

MEMENTOS WITH HISTORY (99)

GUERRILLAS OR COUNTERGUERRILLAS: MEMORIES OF AN OLD MILITARY SEAL

Some time ago in one of our frequent visits to Madrid, which coincided with a large antiques fair, I found in that fair an old military seal of the then "Spanish Army of the Island of Cuba", that is the Spanish Overseas Army in Cuba, specifically of the 1st and 2nd Companies of the "Tercio de Guerrilleros" (Regiment of Guerrillas) of (probably) Puerto Padre, a city located on the north coast of the then province of Oriente, nowadays province of Las Tunas, as over the last almost sixty years not only the history but even the geography of Cuba have been changed in the "remodeling" of that island's "Historical Memory".



(Curiously, the antiquarian from whom I purchased the seal was an American from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, whose shop is located only twenty minutes from my home in Miami....It took a

trip to Madrid to find it....When something is meant for one, it is meant for one !)

The seal, once my initial curiosity was satisfied, languished for a few years in a box full of military insignia and other military curios, until a few days ago I rediscovered it when a friend asked me some questions about some old Cuban diplomatic seals he had purchased.

The “Guerrilleros” alluded to in the seal were one of several “Tercios” or Regiments made up mostly of native Cuban troops who served as “auxiliaries or explorers” in Spanish Army terminology or as “contra guerrillas” composed of traitors and mercenaries in the opinion of the Cuban rebels. The fact is that their reputation was one of predators and evil doers, and their fate not a very nice one if they had the misfortune of falling into the hands of the “mambises” as they were liable to hanging or being cut down with machetes. They were also known as “rayadillos” due to the Spanish colonial uniform they wore(white with very thin blue pinstripes)(rayas) and they were armed with Remington and Spencer carbines, plus revolvers and machetes.

According to a curious and interesting book titled “Spaniards and Mambises” which I found in a Cuban books kiosk in the 2002 Miami Book Fair, from where I have obtained some of this information, and which probably is an official publication of the current Cuban regimen, of unknown authorship as there is no specific name anywhere on it, these “conraguerrillas” include *“black and white Cubans and Spaniards and Canary islanders who worked in the fields”* who were *“fearful because of their knowledge and familiarity with the tactics of the mambises”*, many of them actually being *“traitor mambises who presented themselves to the enemy”*. According to the same book some of these counterguerrillas were “local” units operating in determined areas , while others were “flying” units which followed the regular Spanish troops as guides and explorers,

much as the Indian Scouts that accompanied the US cavalry in its campaigns against the Comanches and Apaches in the Old West.

All of this, out of an old seal's impression on paper...If only the old seal could talk!

Hector J. Meruelo
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Miami, Florida, USA