution, its path towards socialism, the unity of the revolutionary forces and the people at large. He was also essential in the country’s economic and social transformations, the
progress in education, health care, sports, culture, science, the defense from foreign aggression and in
displaying his great leadership in an active foreign policy which defends principles and actions of
solidarity with the peoples fighting for independence and progress. He was key in the building of the
strong revolutionary, internationalist and communist consciences of the Cuban people.

On July 31st 2006 he relinquished all his posts due to health problems. He wrote numerous reflections
and articles during his convalescence. He devoted great efforts during his last years of life to projects
related to agriculture as well as human and animal food. Due to his moral authority he was consulted
and influential in major and strategic decisions of the Revolution.

Fidel’s life cannot be contained in a few lines. His permanent and indissoluble link with the people, his
brilliant oratory, his constant preaching and his absolute commitment to the cause of the Revolution
have led an indelible mark in the Cuban people and have been a source of inspiration to millions of men
and women in all continents. Future generations of Cubans will have in him, as they did in Marti, an
example, a paradigm and motivation to continue his work.

He died on November 25th 2016 in Havana Cuba at 10:29 pm at the age of 90. Upon his request his
remains were cremated. His ashes were laid to rest at Santa Iphigenia Cemetery in a solemn ceremony
on December 4th 2016.

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