

[Interview with Commander Fidel Castro Ruz by CMQ, in Camagüey, January 3, 1959, Year of Liberation.](#)

Autor:

- [VERBATIM RECORDS - PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICES](#)

Fidel Castro: With the triumph ensured throughout the country, with all the military commands of the nation controlled by the revolutionary leadership, and with Judge Urrutia as President of the Republic, to whose inauguration the military command I hold is absolutely subordinate, with freedom and civil power restored in the Republic in all its fullness, I request from the workers' leaders and all the workers, as well as from the living classes, the cessation of the revolutionary general strike that culminated in the most beautiful victory of our people.

My devoted memory of the fallen heroes in this time of triumph, and my emotional and profound recognition of the people of Cuba, who are today the pride and example of America.

Journalist: Dr. Castro, when can we announce to the people of Havana that you will arrive with your comrades there?

Fidel Castro: Well, naturally you will understand our desire to arrive in Havana, among other reasons because we know that they are waiting for us, but, as you have been able to appreciate, the march has to be a little slow, for different reasons: the road has been blocked at a number of points...

Journalist: We have witnessed - excuse me for interrupting you - the applause and great welcome that have been given to you in Camagüey city, where tens of thousands of women, men and children have taken to the streets to cheer you on. We figure that's why the march will have to be slower...

Fidel Castro: Indeed, I consider that the recognition and affection shown to us by the people is greater than any merit we may have. I believe that we have simply done our duty and, in the end, the sacrifice has not been so much; greater has been the sacrifice of mothers who have lost their children in this struggle, which was a necessary one. We have simply done our duty; we consider that we have done our duty or at least a part of it.

I notice that the work is getting bigger every day, sometimes it becomes absolutely exhausting. We have not slept a minute, day or night, for many days.

I was explaining to you the reason for our delay, and I was saying that because of the war it was necessary, to prevent the forces fighting against us and the tanks from crossing, it was necessary to destroy a series of bridges, and now we are marching precisely in vehicles and in tanks and we have precisely the inconvenience of having to make detours and march slowly. So, of course, the duty to stop at the villages, where our compatriots are always waiting for us, eager to greet our fighters, and that slows us down. The calculations we have made are the following: leave tonight or tomorrow at dawn from Camagüey, arrive in Santa Clara tomorrow, leave Santa Clara the day after tomorrow, Tuesday - we will also have to hold an event in Santa Clara - and then, on Wednesday, according to our calculations, we plan to arrive in Havana, in the afternoon. Those are our plans, and we believe that, although we are eager to reach the capital, we apologize to the people of Havana, understanding the difficulties of moving forward more quickly. At first, I thought it would be faster to move forward...

Journalist: We understand, Dr. Castro, that you are going to arrive in Havana with more than 1,000 men, and with all the equipment of tanks and vehicles, etc.

Fidel Castro: Well, actually, in accordance with the plans we have to restructure and reorganize the revolutionary forces, I have left in the different provinces, in the different areas, enough combatants to maintain order, which is not difficult with the people of Cuba. In Oriente province, we have not had a single case of looting, and even the most hated elements have been arrested; no one has taken revenge by their own hand, even though even after the situation has been controlled nationally, it has been fought in several cities by desperate elements who had many faults, and has cost us some valuable lives. Coincidentally, Captain Horacio Rodríguez, one of our Granma comrades, when he tried to stop a henchman after taking over the Manzanillo plaza - a man who was very hated, because he had committed many crimes in Yara area - he went to arrest him and at that moment, it seems that with the tenacity he put into capturing him, he went into a house after throwing two hand grenades, and then they shot him with a machine gun and killed him. Here in Camagüey, yesterday we had to fight against a series of elements from the repressive and secret forces and Masferrer's supporters who took refuge in a building and had to be forcibly removed. It cost us some casualties, too. But aside from those facts... All these elements, when they were arrested, immediately, following the rule that we have maintained in this war, no one let themselves be carried away by hatred or revenge; on the contrary, everyone considers it a matter of honor and chivalry, even with criminals, to subject them to the procedures...

Journalist: That is a great example of responsibility and restraint of the revolutionary forces.

Fidel Castro: I always said that in the future there would be no revenge because there would be justice. But justice means meeting the elementary requirements of the procedure, even though there are cases where everyone knows that there is no alternative but to apply the death penalty to them, because they are men who have committed as many as 20 or 30 murders, and it is impossible in such cases not to apply it. The people want nothing else, but for the death penalty to be applied to them.

Journalist: Justified.

Fidel Castro: And in those cases, then, it will be the revolutionary courts that will decide according to the revolutionary law, and according to what the people want and, furthermore, what the country needs. We must not forget the tragic days the nation suffered. I can explain a little the emotion of the people, the delirium, the delirious joy of the people, only because of how cruel the tyranny was. I was telling a journalist that this joy was the measure of how cruel and inhumane Batista's regime had been.

It is also necessary to give an example: when one acts justly, then even those close to someone who has committed dozens of crimes understand that there was no other alternative, and there is not even this grudge left. They will be exemplary punishments that the generous Revolution will apply only to those who really deserve it, but I was saying that it is a satisfaction for us to have seen that there has not been a single case of a man dragged through the streets, for example, the populations from Manzanillo, Bayamo, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín, in the places where the terror against the people was most vicious, it was where they behaved most exemplarily.

So it's not hard to maintain order, because the people do it all, just like that. Traditionally, Cubans are willing to collaborate and do whatever is necessary the greatest sacrifices; what they are not willing to do is to do anything the hard way. I understood that...

Journalist: Doctor, forgive me for asking this somewhat sentimental question.

Fidel Castro. - Yes, of course.

Journalist: Since it was in the Moncada Barracks that you initiated the first great armed battle against the usurpers, and it was there that the July 26th Movement had its origin and name, you must have

suffered a very strong emotional impact upon entering the Moncada Barracks victoriously. Would you like to briefly explain these impressions?

Fidel Castro: Well, we have lived for a long time under a great emotional impact; we have become somewhat accustomed to exceptional circumstances like those. Also, for example, since our departure from Mexico, the crossing, the landing; when we landed in some swamps, I came to believe that it was a cay until we finally discovered that... We were able to get out of there with a lot of work. The first setbacks: staying with two men and two rifles for almost 15 days, trying to make contact again and regroup the first fighters, looking for the weapons that were lost. All the vicissitudes of the struggle: the first victories, from the smallest to the biggest; from the battle of La Plata to the occasion when, just six months ago, we had to fight against 14 quite well-armed infantry battalions, with only 300 men and 5,000 bullets in reserve...

Journalist: Those fights were in Oriente, weren't they?

Fidel Castro: Well, that was in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. We've been going through all sorts of emotional times for two years and thirty days now, haven't we? Of course, even on days like those... The first day was a terrible day too because we were betrayed; there was an attempt to snatch the victory from the people. That morning we had to act quickly...

Journalist: Are you referring to the attempt to integrate the Military Junta into Columbia?

Fidel Castro: The coup was a counter-revolutionary blow by the Junta to avoid the inevitable; if it lasted another 15 days, we were making all the forces prisoners. At that time, we had 10,000 soldiers in Oriente province. We were about to attack Santiago when Cantillo showed up to make the proposals that... I, for example, thought, analyzing it coldly, that the best thing was not to accept any kind of support, because the war had already been won; but when one makes those calculations, one must always think that, if the same objective can be achieved without spilling one more drop of blood... Because, above all, the men who fell at the end of the war are those who brought deep sadness to us, for the idea that they have, for example, survived all the dangers in numerous combats, and it always brings a great sadness, in a moment of a victorious combat, to think of those who did not see the fruit of the triumph. That's happened to us with some commanders. It happened to us with Commander Paz, when the battle of Jigüe... No, rather, with Commander Cuevas, when the battle of Jigüe, hours before that victory, which was our first great victory, since it meant more than 300 casualties at that time and 260 weapons captured, in a battle that lasted 10 days; and that comrade, who had been one of the heroes of that combat, did not survive; he could not see the victory. It happened to us with Major Cuevas, it happened to us with Major Daniel, it happened to us with another comrade, Major Coroneaux, when the battle of Guisa, who was the hero of the battle of Guisa, and...

Journalist: How many days did the battle of Guisa last, Commander?

Fidel Castro: It lasted 10 days. The strongest battles we've ever had have been 10-day battles. I don't know if all the details will be known.

Journalist: - It would be interesting if you could refer to some of the main ones, right, because...

Fidel Castro: - Well, we wouldn't really finish today.

Journalist: But some of the main details that the people want to know because they are justifiably admiring your heroism.

Fidel Castro: Well, it's not that much, it's simply that we had no choice but to do that. I will tell you, for example, we started the Jigüe combat with 120 men, and it was fought against two battalions. For every one of our men, we made three casualties to the dictatorship. The battle of Guisa was a battle fought at the gates of Bayamo against all those Sherman tanks; we had no artillery, we had nothing, and yet

there the 220 men fought against about 3,000 men. What happened in these combats is this: we started the combat with a certain number, but as the days went by, we had more and more rifles, because every time we made the enemy suffer a setback, 20 or 30 rifles were occupied, and they started... For example, I started the battle of Jigüe with 120 men and we ended up with about 400 armed men. The one in Guisa began with 220, and it was at the gates of Bayamo and ended with 350 armed men. Within 45 days, we were fighting garrisons that made a strong resistance... Maffo's barracks held out for 20 days, it barricaded itself in BANFAIC's facilities and it was very hard to defeat them.

Palma Soriano's resistance was not so strong, because we placed an 81 mm mortar in a good position; our mortar gunner had acquired tremendous marksmanship and in a few minutes he put Palma's forces out of action, but they made a great resistance in spite of that.

It was also in those days when we had a great number of casualties because the advance from Guisa to Santiago de Cuba was an advance of continuous struggle on the Carretera Central. We were told that we were in the Sierra Mountains and that because we were there we could control the situation. We fought the troops from Bayamo and all the garrisons that were between Bayamo and Santiago de Cuba in the middle of the Carretera Central, and since we took the Carretera Central they did not take away an inch of the road from us. In those days, more than 700 weapons were occupied and made, by the forces of Column One, plus Column Three... And, besides, it was no longer a matter of columns; all our troops were already collaborating, because all those who were in one position were supporting the others, preventing the reinforcements from crossing, right? More than 1,000 casualties and over 700 weapons were taken.

At that time the battle of Santa Clara was taking place, because I communicated in those days, after the battles of Guisa, with Commander Ernesto Guevara, who was our commander in the province, and I indicated to him... because he knew the plans that we were going to advance on Santiago, and it was very important; when he left the Sierra Maestra, the strategic objective of the advance of the columns to Santa Clara was precisely to support us when we advanced on the capital.

I am not going to explain now - because it would be long - what our whole strategy was; it was a plan that was made and carried out, but with such accuracy that Batista fell almost the day we thought he would fall, and Santiago de Cuba fell more or less the day we thought we would take it. So that's what happened... Which, by the way...

Well, almost, no. They could not take away our triumph in any way, but they tried to take away our triumph.

And if we had not acted quickly, the consequences could have been serious, because people were told that Batista had left, people were informed that we were going to Havana, they wanted to make it clear that we were in agreement with that, there was already talk of a "peace commission".

And I calculated after Batista left power, a peace commission that would come to visit us so that we would not maintain the operations could make us appear before the people as if we were ambitious or intransigent; and the truth is that it was a great moment because there was nothing revolutionary about it. Besides, it was simply an attempt to keep up the strength somehow; it wasn't long before they told us to hand over the guns.

I had repeatedly said, and always foreseeing that danger, I had been constantly saying that we did not accept the Military Junta and that our conditions for accepting any agreement with a military movement, made by the military who were not committed to the crimes or immorality, theft, vice and all the depravities it practiced.

Journalist: It seems, doctor - and forgive me for interrupting - that the speech you made rejecting the Military Junta completely, was the decisive blow to the situation...

Fidel Castro. Well, when they tell me... I was at the América sugar mill at the time, preparing the troops to advance on Santiago, when I was informed that Radio Progreso had said that Batista had left.

Of course, it was not a total surprise, because the day before I had sent him an ultimatum announcing that the hostilities were breaking down, and I had sent it to the square in Santiago de Cuba to tell Cantillo because he had already... I was aware of his betrayal 24 hours before December 31 at 3:00 p.m., the date and time for which a whole plan of action had been drawn up, in accordance with the unconditional support - because otherwise the support would not have been accepted - that he was going to give to the Revolution. And upon realizing this I immediately wrote to him, and we exchanged some letters that I read on the radio, documents that absolutely proved Cantillo's betrayal; I sent him an ultimatum and told him that if after 3:00 pm on December 31... we would advance resolutely on Santiago.

A very hard battle would have been fought in Santiago because there were approximately 5,000 soldiers, artillery, tanks...

We were used to fighting against those troops, and, besides, I was sure that we would take Santiago from them; the plan was already made, and I had no doubt that we would take Santiago from them. You already know so exactly the reactions, tactics, and everything, when you have to attack them on one side... For example, when you want them to withdraw from a position, you know what you have to do; and the tactics to be applied were almost infallible. And I was already placing some cannons at the entrance of the bay to cut off communication by sea; tank cannons destroyed by us, which we had taken advantage of the cannons and had made everything else from the land cannon assembly...

Journalist. Fortunately, it wasn't necessary to use them...

Fidel Castro: I used to say that not even the Krupp factories made better cannons than our gun makers. Right there at the América sugar mill, using...

Journalist: Were the cannons made there?

Fidel Castro: Not the cannons, the cannons were those of the tanks; the assembly of the cannons. At that time, I was already setting the mortars against the airport, and we already had a large number of mines that we were going to place between the airport and the city. The combination was to cut off communications in the first place - which was how it was done in Palma -, taking the airport and blocking the bay; we also had the means to sink a ship there, but that could have caused some international frictions and the loss of many millions. The cannons were to be placed 300 meters from where the ships were to pass. Then the troops were already taking up their positions; we were going to first beat the overhangs they had near Santiago de Cuba.

That's what we were doing, when in the morning, the first day, I was told that Radio Progreso had reported that Batista had fled to Santo Domingo. And since they always tell so many lies, there are times when people hear one thing and... And usually one always hears the news with skepticism. I immediately sent someone out to check, and within half an hour the news was confirmed that Batista had fled, and that there was a Junta, and that Carlos Manuel Piedra was president. I immediately, without wasting a minute, wrote up the statements; it did not take me more than an hour to write up the statements and leave for where our mobile plant was, where Radio Rebelde was already installed in Palma. I moved, and it was when I proclaimed that a coup had taken place and that this coup was very suspicious, that we did not accept it; and it was then that I gave the order to all the columns to advance on the villages, to attack, and not to give another truce except for surrender. And I communicated with Commander Camilo Cienfuegos and ordered him to advance immediately; he had just taken Yaguajay, and I told him that within two hours at the latest he had to have the men on the march over the capital. And I told him, quite simply, to take Columbia. Camilo could be given that order.

Journalist. - and he would absolutely comply with it.

Fidel Castro. - Yes. I told him to march with 500 men, with automatic weapons, and take Columbia. To communicate with me again when I was at Columbia.

Then, Ché was finishing the battle of Santa Clara; he had 300 soldiers still resisting. I told him not to worry and leave some troops there maintaining the siege and also to advance immediately in support of Camilo; that Camilo should take Columbia, and that he should go to the Cabaña.

Then we immediately moved the troops to Santiago de Cuba. Santiago had to be attacked that day anyway, because otherwise that coup could be consolidated. Around 2:00 in the afternoon I was very concerned with the news coming out of Havana that a "peace commission"...

Journalist. - The commission was already appointed.

Fidel Castro: You know what those confusing moments are. The international press can be misled; public opinion can be confused. But my proclamation had already been read, which came out on CMQ and Radio Progreso; and, moreover, I immediately met with the comrades of the Movement's leadership and we agreed to give the order for a general strike for the following day, and we gave Santiago the order around 3:00 in the afternoon, and an ultimatum to the city that at 6:00 in the afternoon if they did not lay down their arms, we would attack.

When I was moving over Santiago, it was very funny to me, because I heard on the radio the announcement that the people were full of joy, that the flags of the Movement were in the streets and the women were dressed in red and black, as a sign of triumph, for the triumph of the leader of the Revolution and for the triumph of Fidel Castro. And I said: but how will my triumph be, and what I am doing is advancing on a city that has 5,000 soldiers? It was a very curious situation.

But, really, the garrison in Santiago de Cuba, where Colonel Rego Rubido was in charge - which I think very highly of him because many times adversaries are better known than friends... And he's an honorable soldier and a brave man; he could have put up a fight. We had already exchanged some related communication precisely... I had told him what Cantillo had agreed with me and what Cantillo was doing; I had told him since the day before. So his attitude was to make contact with us.

There was a similar attitude on the part of the Navy as well: the Maceo frigate communicated with us and told us that they were unconditionally at our command.

Journalist: Do you know that already at that time - and excuse me - CMQ was on the air with all the stations and Radio Rebelde, broadcasting to the whole island and even to the continent?

Fidel Castro: Yes, I know; I know that my statements came out of the CMQ, I heard them.

Then, the Máximo Gómez frigate immediately said that they supported us; the police headquarters in Santiago said that they were supporting us; and at the same time, simultaneously, the head of the garrison flew in a helicopter to Palma to locate me; he could not locate me, and we continued to advance over Santiago. All the preparations for the attack were already being made, when we made contact with a captain who was located in El Caney, and we made contact with Colonel Rego. We had an interview. So I told him that I wanted to meet with all the officers of the garrison in Santiago de Cuba to talk to them; that I just wanted to talk to them, that I was sure that my proposals would be accepted by them, since I believed that I was absolutely right and that I was going to talk to them in terms that were precisely the most convenient for the republic and for them.

In fact, at 7:00 at night the meeting took place, and I told them that Cantillo had come to speak to me on behalf of the army and what he had done was betray me before he started, and betray the soldiers as well, because none of them were consulted about anything; that I did not want a coup, that I wanted to meet democratically with all the officers and, if necessary, with all the soldiers, to speak to all the

soldiers; that this was not a conspiracy, this was a democratic decision; that the generals did not have the right to decide on... Normally the military has to follow orders and obey, but when it comes to such vital and fundamental issues as deciding the position, the position at a historic moment in an army, officers must be consulted.

Journalist: But while this was happening, Commander, all the people were already jubilantly celebrating the triumph, because they were already aware, through the CMQ network, Radio Reloj and all the other radio stations, of your pronouncements rejecting the Junta.

Fidel Castro. - Well, I said this phrase. When I saw that he had betrayed us and that he had proceeded in such an absurd manner that even Pedraza was appointed to the Junta and left, he had appointed officers to certain positions who, when they went to find them to give them the position, had already left - calculate how those people's consciences would be! It was a political blunder, a mistake.

I said, "this man has taken a somersault into the void. And I also said in other words, "Look, we've caught them off base, and between first and second, because they haven't even reached third" (Laughs).

Journalist: You said it in baseball's language: "they were out between first and second...

Fidel Castro: I knew that given the moral status of our forces at that time, the order to advance on the barracks would become a total disaster for the regime because Cantillo was the continuation of the regime. And I was completely sure of the consequences. Of course, there could be bloody battles. I was worried, it worried me that those casualties were going to happen at that time, didn't it? And that is why I considered that the attitude of the military from Santiago de Cuba was very worthy of consideration. They saved our lives. And, besides, at that time everything was very confusing. And they ensured the triumph because from the moment the frigates and the army in Santiago de Cuba joined, and the army in Bayamo joined, Mr. Cantillo, who was defeated, could do whatever he wanted in Columbia. Camilo was moving forward, and we were immediately going to support him.

It just happened that... Look: the story of these two years of struggle is the story of a series of mistakes by our enemies, of underestimating the adversary. These people underestimated the Cuban people and they underestimated the rebels many times, and they underestimated them again at the last minute. They thought the people were going to be taken for a ride, and they found that the Revolution came out much stronger with the betrayal than without the betrayal. I don't know if this man thought we were going to cross our arms. Hardly any steps were taken to overcome that situation, and by 10 a.m. it was completely under control.

An extraordinary event has taken place in Cuba. I often thought that the Revolution would have to be done in two stages, that in a first stage a part of the victory would be achieved and that afterward there would be new clashes; but the Revolution has been done in one go. The total disarmament of all the opposing forces took place in a matter of hours. The troops that really supported us in that moment of confusion were not disarmed and in no way... Besides, I'm counting on those troops. Yesterday I had a meeting, I met with the 2 000 soldiers who were in Bayamo, and the enthusiasm and fervor are created in them, a sense of loyalty to the people represented. Whoever sees that town... Not from the army, the army's technical staff goes with us and they go in our column. So, I am going to send to transfer, so that they can reach us in the march, some companies of the Navy and the companies that are camped in Bayamo we need and it is worthwhile, with those men, to carry out a task of overcoming because there are very humane people.

Journalist. - About that, Commander...

Fidel Castro: So I am going to send for them, because, as I have told them, there have been no defeats here, but winners, exclusively, because the people have triumphed...

Journalist: The people, no doubt.

Fidel Castro. I don't want them to just come in... If we all have to live in peace, if it is our duty as revolutionaries to choose the military men who are worthy, who have human qualities, to make the new army of the republic, well, we should not enter Havana alone, if the military men supported us at that time, which was hard, when some military men betrayed us they supported us, it is correct that we enter Havana not only the rebels but also some armed companies of the army.

Journalist: And there they will be joyfully received.

Fidel Castro. Armed! And get some Navy companies in there, too. Because I have absolute confidence in those men.

Journalist: When you enter Havana, do you intend to go to the Palace, to Columbia or to the Garrison of...

Fidel Castro: No, look, nothing about the Palace, because nobody here has ever been thinking about that.

Journalist. You'll go to Columbia?

Fidel Castro: Well, the idea is to meet in Columbia with the people, rebels and the military, because the movement that was made in Santiago was a movement of revolutionaries, of the military and of the people. That's the Revolution that we wanted and that we advocated, and many times... we would constantly talk to the military.

Journalist: So you're going to invite the people to go to Columbia that day, to the Columbia camp to attend ...

Fidel Castro: We are going to invite the people to go en masse to Columbia, to receive there both the eastern combatants and the soldiers who joined them, the revolutionary soldiers and the revolutionary sailors. And bring the military together with the people, because from now on, and forever, the armed institutions will be institutions at the service of the people.

Tyranny had us isolated from the military and the civilian. An unarmed civilian, with no technique and no military knowledge of any kind, was at the mercy of any little gang that took over, and the military usually obeyed orders. And military men must be identified with the people; the differences are over, the only thing that brings us is a spirit of caste and contempt for one another.

Journalist. It's the people themselves...

Fidel Castro. And us, our mission is... The Revolution must first be ensured with the control of the instruments that are necessary to support the Revolutionary Government.

Journalist: And the immediate plans for reconstruction and democratization.

Fidel Castro: The second thing: to create permanent bases for the armed institutions of the republic, of permanent identification with the people. We can do a lot to make that identification happen. And to turn the armed institutions into true models of institutions, first of all, at the service of the country, the Constitution and the rights of the people. I think we can do a lot because we have proved it; because our army, the Rebel Army, is an army where no prisoner has ever been beaten, no prisoner has ever been insulted, no prisoner has ever been killed. And that could have been taught to men who saw their comrades killed and tortured instead. That can be taught to the whole army, and I ask the people to help us.

I really want to do a lot of things right now, because I have a lot of commitments. Above all, I have such commitments with the farmers, those people who suffered the worst part of the war, and I have the task, at this time, of dealing with the issues of the armed institutions. You know I'm a lawyer.

Journalist. - I know, of course. And brilliant!

Fidel Castro. No, no, not brilliant.

Journalist. - Of outstanding notes. You had an outstanding record.

Fidel Castro: I'm not a military man by profession. I didn't know I was going to have to deal with it right now...

Journalist: Did you acquire all this military knowledge in the Sierra Maestra itself, in the struggle itself?

Fidel Castro. Of course. Look, I believe that every man is a warrior, and that must come from our ancestors, who lived fighting all the time. And war is a lot of cunning, of common sense, of mental agility, well, of a number of things. And we have formidable commanders, and none of them studied at any military academy. I assure you that when I told Camilo to take Columbia, I was sure he would take it, and Che to take the Cabaña, I was sure. They didn't take it, of course; it wasn't fought there by chance, but they took it.

Journalist: Just as they had taken other towns before.

Fidel Castro: Look, there were some who told me: "that's crazy to send those columns through Camagüey". I said, "no." People thought that the columns were huge, and the columns... Camilo's had 82 men and Che's had 110. We gave Che the bazooka, Camilo all the Garands, almost all his troops had the best weapons. Because I immediately distributed the forces thinking about this plan, at that moment, and I sent Camilo and Che, who were among our best commanders.

I always, every time I had a commander in the Sierra Maestra or some more capable officers, I had to send them out, and I had to start teaching other people again. And our people learned by fighting.

Journalist. That was the Sierra Academy.

Fidel Castro. Because from Column One came all the other columns, and until the end, I said, "Well..." I left La Plata with 16 men, a few days after the elections, and we were already in Santiago with about 1,000 men. I said, "this time I don't divide the Column anymore, I do not divide it anymore". Because, well, the circumstances had already changed and what we had to do was to move forward, to do big operations. We, after the offensive, ended up with 800 weapons; but we immediately went in a number of directions. I have the maps where all the plans were made, which were carried out thoroughly, but in full, with all accuracy.

I said that every man is a born warrior, and that explains why we have made war. Besides, I repeat: because we had no other choice, what were we going to do? One day Tabernilla said that there were 12 of us. It was true; that day he said it, there were 12 of us. We were not going to give up, nor were we going to escape either, because we had plenty of time to escape, and we never had the courage to give up or to leave. So what choice did we have? Winning the war. Well, that's what we've done; we've done it because we had no other choice than that.

Journalist: The revolutionary triumph has been consolidated, Commander...

Fidel Castro: Well, I was saying that I have to take care of something that is not my job.

Journalist: You prefer to talk about the peasantry.

Fidel Castro. I can do very little. I want to tell you that I have to settle for doing little, for different reasons. Firstly, because the task of reorganizing, restructuring and establishing the armed institutions of the Republic on a truly democratic basis is already a task, although we are working on it and a number of activities are already being carried out in that direction, and it will go very quickly. But I have very big obligations, especially to the farmers, immediate obligations.

I wouldn't want them to forget those people in any way. And I remember that many times, when I passed by those places people said: "and after they leave, maybe they don't remember us", because they have been very used to being forgotten. And, I, sincerely, feel a deep affection for those people, and I plan to dedicate a great part of my time to do what is within my reach, including employing the same combatants in a series of jobs there, employing the people, providing them with machinery, a series of things that I will ask the comrades who are in the corresponding ministries, I will ask them to collaborate. This is what I can do because let me tell you from now on that I have the firmest and most determined purpose of subordinating my authority and influence entirely to the legitimate president of the republic, and that in everything I will absolutely be a subordinate of the civil power because that is what we have been advocating and that is what the country needs. So, therefore, what I can do is little. But I know that the colleagues the President has chosen to work with possessing the greatest desire to work. While I take care of the immediate tasks entrusted to me, I will also do what I can, as soon as it is within my power, to accomplish some things that are immediate.

I do not even want to spend many days in Havana without going to the Sierra Maestra, to gather the farmers from the Sierra Maestra, because I have to gather the farmers from the Sierra Maestra. The citizens, our compatriots from Bayamo, from Palma Soriano, from Santiago de Cuba, and from all villages, have come together.

Journalist: And you will do so successively in all the provinces.

Fidel Castro. We'll meet in Havana. But I have to go and meet the farmers from the Sierra Maestra and gather thousands and thousands of farmers there, without bombing, without hunger, without siege because I know that it will be a great hope for them to know that we remember them. And believe me, I am obligated to the entire nation, and I am obligated to all my countrymen, but I also feel very obligated to those men who helped us make...

Journalist: The nation is full of hope and joy, confident in the patriotic work that you will carry out, to which all the people are giving the widest and most decisive cooperation.

Fidel Castro: I know that we are going to succeed, even if the day ahead of us is hard. I know we're going to succeed because they've become revolutionary men. If we had succeeded the day after the landing, there could be no revolution here, because there were no human values. And the Revolution and the struggle have been an extraordinary school, where a fabulous amount of values, of men of temperament and of a capacity to be trusted, have emerged.

Look, I'm calm. People tell me to be careful, to watch out for snipers in the villages, that if something happened to me it would be a problem. I am completely sure but absolutely sure that no one here is indispensable. I tell you this in all frankness because I know the men the Revolution has and how united they are within our Movement. I know that no one here is indispensable. I can be put to work in a certain way, I can be told to rest for a month, I can be told to go on a trip around Europe, or anywhere else. And I don't need to, I'm sure everything's fine.

When I leave, for example, a commander here in Camagüey and entrust him with certain activities, or I leave, for example, Raúl in Santiago de Cuba, I know. As I have seen, when I sent them to the Second Front, the task they carried out there; when we sent Commander Ernesto Guevara to Las Villas; the task they carried out there. They alone solved the problems; they had general instructions, but they did all the other things themselves. The activities carried out by our commanders wherever we had to send

them have proved such a capacity that I do not have to be present. They know what to do...

Journalist: There is identification with your principles and procedures.

Fidel Castro. Absolutely. Look, you have to see that, for example, there are 10 or 12 of us left from the Granma yacht expedition.

At present, all of them are commanders of the Rebel Army, and they will also be commanders of the new army of the republic, of the new army that will be of the revolutionaries and the honorable military. Calculate, from Mexico, all that we have lived together. It's almost impossible for us not to understand each other. We were the ones left, and there's such a complete identification...

Journalist: Everyone knows, Commander, that many of the Granma expeditionaries could not survive to see victory. How many were the dead from Granma?

Fidel Castro: Look, actually, about four comrades died in combat. The rest was the usual thing. The revolutionaries also had to have an idea removed from their minds; there was that pessimism, that fatalism... When one suffered a setback, as there were always many... it happened on Moncada, and it happened later too. Some comrades, with their fatalism, believed that all struggle was impossible and tried to leave, handing in their weapons and some of them showed up. The result was that a few comrades were taken prisoner in the first moments, and they killed all of them, about 35 or 40.

The lists have to be calculated because at the beginning it was very difficult to know who had been able to get out and who had not. But some 35 of their comrades were killed; about four were killed in combat, and some were ambushed. The survivors will be approximately 50%. And of those who continue to fight, some have fallen as well. Of about 14, comrade Ciro Redondo died, comrade Julito Díaz, and finally comrade Horacio Rodríguez died. I have to check again... We are constantly reviewing those who remain from Moncada, then those who remain from Granma, and there are 10 to 12 of us at the moment.

Journalist: Well, Commander, we're not taking up any more of your time, because we know that you have urgent tasks ahead of you.

Fidel Castro: Well, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the company CMQ. They have all performed an extraordinary task. When I saw that the stations were on the air on Monday, I said, "Well, there can't possibly be any failure of any kind now."

Journalist. And simultaneously with the rebel stations. It was the consolidation of the triumph.

Fidel Castro. That was incredible. I knew... The support of the radio plants was decisive in the last battle that was fought and the last victory, and the greatest victory. It was not a victory of the Rebel Army alone; it was a victory of the honest soldiers, of the workers, of the living classes, of the whole people, and very especially, of the radio and television press. I must sincerely thank them and acknowledge what they have done; I thank them on behalf of the people...

Journalist: Of the people, who are the winners.

Fidel Castro: I thank them on behalf of yourselves.

Journalist. Commander, a question to finish, for the newspapers. The journalists are ready to give you their full cooperation because it is the cooperation to the Revolution that the people have longed for and that you have been able to carry out. Now that the Revolution has been completed, which, as I repeat, was a desire of the people, and which has been made possible by the sacrifice of all its men and of the people to a large extent, in the economic aspect the people are obviously immediately concerned with the issues of the harvest. Will there immediately be preferential attention to that issue?

Fidel Castro: I observe a feverish activity in all economic areas, installing the communication channels quickly, putting... That is a consequence of the optimism that there is in the country (Interruption)... but I am not calm when things get... they wanted to cheat me (Laughs).

Journalist: You were saying a moment ago, Commander, that when you were listening to the radio and television stations where CMQ, Radio Reloj and all the other stations in the country are, you felt sure of victory, because the people were already listening to all the guidelines and all the final directions of the struggle...

Fidel Castro. Yes, yes... For example, when I saw... I understood from a series of circumstances that all the advantages were at that moment on our side, that the betrayal was going to precisely become the destruction of those interests that wanted to be saved.

When I heard the stations on the air, suddenly the people in the street and the stations talking freely, I understood that the regime was totally overthrown, that the Revolution was totally triumphant. That's what it took. And the service provided by the radio stations was extraordinarily useful in the final battle, which was the last victory of the Revolution; a victory, as I said, in which not only the fighters, but also the people, workers, classes, and the press, had participated. And that was decisive. I have to acknowledge and express my gratitude to all the stations, they provided a very valuable, decisive service.

Journalist: Incidentally, when the strike is over, the press censorship ends completely, there is nothing like that, absolute freedom of information, right?

Fidel Castro. Precisely. I know that the people would be suffering the consequences of the strike, and it is absurd that we did not care about the people. Everyone was very worried. I had an interview with Camilo yesterday in the early hours of the morning, and I was waiting for the result of the instructions he was given to simply assume control of all the commands, and I was waiting for his response, which I have already received through different channels: confirmation that all the military installations in the country are totally controlled by the revolutionary commands; then, Dr. Urrutia already took possession yesterday?

Journalist: The Cabinet was formed...

Fidel Castro: The Revolution has fully triumphed, and this very afternoon... I am impatient for you to communicate the news to the workers and the workers' leaders: our request that the strike is ended immediately and that the people can already fully enjoy the joy of victory today.

Journalist: That's great news, and it's also great news that you're going to Havana on Wednesday, where you'll be received with great enthusiasm, as you are everywhere else.

Fidel Castro: Look, I want to look good, so far I have looked good, I have mentioned a day, I've come on the day scheduled.

When I once said that I would come in 1956...

Journalist: Indeed, you came.

Fidel Castro: Yes, when I said that if Batista did not resign in two weeks, we would come to Cuba, we arrived on the same day. So I think I have a word. But, look, on no other occasion is it more difficult to ensure that I arrive on Wednesday. I think I'll be there on Wednesday.

Journalist. Well, if not Wednesday, Thursday.

Fidel Castro: Because although dictatorships cannot resist anyone, there is no one who can resist the people, do you understand? And the village is on the way and I have to attend to it. This time I can't ensure anything, I can't ensure the day, because the people are involved.

I do hope that, with the cooperation of the people, we will arrive in Havana on Wednesday. You must also understand that all our men are making an extraordinary effort; they are in trucks, there are no comforts, hours and hours walking slowly, standing still; and all of us have not slept for many days, I think we have learned not to sleep.

Journalist: You've learned something extraordinary.

Fidel Castro: And we have more than desire, a need for rest. I know we're not going to get any rest, other than that. I, for one, know that I will not be able to rest.

Journalist: In Havana, you won't be able to rest during those days, surely, because there the demonstrations of joy will be the same as everywhere else...

Fidel Castro: But at least I am hopeful that our men will rest. You will also understand the joy with which they are going to Havana, because almost all of them are farmers from the Sierra Maestra, almost all of them are farmers from the Sierra Maestra who are going to Havana; and they see Havana almost as the culmination of those dreams, right? And they go with enthusiasm... That's why they resist what they resist, they're piled up in trucks, they're uncomfortable and no one complains. And, besides, it costs a tremendous amount of work to keep the march going, the order of the column, everything, because cars get in everywhere, people get in everywhere, and I say that it's a good thing we don't have to fight because the case was going to be that they had to ask for mortar fire and a journalist was going to fire a "flash" (Laughs). I don't know if the one next to me is a military man, if he's a rebel, if he's a journalist, or if he's the one who handles the cannon, the tank, I don't know. That's a hell of a mix we got there...

Journalist: From all the people, cooperating with this Revolution.

Fidel Castro: Of course, we are very happy to help journalists.

Journalist: In this regard, you know that we need you to arrange for a plane to return immediately to Havana to carry the news for CMQ and Radio Reloj and all the stations, so that you can give orders here to your commanders, to your friends, so that they can provide us with that plane?

Fidel Castro: Look, let me tell you: all of us, honestly, being men who are not moved by ambition, bending or deceit; we know that we have the support of the press beforehand, and we have fought so that censorship will never again exist in Cuba, and censorship will never again exist. Then, whatever we do for the press, it cannot be understood as aiming to conquer the press, the press is with the Revolution.

Journalist. Of course...

Fidel Castro: Now, in the Sierra Maestra, everywhere and in all circumstances, both Cuban and foreign journalists have always received the greatest attention from us, and we will continue to do so. All facilities, because we are aware of what journalists can do to help us in our revolutionary task. You have helped us to obtain success; now you have to help us in the most difficult part, which is in peace; doing what must be done and which will also take time and which has many difficulties. It is necessary that taking into account the good intentions of the revolutionaries, you help us.

We'll help you too. First, by defending that freedom with our blood, with our lives; and then, by giving you every facility in all circumstances to inform the people. We will not be doing the press a favor by doing the people a favor, who are interested in everything and who want to be guided. This is a very

intelligent and clever people, that what they need is nothing more than to have the news of what is happening; and the people reach their own conclusions.

Journalist: Indeed, intelligently.

Well, we're not taking up any more of your time, you have urgent tasks to perform. We wish you all the best, and we'll see each other in Havana.

Fidel Castro: Greetings to your comrades on CMQ, and apart from our gratitude expressed to all the radio stations, here I would also like - since this is a CMQ program - to thank the company and the employees for everything they have done.

Journalist: We thank you for your kindness in dedicating some of your time to us.

Thank you very much, Commander.

Lugar:

Camagüey Province

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