

The following was requested by Mike Carey for Correspondents Report --from Lionel Martin in Havana, Cuba, June 24, 1988

11 It has been raining here in Cuba in recent weeks - tremendous torrential rains that were more than anybody wanted. The rains broke a four year drought, so in spite of all, they were welcomed. But as Cuban president Fidel Castro told a group of reporters who visited some of the flooded districts with him: First we don't have any rain and then two years of rainfall comes down on us in five days.

We accompanied Fidel - everybody here calls him by his first name - for eight hours going into the districts that were most damaged by flood. Fidel, dressed as usual in his army uniform, rode in a jeep with an Soviet-made AK-47 rifle placed in brackets just in front of him. His jeep was preceded and followed by other jeeps full of security guards who carried AK-47's on their laps.

We arrived at a mountain valley that was once a place of fertile fields. It was now flooded - a large lake - with just the tops of the electric power powerline poles sticking out of the water. The farmers in the valley had lost their possessions and their fields were under water. But there were no lives lost because army helicopters and amphibious personnel carriers had taken the men, women, children and even farm animals to safety.

Fidel, sixty one years old and grey bearded, scrambled aboard one of the Soviet made amphibious vehicles and we followed. We rode across and around the water filled valley with Fidel inspecting the damage. He told us that because there was hardly runoff from the valley, they might just decide to turn it into a permanent reservoir and move the farm families else where/

29 We then drove to a town near the valley. By then it was pouring again but the towns entire population--and the refugees from the flood-- were out on the towns single road to greet Fidel. Fidel got out of the vehicle and was immediately surrounded by these mountain people. For over an hour, in the torrential rain - he talked to them and they talked to him. He held a conversation with several young doctors - both women - who had set up a permanent family clinic in the town. He talked to young and old, men and women about the rains, and the country's problems, and his great confidence in the future. He told them that the government would pick up the bill for the personal flood damage - that it would provide new homes, refrigerators and television sets for those who had lost them.

39 It was a revealing experience because it was obvious how much faith the people had in Fidel and how close this aged revolutionary leader felt to the plain people of his Caribbean island. -2'40"

The Cuban revolution is soon going to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary. Like many underdeveloped nations in the world it has economic problems.

Because of the drop in world sugar prices, something which

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On the Visit to Flooded Area in Cuba
with Fidel Castro

from Mike
Carey

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has also hurt Australia -- there has been a big drop in hard currency earnings. Cuba is far from a consumer society and there are many products that are not available at the stores here. But, as even western diplomats admit, nobody starves in Cuba and there are no beggars. This is because there is government controlled rationing of basic food products which are sold at low prices. There is a big housing shortage in Cuba which means married couples often have to live with their parents. But rents are only ten percent or less of the family's salary.

7 The big, obvious achievements of the Cuban revolution are in the field of education and public health. A ninth grade education is now compulsory and Cuba is now graduating 3000 doctors a year.

52 For the average Cuba is a far away, exotic place - probably the same way Australians feel about Cuba.

But they do know a few things about Australia. For instance, while they don't like Rambo they learned to love Crocodile Dundee who they have seen in movie houses and on television here.

Also, one of Cuba's 154 sugar mills is called Central Australia, that is, the Australia Sugar Mill. I've been trying to find out just why but nobody seems to know. In fact, some of the people living near the sugar mill aren't even clear where Australia is, or for that matter, what it is.

Another, somewhat bizaar link between Cuba and Australia is in the person of the Australian writer Harry Reade. Harry came to revolutionary Cuba twenty seven years and stayed for about eight years. In those days he was a cartoonist and the persons who now make Cuba's very good animated cartoons still think of the big Australian as their original teacher.

Harry Reade has one other distinction that should make any red blood Australian proud. He introduced the word "bloody" into the Cuban language which is Spanish. For instance, por favor means Please in Spanish - and because of Harry Reade every once in a while one can hear a Cuba saying Por Bloody Favor.

This is Lionel Martin in Havana for Correspondents Report

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in the south for the first time. Castro declared. South Africa can no longer operate there with the impunity it once enjoyed. The victorious tactics of the Cuban Angolan forces is what forced South Africa to the conference table in London several weeks ago.

Fidel Castro said that Cuba does not want a military victory because that would mean more bloodshed in Angola. What he wants is a fair solution, he said -- that would include South Africa's withdrawal from Namibia, and an end to South African military incursions into Angola.

Lionel Martin in Havana for PM

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