Cuban revolutionaries began their fight against Batista's dictatorship by an attack on the Moncada Barracks on 26 July 1953 under the leadership of Fidel Castro. Victory was won on 1 January 1959 with the dictator fleeing into exile.

During the first months of 1959 no awards were created. Only two laws concerning decorations were passed in Fidel Castro's first year of power. Law No. 586, dated 7 October 1959, modified the statutes of the Order "Carlos Manuel de Céspedes" while Law No. 642, dated 20 November 1959, decreed a verification of the awards of the Order "De Merito Mambi," issued up to 31 December 1958.

After Fidel Castro announced the socialist character of the Cuban revolution on 16 April 1961, the introduction of a new Cuban decoration system was initiated.

By virtue of the Fundamental Law No. 17, dated 28 June 1978, the National Assembly of the People's Chamber defined the decoration system of the Republic of Cuba. By means of the law-decree dated 10 December 1979 (No. 30) the State Council gave its approval.

By 1984 there were approximately two Honorary Titles, 19 Orders, 30 Decorations, and 35 Medals in existence.

The bestowal of decorations to Cubans and foreign nationals is done by decision of the State Council on a recommendation by the respective social organization.

In the following, an overview on the orders, decorations, and medals known to the author is to be given. To the extent to which original decorations were available they are shown in the photographic illustrations.

HONORARY TITLE


This is the highest award of the Republic of Cuba and is only awarded to persons who earned merit in a specific degree. On 1 January 1980 this "Golden Star" was bestowed on the City of Santiago de Cuba and affixed to the Flag of the Capital. Additionally, two senior officers in the rank of lieutenant-general also received this highest Order. Cosmonauts Mendez (Cuba) and Romanenko (USSR) were awarded this Honorary Title.


This award was given for the first time to Blas Roca Calderio, Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party and Deputy President of the State-Council and Council of Ministers, on the occasion of his 75th birthday.
GOLDEN STAR OF A HERO OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA.

ORDER OF JOSÉ MARTI.
3. Order of José Martí.

This Order is awarded to national and foreign citizens as well as Chiefs of State and Governments for great merit and valuable achievement in the fields of culture, science, and sports, as well as for extraordinary artistic achievement. This Order is named for the Cuban national hero, José Martí, born in 1853. He was killed fighting against the Spanish colonialists on 19 May 1895 in the battle of Dos Ríos in the Province of Oriente.

The Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, Leonid Breshnev, received this then highest Order during his visit to Cuba on 20 January 1974. The Order was instituted by Law No. 1239 dated 2 December 1972 by the Revolutionary Government.

The sixth award of this Order was to Erich Honecker of the German Democratic Republic, and the seventh to Erich Sindermann of the Government of the German Democratic Republic.

Originally the Order consisted of a gold medal measuring 40 mm in diameter. The obverse showed a portrait of the national hero with the circumscription "ORDEN NACIONAL JOSE MARTI." The ribbon was colored blue - white - vermilion, with the white stripe being divided by a small red and blue stripelet. The second type of the Order is that illustrated. The ribbon is 25.5 mm wide - not watered - with a white stripe on the left and three stripes, each 4 mm wide, colored vermilion - white - blue on the right side.

This Order is also shown on a Cuban postage stamp.


This Order was instituted as early as 18 April 1926 by Decree No. 486.

It was renewed and modified by Law No. 586, dated 7 October 1959, as well as by Decree No. 2098 of President Fidel Castro Ruz of the same date. The Order is named for Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, who distinguished himself during the 10-year struggle from 1868 to 1878. As first president of the Republic of Cuba "in arms" he was killed on 27 February 1874 in combat against the Spaniards.

The Order is bestowed on nationals and foreigners, Chiefs of State and Governments, "who have distinguished themselves in the struggle for the national liberation of peoples, for friendship shown toward the Cuban revolution or for her international esteem in the political, social, or economic struggle ..."

5. Order Playa Giron

On 19 April 1961 this Order was instituted on the occasion of the unsuccessful landing of Cuban nationalists on the island.

The first award of this Order was effected in July 1961 to the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin during his visit to Cuba. At that time it was the highest Order which Fidel Castro's Cuba had to offer.

Persons to whom the Order was awarded include Soviet aviator-cosmonaut Tereshkova, Yasser Arafat, Breshnev, Samora Machel, Erich Honecker, Alvaro Cunhal, and others.