HISTORY OF THE CRUISER “CUBA”

Their characteristics as islands turned countries like Great Britain and Japan to seek answers in the sea. During colonial times in Cuba, Havana became the naval base for the conquest of other lands in the New World and of the flotilla system of Spain. By the same token, the great Spanish vessels of the XVIII Century were built in its shipyards and during our wars of independence, mambises counted on the support of several expeditions that sailed from North American territories.

Among others, we can note the efforts of General Emilio Núñez, the de facto precursor of the Cuban Navy. Nevertheless, when, what we mistakenly tend to call an island – without keeping in mind the Isle of Pines and over 1,300 keys and islets – became the Republic of Cuba, there was not enough thrust to develop maritime resources as an objective.

Lastly, mid-term during the presidency of General José Miguel Gómez y Gómez – the popular leader with all his faults and virtues, + some resolutions regarding naval and maritime matters were approved. After a modest Coast Guard Service was reorganized, the Navy of Cuba was established with a program of naval expansion that reached
its peak when a cruiser and a training vessel were commissioned at the William Cramps and Sons shipyard in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In the future, despite the fact that many naval units would be transferred from the United States and later from the Soviet Union, none other of importance would ever come out of the slipways to specifically serve in the vigilance and protection of the Cuban coast.

When both ships were launched on October 10, 1911, Captain Julio Morales Coello, Chief of the Navy of Cuba, as well as a large number of Cuban and several armaments of smaller caliber. Its auxiliary vessels were two steam tenders, 30 feet in length, two 28-foot boats and two lifeboats.

The first commander of the “Cuba” was Lt. Commander Gabriel Díaz Quibús and from its beginnings, other activities which were not strictly considered naval in scope, were added to its service log, both nationally and internationally. An example of this, both from a diplomatic as well as a humanitarian point of view, was the trip to Veracruz, Mexico in 1913, at the request of Manuel Márquez Sterling, Cuban ambassador to the neighboring country. Its purpose was to protect and take into exile, deposed President Francisco Madero. Nevertheless, Madero was assassinated and only his relatives were taken to the political asylum that had been offered in Havana.

During the course of domestic political ups and downs which occurred after the Machadato, the “Cuba” stood out in support of the attack to Castillo de Aparés in 1933. The following year, a rebellion on board the cruiser took place in Antilla, Oriente province, under the leadership of its commander, Lieutenant Evaristo Ulloa, spurred by changes in the leadership of the Cuban Navy. The uprising did not gain support, although it reflected the influence of certain revolutionary undercurrents in the naval sector. After modernization, which eliminated coal as fuel, one of “Cuba’s” moments of glory was in 1937, when Lt. Commander Pedro Brito Silva participated in the naval review at Spithead, Great Britain, for King George VI’s coronation. It was during this voyage, which visited various ports from London to Oslo, where for the first and last time the flag with the solitary star was seen in Europe’s in northern latitudes, waving aboard a Cuban warship.

During World War II, although Cuba, an ally of the United States, declared war on the Axis, in practice it merely confronted German submarine offensive in waters close to our shores. Enemy torpedoes sank several Cuban merchant marine ships and killed a significant number of their crew; meanwhile, Cuban submarine chaser CS-13 managed to sink German submarine U-176, making the Cuban Navy the only...
Una de las últimas fotos tomadas al Cuba cuando estaba atracado en la base aérea del Mariel. Posteriormente sería hundido por cohetes del régimen actual en la Isla de Pinos. 

One of the last photos taken of the “Cuba” while anchored at Mariel Air Base. It was later sunk by rockets of the current regime at the Isle of Pines.

Litografía del Crucero Cuba.

Lithograph of the cruiser “Cuba.”

one in Latin America to score a victory of that nature. By the time hostilities ended, it was a fact that the “Cuba,” under the command of Lt. Commanders Antonio Cuadras Garrote, Braulio Fernández Hernández and Marcos Pérez Medina, had travelled approximately 28,000 miles in the region, escorting with distinction a total of 90 Cuban and foreign flag merchant ships.

The main role of the “Cuba” ended in the post-war period with the acquisition of three modern US frigates by the Cuban Navy. After 1952, the cruiser became the equivalent of a presidential yacht. On occasion, it was also used as a training vessel which made its last voyage around the Cuban coastline in 1961.

When it was retired from active service and sacked by its crew, it remained anchored in Mariel until years later, when after being towed to Siguanea Inlet, in the Isle of Pines, it became the target of rockets from another Cuban naval unit. Today, it remains sunken at a depth of 18 feet and is partially visible.

Without ever being a famous capital ship, the “Cuba” was the epitome of Cuban naval history. And, in the event that we would have had a ruler with at least some inclination towards the civilized, it is possible that the cruiser would have ended its days in the harbor of Havana, turned into a naval museum for posterity. But, if one considers the hatred of the paranoid tyrant for all things Cuban and his eagerness to erase a better past, its ignoble and undeserved ending was to be expected.

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