

Soldado de la Revolucion Cubana.

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De los canaverales de Oriente a general de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias

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Standing on giant's shadows, Zayas offers a valuable account of the Cuban Revolution from below, but still an official one.

In my little historical trivia knapsack that I keep just in case I am asked where I grew up, there is one story that never fails me: the *Granma* ship that took Fidel Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, among other members of the 26th of July movement into Cuba's Sierra Maestra, departed from Tamaulipas. In one of my home state's coastal towns, the rebels carried out the invasion's last preparations.

The Cuban revolution, as no other, captured the imagination of the Latin America's left in the 60s and 70s. In the house of any left-leaning family you could expect to find biographies of the aforementioned leaders and historical accounts of the Cuban's contemporary history. For my generation, the **Subcomandante Marcos** and the **EZLN** were to occupy that same inspirational role. Nevertheless, after receiving *Soldado de la Revolución Cubana* I savored the opportunity to learn about the normal leaders that my father's generation were not interested in, dazzled by Cuba's almost mythical figures.

Pathfinder Press has published now several books addressed to a younger audience where their author explains how, as young person his or herself was drawn into the revolution. *Soldado de la Revolución Cubana* comprises material from four interviews with **Luis Alfonso Zayas** between 2007 and 2011 conducted by **Martín Koppel** and **Roger Calero**, from the newsmagazine *El Militante*, and Mary-Alice Waters, Pathfinder's publisher.

Zayas, who is currently one of the leaders of the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution, was an early supporter of Fidel Castro and joined his Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio in 1955. He participated in the Rebel's Army Sierra Maestra combat. Under Che Guevara's command, he joined the campaign that overtook Santa Clara and triggered Fulgencio Batista's escape from Cuba. After the revolution, Zayas carried out various party and army posts during his active career. He headed twice the Work Youth Army where young Cubans undertook their military service and acted as a kind of Cuban Civilian Conservation Corps.

Zayas volunteered three times to the internationalist Cuban mission in Angola's Independence and Civil wars. Unfortunately the accounts of his tours are excruciatingly brief. That leaves his childhood years stories as the most memorable part of the book comprises his childhood years. Zayas describes the harsh life at the plantation when Cuba was an American semi-protectorate.

The book is a valuable source as it retells a part of Cuba's history rarely known in the US. However, it should be taken with caution as it shies away from any critical perspective on the Revolution's shortcomings and purges as well as Castro's dictatorship. To illustrate my point, the reader might read

David Grann's acclaimed feature in the *The New Yorker*, "The Yankee Comandante"[\(May 28, 2012\)](#).
Recommended for public and academic libraries. Young adults and adults.

Soldado de la Revolucion Cubana. De los canaverales de Oriente a general de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias. Luis Alfonso Zayas. Nueva York: Pathfinder Press, 2011. 211 pp.\$18.00. ISBN: 978-1-60488-032-8. Not available as eBook.