

Those are my father's eyes / 65th anniversary of CIA sabotage explosion of La Coubre in Havana Bay



More than a hundred people died and disappeared after the sabotage of the steamship La Coubre. Photo: Granma Archive

Havana, March 4 (RHC)-- Everyone who has told something of what happened when La Coubre was left with a deep wound. Juan Luis Rodríguez, for example, lost a leg; but Zenaida Capetillo, her father; and Alberto Solís, first his father, and a few days later, his mother.

The scar is different for each person, but equally deep, regardless of whether they were there, when the first explosion killed the crew and dock workers who were unloading the weapons and ammunition brought by the French steamship; or at the time of the second explosion, when a sea of ??people had poured over the jetty of Havana Bay, to rescue the wounded, to put out the fire... to recover corpses and remains.

Captain of Police Station 14, at 3:15 in the afternoon of March 4, 1960, Juan Luis felt all the lampposts in the Carlos III area shake. His senses guided him toward Tallapiedra, he thought of the power station, and he went there; but the crowd, the destruction and a burning ship indicated the exact location of the disaster.

He wanted to help in many things, but his military instinct, to go first to what would prevent the tragedy from becoming greater, decided him to join a group that was trying to push a truck loaded with weapons and bullets into the bay, to get it away from the fire.

It was the first thing he did... and the only thing. The second explosion surprised him. Although stunned, he felt how "a glowing iron fractured my tibia and fibula... A mushroom cloud of fire and black smoke rose from the ship, and immediately pieces of heads and arms began to fall."



Most of the victims were due to the second explosion; that was how it was planned. Photo: José Agraz

When Juan Luis “ran” from Carlos III to Tallapiedra, along another street, from Zanja and Gervasio, the boy Alberto Solís, 14 years old, had also run out. He did go straight to the dock, his father was a stevedore there. No matter how much he begged, they did not let him through. Perhaps that saved him from dying in the second explosion, which occurred before his eyes.

In another house, at that same minute, Capetillo’s wife asked about that explosion, and when they told her, she put her hands to her face. His daughter Zenaida said that he “was not supposed to work that day, but they went to look for him early to speed up the unloading of the ship. Since he had not had lunch, he told his mother that at three o’clock he would take a little break, that she should have something ready for him”; but at three o’clock, four children had been orphaned.

The following days were the worst for both families. Perhaps they crossed paths in hospitals, or at the morgue. In Capetillo, the search was fruitless. “The last time they saw him he was sitting on the boxes of bullets, writing down the load... We found nothing, neither in the bay nor anywhere else.”

Alberto persisted for seven days in the search for Alonso, his father. What an indescribable trauma for a child to go through and through the drawers of a morgue, full of corpses, pieces of them, unrecognizable! He had looked more than ten times in drawer 85, when, after a week, a friend of his father, a survivor, told him to stop there.

«He had lost part of his face, a leg, he was all burned and had several bullet holes in his body from the weapons the ship was carrying. (...) Indeed, when they moved him from there to the coffin, underneath were his burned clothes, but we were able to identify some of them».

A short time later, the boy Alberto went from being Esther's older brother to being her father. María del Carmen, his mother, fell ill after the tragedy, and died.



A man tries to get up among the scattered rubble and death. Photo: Granma Archive

With the sabotage of the steamship La Coubre there were more than a hundred dead and missing, but the number of wounded is still unknown: it was reproduced, constantly, in the pain of the families. There were many Juan Luis, and Zenaidas, and children like Alberto, who walked desperately through hospitals and morgues.

This is what nurse Gloria Azoy recounted several years later: "...I collected some remains, just this part of the eyes, impressive, as if they were alive, and I put them on a bandage. Later a child approached me,

trying to find information about his lost father. I looked at him, and immediately understood who he was looking for. “Those are my father’s eyes,” he told me.”

However, the United States Government wants to say that Cuba sponsors terrorism, and for many years it says that it is so, and then it says no, for a few days, and then again it says yes. Are we the terrorists?

(Source: Granma newspaper archive)

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