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Luis Posada Carriles, Who Waged Quest to Oust Castro, Dies at 90

By **Frances Robles**

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Luis Posada Carriles, the anti-Castro militant and former C.I.A. operative who made headlines for decades for his failed attempts to topple the Cuban dictator, died on Wednesday in Miramar, Fla., He was 90.

The cause was fluid in his lungs and complications of a stroke he had in 2015, his daughter, Janet Arguello, said.

Mr. Posada spent nearly 60 years on a quixotic and often bloody mission to bring down Fidel Castro by any means possible. He was accused of using bombs and bullets in a crusade that took the lives of innocents but never did manage to snare that Cuban leader, who died at 90 in 2016.

Mr. Posada hopped from country to country, finding refuge in jungles, arming rebels, surviving stints in prison and living on the run off the largess of Cuban exile supporters, then dying a free man at a home for aging military veterans.

“My old tired heart has made enough rounds,” Mr. Posada said in a jailhouse interview with The Miami Herald in Panama in 2003. “I’m going to eat my steak, drink my wine and struggle for my country. That will be my life’s end.”

But others saw it differently.

“He was an international terrorist of the first order,” said Peter Kornbluh, the director of the Cuba Documentation Project at the National Security Archive, who spent decades collecting declassified documents on Mr. Posada’s ventures.

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Luis Posada Carriles was born on Feb. 15, 1928, in Cienfuegos, in central Cuba, one of four children. His father owned a bookstore and printing press.

Mr. Posada attended the University of Havana, a few years behind Fidel Castro there. He worked for a time at the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, first in Havana and then in Akron, Ohio.

By 1960, Mr. Posada had a prison record in Cuba for anti-Castro activities and was soon working for the Central Intelligence Agency. He almost participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, but the mission, a C.I.A.-backed operation, failed disastrously before his plane could take off and take him to Cuba to join fellow Cuban-exile guerrillas there. He later joined the Venezuelan intelligence service, where the Cuban government media said his job was to be a “C.I.A. mercenary.”

One of the deadliest events linked to Mr. Posada came in 1976, when a Cubana de Aviación flight exploded off the coast of Barbados, killing all 73 people aboard, including teenagers from Cuba’s national fencing team.

A November 1976 F.B.I. report obtained by the National Security Archive showed that a trusted informant had placed Mr. Posada at two meetings where the bombing was plotted.

Living in Venezuela at the time of the attack, Mr. Posada was tried before a military tribunal but acquitted. He remained in prison while prosecutors appealed the ruling, seeking to take the case to a civilian court. But disguising himself as a priest, he escaped.

Mr. Posada always insisted that he was innocent of the airplane bombing — what he called “an abominable deed.”



Mr. Posada, foreground, greeted supporters in 2011 after a federal jury in El Paso, Tex., acquitted him of charges of lying to United States officials in order to gain asylum. He was long suspected of organizing a string of Havana hotel bombings in 1997 and the 1976 bombing of a Cuban jetliner that killed 73. Alan Diaz/Associated Press

He ended up spending nine years in prison in Venezuela.

“My memories of him are of being a 5- or 6-year-old and visiting him in jail,” Ms. Arguello said, adding that she saw little of her father in the decades that followed. “That was the life he chose.”

Mr. Posada’s next stop was El Salvador, where he participated in the covert Iran-contra affair, in which the Reagan administration secretly sold arms to Iran and used the proceeds to help rebel forces in Nicaragua, or contras. Mr. Posada served as a quartermaster for the rebels.

While in Guatemala in 1990 he was shot — he presumed by Cuban intelligence operatives; the bullets grazed his heart and tongue and left him with a severe speech impairment.

In an interview with The New York Times in 1998, Mr. Posada was quoted as acknowledging that he had organized a string of hotel bombings in Havana that left one Italian tourist dead and 12 people wounded. He later said he that had been misquoted, and that all he had done was publicize the bombings.

Mr. Posada stayed on the run before reappearing in 2000 in Panama. Mr. Castro, who was in Panama for a presidential summit, stunned the world when he announced at a news conference that his old foe was in town, trying to kill him. Shortly afterward, Mr. Posada and a group of comrades with terrorism-related records were arrested in Panama City with C4 explosives.

Mr. Posada was sentenced to eight years in prison, but the president, Mireya Moscoso, in her last week in office, pardoned him in 2004. He showed up in the United States a few months later.

“He had that magnetic quality to him that I’m sure explains how he was able to survive all those years,” said Mr. Posada’s lawyer, Arturo V. Hernandez. “He was able to establish alliances to help him. You can’t do that if everybody hates you.”

Exiles sent him money, and they bought his paintings to help him survive. (He had learned how to paint in prison.) They paid bribes to sneak him out of jails and countries and into others.

“He was a charmer,” said Santiago Alvarez, a longtime Miami activist who has served time in prison for his anti-Castro efforts. “He had stories for everything. He made you laugh. He was good company.”

Federal prosecutors said it was Mr. Alvarez who sneaked Mr. Posada back into the United States in 2005, but both men denied that.

Mr. Posada was charged with lying to the immigration authorities about the bombings and how he had entered the country, but was acquitted in 2011.

A judge ruled that Mr. Posada could not be returned to Cuba or Venezuela, the two countries that eagerly sought his return. So Mr. Posada stayed in South Florida, where he remained estranged from his wife, Nieves, their daughter and a son, Jorge. They survive him. Complete information on survivors was not immediately available.

“I think I did what I had to do,” Mr. Posada said in the jailhouse interview with The Herald, in which he renounced terrorism, though he said that he still longed to stomp Mr. Castro “like a cockroach.”

“I’m doing what I have to do as a Cuban patriot.”

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