

Volume 13

Number 010

Cuba: Máximo Gómez y Báez

Lead: In both wars for Cuban Independence, the Ten Years' War beginning in 1868 and the final conflict in 1895, no leader in tactics, strategy, and inspiration excelled Máximo Gómez y Báez.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Gómez was born of prosperous parents in the Dominican Republic and received training as Spanish cavalry officer. He commanded reserve troops there and then transferred to Cuba in 1865.

Attracted by the ideals and claims of the Cuban independence movement, Gomez joined the revolution in the decade-long first conflict in 1868. He helped modernize tactics among the greatly outnumbered and out-gunned Cuban rebels, particularly the innovative use of the machete. The Cubans were nearly always low on ammunition, typically having only a single bullet to fire at first, but the Spanish soldiers came to fear the machete wielding mambises who could cut through their traditional infantry squares with relative ease.

At the end of the first war, Gomez and other leaders rejected the amnesty and limited concessions offered by the Spanish government

and many went into exile. Gomez returned home to work his family plantations in Dominica. He kept in touch with Cuban exiles and visited them in the United States. In 1895 he joined Jose Marti and others in a return to the island for the resumption of the revolution. There he assumed command of the Cuban national forces. Fighting went fairly well for the Cubans in the east, but not until late in the war did they achieve control over the rich prosperous provinces of western Cuba.

In 1896 Spanish General Valeriano Weyler was appointed Governor of the island. Recognizing that he had to separate Gomez' guerilla's from their

natural allies in the population, he established “re-concentration” camps similar to those of the British in the Boer War. There in abysmal circumstances - filth, hunger, and disease -over 300,000 Cubans languished and many died. This tactic helped isolate the revolutionary army but brought also international condemnation particularly in the United States and the collapse of Weyler’s political support back in Spain.

The sacrifices and hard-fighting endured by the rebels laid the groundwork for the disintegration of Spanish will and military position when the United States declared war and intervened in 1898. The U.S.’s

contribution was considerable and probably secured the final result, but Cuban's jealousy asserted at the time and today that without the fighting of native Cubans over many years in softening up the Spanish forces, the outcome might have been far more contentious.

Gomez disdained politics. He refused the Presidency of the newly independent Cuba in 1902, retired to a villa outside of Havana and died in June, 1905.

This series on Cuba has been prepared in part during a research trip supported by the School of Continuing Studies of the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Foner, Philip Sheldon. *Antonio Maceo: The Bronze Titan of Cuba's Struggle for Independence*. New York: Monthly Review, 1977.

Gott, Richard. *Cuba: A New History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Lazo, Rodrigo. *Writing to Filibustering and Cuban and Exiles in the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Tone, John Lawrence. *War and Genocide in Cuba: 1895-1898*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/havana/maceo.htm>

<http://www.historyofcuba.com/gallery/gal4.htm>

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.