

## Major General Carlos Roloff Mialofsky: A Polish *Mambí* in the USA

JOSÉ B. FERNÁNDEZ

### ABSTRACT

With the exception of Dominican Generalissimo Máximo Gómez, no other foreign-born hero of Cuba's War for Independence is so admired and beloved by Cubans as Major General Carlos Roloff Mialofsky, "The Polish *Mambí*." This article examines Roloff's activities in the United States, organizing Cuban expatriates prior to and during the War of Independence (1895-1898). Emphasis is placed on Roloff's penchant for organization, his leadership, and his mastery of deceit in coordinating expeditions in the United States right under the noses of American authorities and Spanish agents. "The Polish *Mambí*'s" efforts in the United States were major factors in securing Cuba's freedom.

Keywords: *Mambí*, Cuba, war, expeditions, Polish

### RESUMEN

A excepción del generalísimo dominicano Máximo Gómez, ningún héroe extranjero de la guerra de Independencia cubana es tan admirado y estimado por los cubanos como lo es el mayor general Carlos Roloff Mialofsky, "El *Mambí* polaco".

---

José B. Fernández, Pegasus Professor of history and languages at the University of Central Florida and Immediate past Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at said institution. As specialist on Hispanic Letters in the United States, he held a presidential appointment on the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of the National Museum of the American Latino. He has authored numerous books and articles.

Fernández, J.B. "Major General Carlos Roloff Mialofsky: A Polish *Mambí* in the USA". *Camino Real*, 9:12. Alcalá de Henares: Instituto Franklin-UAH, 2017: 133-148. Print.

Recibido: 21 de enero de 2017; 2ª versión: de febrero de 2017

Este artículo tiene como propósito examinar las actividades del general Roloff como uno de los líderes de la comunidad de expatriados cubanos en los Estados Unidos antes de la guerra de Independencia cubana y durante dicha guerra (1895-1898). El artículo enfatiza el liderazgo de Roloff, su don de organizador y su maestría en la coordinación de expediciones militares desde los Estados Unidos, burlándose de oficiales norteamericanos y agentes españoles. Los esfuerzos del “Mambí polaco” fueron de gran valor para alcanzar la libertad cubana.

Palabras clave: Mambí, Cuba, guerra, expediciones, polaco

\*\*\*\*\*

On a warm evening in 1895, a bearded man with a thick accent spoke to a crowd of Cuban expatriates at the San Carlos Club in Key West, Florida, and said the following:

Compatriots: I am the son of the unfortunate Poland, I am Polish and my country is a prisoner of three terrible tyrannies: the Russian tyranny, the Austrian tyranny and the Prussian tyranny. I long for its liberty, as well as I cry for its misfortunes. Destiny has been adverse to us Poles, but because I cannot offer my life for the country of my birth, I put all my efforts for the freedom of that other land where I lived among heroic men, that land for which I have spilled my blood defending the rights of its sons. (qtd, in Álvarez 1981: 193)

The man was Major General Carlos Roloff Mialofsky, “The Polish *Mambí*.”<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Dominican-born Generalissimo Máximo Gómez, no other foreign-born hero of Cuba’s War for Independence is so admired and beloved by Cubans as Major General Carlos Roloff Mialofsky.

Born in Russian-occupied Warsaw, on November 4, 1842, Karol Rolow Mialowski, was the second of Karol Rolow and Loisa Mialowski’s three children. When he was a child, the family moved to Krolewiec,<sup>2</sup> a Prussian occupied Polish Baltic port. There he attended school, where he learned German, business, and military strategy. In 1862, when his father died, he migrated to the United States, residing in Cincinnati, Ohio (Álvarez 1981: 121-122).

At the outbreak of the American Civil War, he enlisted in the Ninth Ohio Volunteer Regiment. Organized in 1861, the Ninth was composed of German-speaking volunteers commanded by Brigadier General Augustus Willich, a former Prussian army officer. It formed part of General George H. Thomas’s division. Known as the

“Niners,” the Ninth participated in some of the major battles of the Civil War such as Chickamauga Creek, Missionary Ridge, Rocky Face Ridge and Resaca (Reinhart 6).

Known for its bravery and courage under fire, the Ninth was disbanded in June, 1864. After its disbandment, Roloff, who had achieved the rank of captain, left for Cuba. Fluent in seven languages and with a business background, he was hired by Bishop and Company, an American-owned, sugar-exporting company based in Caibarién, a port in Las Villas Province (Roloff).

Upon his arrival in Caibarién, Karol Rolow Mialowski became known as Carlos Roloff Mialofsky. Respected for his penchant for organization and financial acumen, he lived comfortably in Caibarién. However, destiny had other plans for him when on October 10, 1868, the Ten Years’ War for Cuban Independence started (Fernández 2012: 11).

On the evening of February 6, 1869, Carlos Roloff Mialofsky joined the Cuban patriots. The Las Villas’s patriots appointed Roloff as Major General and Chief of Staff because of his military experience (Báez 1974b: 11). Although the Cuban patriots scored some victories against Spanish forces, they were defeated. The defeat resulted in the Pact of Zanjón, the armistice which ended the Ten Years’ War, on February 11, 1878 (Thomas 266).

Although Roloff’s troops continued fighting in Las Villas until April, 1878, the Cuban Patriotic Junta ordered him to stop. A frustrated Roloff expressed his disappointment in a curt statement: “The troops in Las Villas have never accepted the dishonorable Pact of Zanjón, we only capitulated because it was forced on us” (Álvarez 1981: 98).

With the patriots’ defeat, Roloff, who opposed the pack vehemently, left for the United States in May 1878. True to his patriotism and zeal for Cuban independence, in March, 1879, he became Secretary-Treasurer of the Cuban Revolutionary Committee (Ros 211). The New York City based organization helped finance General Calixto García’s uprising which lasted less than five weeks, ending with his capture in August, 1880. The uprising became known in Cuban history as “La Guerra Chiquita” (The Little War) (Márquez Sterling 252-253).

The failure of the Ten Years’ War and “La Guerra Chiquita” were major setbacks for the patriots. According to Jaime Suchlicki, “the reasons for the failure are to be found partially in internal dissension, regionalism and petty jealousies among leaders...” (72). Suchlicki further provides another reason for the patriot’s defeat:

The United States refused to recognize the rebels, perhaps in the hope that Spain would eventually be willing to sell the island. Under President Ulysses

S. Grant, the United States reaffirmed its neutrality laws and asserted that it was not prepared to intervene in Cuba. These actions affected armed shipments to the rebels, facilitated Spanish espionage activities and created disillusionment and frustration. (72)

After “La Guerra Chiquita,” Roloff left for Honduras. Although he was financially stable, Cuban independence was his goal. In 1892, Cuban writer José Martí had become the leader for Cuban independence. Martí called on Roloff and other officers of the Ten Years’ War to join him in a plan for Cuban independence (Calvo Poyatos 78-82).

Roloff immediately left for the United States. After meeting Martí in New York City, “The Polish *Mambi*” arrived in Tampa in June 1892. The fact that he was Polish caused double admiration for him as the Martí funded exile newspaper *Patria* reported:

Tampa salutes Roloff, the hero who fought day and night for ten years for the freedom of a land which was not his. Today he is received with admiration by everyone and everyone seeks to shake his hand and express love and admiration for this son of Poland, who today is our honored guest in Tampa. (Álvarez 1981: 156-157)

“The Polish *Mambi*” replied with a speech, advocating for Martí’s Cuban Revolutionary Party, which called for an end to Spanish colonial rule in Cuba and the establishment of a Cuban Republic. In the speech he stated:

[...] the Cuban Revolutionary Party is the entity with which your support will once and for all, end the Spanish government’s tyranny in Cuba. Our war will not be an isolated war, it will be an all-out war conducted by the people in Cuba, the Cuban immigrant community, the foreigners who love Cuba, and those who fight for our principles; the principles of freedom, justice and equality. (Álvarez 1981: 157)

During June, 1892, “The Polish *Mambi*” busied himself seeking contributions from cigar workers and convoking Patriotic Clubs to support the Cuban independence cause. The result of Martí’s idea, these clubs were political entities, each one bearing a patriot’s name or a patriotic date. Cuban *émigrés* were expected to enroll in them and contribute a membership fee to support the independence movement (Stebbins 2004: 10).

“The Polish *Mambi*” continued his proselytizing mission throughout Tampa and the Cubans’ admiration for him grew to the point that he became the “poster freedom fighter,” as a *Patria* editorial stated:

The noble Pole was one of the first ones in saluting the newly-proclaimed republic. He saluted in honor of his unfortunate homeland. In Zanjón, Roloff

was one of the last ones to lay down his arms. Whenever the cause of Cuban independence has been proclaimed, Roloff has been there. Now that the Cuban Revolutionary Party has been established, the tireless and ever faithful Pole is here, ready to offer his sword for Cuban independence. (Álvarez 1981: 156)

Roloff went from Tampa to Key West, where he received a warm reception in July, 1892. As *Patria* reported:

Roloff has encountered a reception as warm as the one he encountered in Tampa. The Circle of Cuban Friends organized a feast in his honor on July 3, which was a memorable one. Roloff has been visiting different cigar-making factories, explaining the cause for Cuban independence and he has been successful in bringing people to the cause. (Álvarez 1981: 159)

For nearly three years Roloff would travel with Jose Martí, organizing Patriotic Clubs and fundraising for Cuban independence throughout American cities. By 1894, 126 Patriotic Clubs had been established in 18 cities. Key West alone had 62 Patriotic Clubs! (De La Cova 19).

“The Polish *Mambi’s*” eloquence was invaluable to the independence cause. Cuban cigar workers in Key West and Tampa responded favorably to Martí’s call for donating ten percent of their salaries to raise funds for the country’s independence. Roloff also became the chief architect of the *Lotería de la Patria*, a lottery plan to raise funds for the Cuban Revolutionary Party. The lottery ran from August 1894 until March 1895 in Key West, Tampa and New York City, collecting thousands of dollars for the party (Álvarez 1981: 170).

With sufficient funds in its treasury Martí, Roloff, and members of the Cuban Revolutionary Party devised the Fernandina Plan to ignite Cuba’s War for Independence in early January 1895. In cooperation with Nathaniel Borden, a prominent businessman from Fernandina, Florida, the Cuban Revolutionary Party, chartered three vessels: the *Lagonda*, the *Amadís* and the *Baracoa* for the purpose of gathering Cuban fighters dispersed throughout the Caribbean and Central America to launch the War for Independence (De la Cova 19-24).

The *Lagonda* was to load weapons in Fernandina and sail to Key West and board Roloff and Serafín Sánchez along with 150 men. The expedition was to disembark in Las Villas Province. The *Amadís*, was to sail to Costa Rica and board General Antonio Maceo. Its destiny was Oriente Province. The *Baracoa*, with José Martí on board, was to sail to the Dominican Republic where Generalissimo Máximo Gómez was to board it and then sail to Santa Cruz del Sur in Camagüey Province (Masó 333-334).

As the *Lagonda* was in Fernandina, Colonel Fernando López de Queralta one of Martí's main contacts there, committed a serious error when, disobeying Martí's orders of maintaining strict secrecy, informed others that the ship was loaded with military equipment. Additionally, he had labeled the crates containing weapons as military articles instead of labeling them with false information (De la Cova 22-23). Meanwhile, the Pulitzer-owned newspaper *The World* reported that José Martí had been seen in Fernandina. This prompted the Spanish minister in Washington, Emilio de Muruaga, to complain to American authorities about violations of U.S. neutrality laws. He also asked American officials to conduct an investigation (De la Cova 33).

On January 14, American officials responded by detaining the *Baracoa* and the *Lagonda* in Fernandina and the *Amadís* in Savannah. No military equipment was found on the *Baracoa* and the *Amadís* and both were released to their respective owners (De la Cova 36-37). However, custom officials seized the *Lagonda* and confiscated 800 rifles and 600,000 rounds of ammunition crates found in a warehouse (Godoy 202).

It is estimated that the Fernandina fiasco cost the Cuban Revolutionary Party between \$25,000 and \$40,000 (De la Cova 34). After the debacle, the organization only had \$3,000 in its coffers. Nevertheless, Martí, Roloff and others mobilized wealthy Cuban cigar manufacturers, cigar workers and Patriotic Clubs, and they responded with a myriad of contributions (Masó 334).

Encouraged by the Cuban *émigré* population's effort, Martí left for the Dominican Republic on January 31, 1895 to meet military leader Máximo Gómez. Prior to departure, Martí reached an agreement with supporters in Cuba to set a date for a start of the War of Independence. The set date was February 24, 1895, and on that day, the war started in Baire, a small village in Oriente Province (Báez 1974a: 104).

As the revolt quickly spread throughout the island, organizing expeditions from the United States to Cuba was of utmost importance to the Cuban patriots. In April, learning that Martí, Mareo and Gómez were already in Cuba, Roloff devoted all of his energies to recruiting men, chartering vessels and acquiring weapons and supplies (Fernández 2012: 21).

While in Key West, trying to organize an expedition to Cuba, Roloff received news that José Martí, disobeying Gómez's orders to stay at the patriots' camp in Oriente Province, charged on his horse against a Spanish column and was killed in action at Dos Ríos. Roloff, intent on avenging Martí's death, sped the plans for an expedition (Fernández 2012: 21).

The Spanish Consul in Key West, Pedro Solís, kept a constant watch on "The Polish *Mambi*", for he wrote in his dispatch to the Spanish Foreign Ministry:

This consulate is closely observing and reporting on the activities of Separatists, not only in Key West but also in Tampa and other cities in Florida. Since I assumed my responsibility of this office several years ago, I have maintained constant surveillance of the insurgents and I have sent detailed reports of their plans to Cuba and Washington D.C. I have already notified our government about an expedition of 150 soldiers who are only awaiting the signal to leave for Cuba. Serafin Sánchez and Carlos Roloff are in command of this expedition. Sánchez will land his group near Holguín and Roloff will land his group near Cárdenas. Our gunboat the *Infanta Isabel*, has arrived at this port and it appears to have prevented them from leaving. I have requested the assistance of the U.S. Coast Guard and a revenue cutter is expected to arrive here shortly. (Stebbins 2007: 183-184)

Furthermore, Major General Serafin Sánchez, Roloff's inseparable friend and co-leader of the projected expedition, described the challenge facing Roloff and him: "More than 500 Cuban men on the Key are following me, begging to know when they will sail for Cuba; there are two Spanish gunboats headed for the Key and another is already here; there are Cuban and American spies in the streets; an American gunboat is patrolling the area; we are hemmed in on all sides" (Stebbins 2006: 22).

Knowing that the Spanish Consul, spies, and American authorities were constantly watching him "The Polish *Mambi*" outmaneuvered them by covertly sending his men and equipment to a place where no one could imagine an expedition would depart: the inhospitable mosquito infested Big Pine Key, some 28 miles from Key West (Álvarez 1969: 8).

In Big Pine Key, 150 men had to endure Florida's heat and humidity, as well as hunger and the constant mosquito attacks. As Fermín Valdés Domínguez, an expeditionary and one of the most renowned Cuban patriots, commented:

Our soldiers are desperately in need of food and sleep. They can't sleep during the day or night because of the mosquitoes. Some are so tired from fending off the mosquitoes that they have collapsed from exhaustion. The summer heat and humidity are taking their toll. The soldiers are getting weaker due to malnutrition and the bad rainwater. (Stebbins 2004: 14)

The expeditionaries in Big Pine Key were anxiously awaiting a vessel to transport them to Cuba. Faced with the crisis Roloff left for New York City in June 11, to meet with leaders of the Cuban Junta to explain to them their desperate need to find a vessel; otherwise, the expedition would have to be aborted (Álvarez 1969: 8).

While Roloff was in New York City, the situation worsened as some of the expeditionaries began blaming Roloff and Sánchez for the lack of provisions. As a

result, several of them deserted, bribing a local fisherman to take them to Key West. Although Valdés Domínguez labeled them cowards, he nevertheless, pointed out the expeditionaries' desperation:

We've managed to endure the miserable conditions on this key for several weeks. The soldiers built some low lying huts from pinewood and palm fronds, but the roof leaks when it rains. Food is scarce, so we're always hungry. Only one meal is served during the day, and it's always the same: salted meat and crackers. The soldiers built huge bonfires so that the smoke and heat would protect them from the mosquitoes, but the fires don't seem to stop them. The soldiers sleep so close to the fires that their bodies are scorched from the heat. This wait is unbearable. (Stebbins 2004: 14)

On July 5, Brigadier General "Mayía" Rodríguez, unable to land an expedition in Cuba, arrived at Big Pine Key with 42 men, carrying 30 rifles and 80,000 rounds of ammunition (Álvarez 1969: 10). The same day, a chartered American schooner arrived bringing much needed supplies. The arrival of Rodríguez's seasoned veterans and the supplies boosted the Big Pine Key expeditionaries' morale (Stebbins 2004: 14).

On July 17, a schooner carrying a message from Roloff arrived, informing Sánchez to begin transporting the expeditionaries in the schooner and smaller boats to the *James Woodall* off Big Pine Key. At Roloff's urging the Junta finally acquired the *James Woodall* in Baltimore on June 29. The 143-ton steamer, with a 14-man crew and a cruising speed of eight knots was purchased for \$15,000. Its captain was the experienced J.M. Hudson (Álvarez 1981: 190).

On July 18, the *Woodall* left with Sánchez, Roloff, Rodríguez and 150 men for Cuba (Stebbins 2007: 184). After several days at sea to avoid detection, on July 24, 1895, at 9:30 in the evening, one of the largest expeditions ever to reach Cuba during the War for Independence landed at Tayabacoa, Las Villas Province, carrying 150 men, 300 rifles, 200 machetes, 300,000 rounds of ammunition and 650 pounds of dynamite (Stebbins 2007: 231).

The expedition's success was largely attributed to Roloff's skills as a careful and meticulous planner. An admiring Serafín Sánchez, while on the high seas, wrote a letter to his wife. Praising Roloff, he stated: "General Roloff is amazing, he did not forget a single detail. He made a great choice in appointing the vessel's captain who is magnificent" (Álvarez 1981: 194).

After seventeen years in exile, Roloff returned to his adoptive land. Generalissimo Máximo Gómez appointed him Commander of the Fourth Corps in



charge of Las Villas Province (Álvarez 1969: 14). Roloff not only distinguished himself in the battlefield, especially as an artillery expert, but he also initiated a financial war against the Spaniards by conducting an extortionist campaign. “The Polish *Mambi*” began demanding contributions for the patriots’ cause from the Las Villas sugar planters. If refused, he would burn sugar plantations. By burning the cane fields, the patriots would deprive Spanish colonial authorities of their main source of revenue: sugar (Thomas 322).

On September 18, 1895, the Cuban Constitution was enacted at Jimaguayú, Camagüey Province. Major General Carlos Roloff was elected as Secretary of War for a two-year term (Márquez Sterling 278). His main duty in this post was that of procuring weapons and coordinating expeditions. Roloff’s first decision as Secretary of War was the establishment of the Department of Expeditions (Álvarez 1981: 215).

As the war progressed, Gómez and Maceo were scoring impressive victories. However, continued success depended on launching more expeditions bringing men and material. As a result, Roloff decided to go to the United States and direct more such ventures. Once again “The Polish *Mambi*” outsmarted the Spanish authorities. They were expecting him to go directly to the United States, and thus sent several gunboats to Cuba’s northern coast. Instead, he left from Pilon inlet in Oriente Province and on June 19, 1895, he arrived in Jamaica (Álvarez 1981: 227-228).

Once Spanish agents in Jamaica detected his presence, they complained to British authorities. After being detained for almost two weeks in Dry Town, he was freed, and “The Polish *Mambi*” left for New York City, where he checked in at the Broadway Center Hotel under the name of Charles Roberts. In New York City, he met with leaders of the Cuban Junta. He then proceeded on the steamer *Mascotte* to Key West, arriving in July 1896 (Álvarez 1981: 229).

After spending a few days with his wife and children,<sup>3</sup> all Key West residents, he began a vigorous campaign seeking funds from cigar workers to outfit expeditions. The workers responded by pledging to buy 10,000 rifles and ten million rounds of ammunition for the war effort (Álvarez 1981: 229).

Once he had visited Patriotic Clubs in Key West, the Cuban community held a banquet in his honor at “El Polaco” (The Pole), a restaurant named in his honor, in July 1896. The banquet was attended by city officials along with Florida State Legislature Representative Hunt Harris, who denounced President Grover Cleveland’s neutrality policy (Álvarez 1981: 230).

“The Polish *Mambi*” appeared to act with impunity in Key West. An exasperated Consul Solís cabled the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs stating the following:

It is difficult to maintain surveillance because I don't have enough paid informants to work for our government. The separatists control this island and they continue to act independently of other insurgent centers. The few Spanish residents that live in Key West live in fear of the many revolutionary Cubans that reside here. The Americans sympathize with the Cubans and criticize our government. The authorities don't seem to be concerned about the fact that the Cubans are engaged in illegal activities and they continue to ignore my complaints. (qtd. in Stebbins 2006: 23)

By early August, Roloff had raised enough funds in Key West to outfit a forty-five men expedition. Spanish agents and American officials were waiting the arrival of a chartered vessel in Key West, but, once again, "The Polish *Mambi*" deceived them by departing in the *Laurada* from Charleston, on August 13, 1896. The ship arrived on Nuevas Grandes, Oriente Province, on August 16, but unfortunately, it ran aground. Due to Roloff's efficiency in planning the group was able to transfer the *Laurada*'s cargo to the *Dauntless*, another of Roloff's chartered vessels scheduled to rendezvous with the *Laurada*. A lightened *Laurada* headed home after leaving a number of expeditionaries on the Cuban coast, while the *Dauntless* continued to El Macío, in southern Oriente Province, arriving there on August 22, 1896. His fellow *Mambises* lauded his triumphant expedition (Álvarez 1981: 229-230).

The *Mambises* were making major gains, to the point that Maceo had already reached the western province of Havana and Pinar del Río. However, on November 18, 1896, they would suffer a serious setback when Major General Serafín Sánchez, Roloff's trusted friend, died at the Paso de las Damas Battle in Las Villas Province (Carbonell 265). A few weeks later, on December 7, 1896, an even bigger blow befell the *Mambises* when Antonio Maceo, "The Bronze Titan" and the Cuban Liberation Army second-in-command, was killed at a skirmish with Spanish troops in Punta Brava, Havana Province, along with the Gerneralissimo's son "Panchito" Gómez Toro (Márquez Sterling 286).

In terms of military affairs, Weyler's "Total War" strategy –which emulated that of American General William Sherman's Southern campaign during the Civil War– was not succeeding, for the *Mambises*' guerrilla tactics vexed the Spanish troops. Additionally, tropical diseases were taking a toll on the 120,000 regular Spanish soldiers (Fermoselle 81).

A major factor which cannot be overlooked regarding the *Mambises*' success was the role played by Roloff's Department of Expeditions, which made it feasible for the rebels to receive a steady supply of weapons and ammunition. During the entire

Ten Years' War only twelve expeditions arrived in Cuba. In 1896 alone, largely as a result of Secretary of War Roloff's efforts fifteen expeditions arrived, thus facilitating the patriots' major offensives (Álvarez 1981: 232-233).

Eager to avenge "The Bronze Titan's" death, "The Polish *Mambi*" left Cuba for New York City to coordinate himself a major expedition. He arrived in mid-December, and the Cuban community welcomed the loyal Pole with open arms (Álvarez 1969: 22). American authorities, however, gave him a different type of welcome. According to the *Indianapolis Journal*, on January 13, 1897, acting on denunciations from Arturo Balse, Spanish Consul in New York City, Roloff, along with Cuban Revolutionary Leader Dr. José J. Luis and American sympathizer J.T. Smith were arrested for violating neutrality laws and causing unnecessary hardships in connection with the *James Woodall* expedition. They were taken to Ludlow Jail, a federal penitentiary in Manhattan and arraigned before Commissioner Shields after posting a \$2,500 bail each (January 14-15, 1897).

While on bail, Roloff secretly busied himself organizing the "Antonio Maceo" expedition in Brooklyn. Since the *James Woodall* had been outfitted in Baltimore, Roloff, Luis and Smith were to stand trial in that city. District Judge Morris was to handle the case prosecuted by District Attorney W.L. Marbury. General Bradley T. Johnson, along with Leon Bensit and Albert Queens, were to conduct the defense. However, when the trial was to open on March 23, 1897, only Luis appeared before the judge. As the Washington DC newspaper *The Evening Star* reported "General Roloff forfeited his bail and he is thought to have gone to Cuba" (March 23, 1897).

Indeed, "The Polish *Mambi*" was in Cuba, for he had departed with the "Antonio Maceo" expedition on March 11, 1897 on board the *Laurada*, captained by the legendary Johnny "Dynamite" O'Brian. The *Laurada* was to rendezvous with the *Bermudas* on San Salvador Island, Bahamas, carrying another expedition. The encounter never happened, for the vessel was confiscated by American authorities before leaving port. After waiting over a week, the *Laurada* set sail for Cuba (Álvarez 1981: 238).

The expedition carrying 37 men, 2,050 rifles, 500 machetes, and two cannons, arrived at Esterón de Júcaro, near Banes, Oriente Province, on March 21, 1897. After delivering part of its cargo, the *Laurada*, renamed the *Antonio Maceo* departed for the United States on the same evening. Four days later, Roloff, with four small boats sailed to meet the patriots at Mano de Pílon, also near Banes. As Roloff's flotilla was passing by the Spanish fort guarding Banes Bay, "The Polish *Mambi*" unfurled the Cuban flag and aimed the recently unloaded the twelve-pound Hotchkiss cannon right at the fort. Surprisingly, the Spanish fort did not fire a single shot in response (Álvarez 1981: 240-241).

“The Polish *Mambi*” was to remain in Cuba until the end of the war in 1898. Unfortunately, Dr. Luis was not as lucky as Roloff and Smith, for the *Butte Weekly Miner* reported that since neither Roloff nor Smith were unable to be located, the Attorney General decided to drop the charges against them, thus declaring the case *nolle prossed*. Dr. Luis, on the other hand, had to serve an eighteen month sentence in the Baltimore jail, for he was charged with violating American neutrality laws, prior to the declaration of the Spanish-American War (July 18, 1898).

Under the articles of the Jimaguayú Constitution Roloff’s two-year term as Secretary of War expired in September 1897. A new Cuban Government-in-Arms and Cabinet replaced the previous government’s members (Márquez Sterling 287). On February 15, 1898, the American battleship *Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor, and on April 23, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain, signaling the beginning of the Spanish American War, which lasted until July 1898 (Fermoselle 91).

No longer Secretary of War, Roloff was named Inspector General of the Cuban Liberation Army on May 4, 1898 (Álvarez 1981: 257). The Department of Expeditions, under Roloff’s assistant, the diminutive Brigadier General Emilio Núñez, continued its efforts to bring expeditions to Cuba, even after the Spanish-American War had started. It is very difficult to ascertain how many expeditions reached Cuba during the War for Independence (1895-1898). Consuelo Stebbins asserts that forty eight expeditions arrived in Cuba from 1895 until 1898 (2007: 233). However, in his *History of Florida*, Charlton Teheau estimates the number to be seventy one (312).

No matter the statistics, the fact remains that Carlos Roloff played a major role in launching the expeditions. His penchant for organization, his knowledge of English, his meticulous record keeping, and his careful selection of subordinates made him excel at such a task (Fernández 2012: 21). Other factors such as geography, connections with customs’ officers and politicians, and the corruption of many officials aided his efforts. Additionally, his cunning and that of his subordinates, as well as his mastery of deceit contributed to “The Polish *Mambi*’s” success (Stebbins 2007: 168-169).

Florida’s geography made a difference in the sending of expeditions right under the noses of American officials and Spanish agents in places like Jacksonville, Fernandina, Key West, Tampa, Pensacola and Big Pine Key (Teheau 312). Roloff’s connections with customs officers and politicians in Florida were of great importance to his cause. Fernando Figueredo, the President of the Revolutionary Committee in Key West, was a customs house inspector who became a Representative in the Florida House (Morris 161). Additionally, when he moved to Tampa, he became the first mayor of West Tampa (Leto 5). Other customs house connections in Key West were

the notorious revolutionary Manuel Escassi and Frank Wicker, the Collector of the customs house, “who frequently met with the insurgents” (Stebbins 2007: 168-169). There was also Judge Angel de Lono, who used to make life impossible for the Spanish Consul (Stebbins 2007: 169).

Being a master of deceit, “The Polish *Mambi*” would use different aliases such as Charles Romero, Charles Roberts and Francisco de Paula to deceive American authorities and Spanish officials (Álvarez 1981: 229). In their efforts to outwit American authorities and the Spanish-hired Pinkerton Detective Agency, “The Polish *Mambi*” and his trusted aide, Brigadier General Núñez, found a friend in the figure of Alfonso Fritot, Assistant Manager of the Passenger Division of the Florida Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. With his blessings, the Department of Expeditions, under an assumed name, would charter a train to be boarded by different small groups of expeditionaries at remote places. At a preset destination a chartered vessel would take them to Cuba. All of this maneuvering was done not to arouse suspicion on the part of the authorities (Cordovi 416).

Since eleven American warships patrolled Florida’s east coast and another one patrolled the west coast, Roloff and the Department of Expeditions devised ways of going undetected. One consisted of transporting small groups of expeditionaries and supplies in small boats to different schooners. These would then take them to a larger vessel anchored off the coast, which would eventually transport them to Cuba (Cordovi 416-417).

Despite formidable success Roloff and the Department of Expeditions, at times, suffered setbacks, such as the confiscation of the *Bermudas*, the capsizing of one of General Calixto Garcia’s boats off Long Island, resulting in the drowning of twelve of his men, and the sinking of the steamer *Commodore* off Ponce Inlet, Florida, on January 1, 1897, resulting in the death of eight crewmen (Eslinger 61). These losses notwithstanding, Roloff and his men became the symbols for outfitting and sending expeditions to aid the Cuban Liberation Army in its quest for Cuban Independence (Stebbins 2007: 232).

On December 10, 1898, the United States and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish American War, and the United States would occupy Cuba until May 20, 1902 (Trask 317). During this American occupation, “The Polish *Mambi*”, true to his record keeping savvy, busied himself compiling the *Indice alfabético del Ejército de Cuba* (Cuban Liberation Army Index) (Fernández 1987: 133).

On April 1, 1901, a new Cuba Constitution was drafted, granting foreigners who had fought for Cuban independence Cuban citizenship. Moreover, it rewarded

foreigners who had served the independence cause for ten or more years with the right to serve as Cuban president, if they chose to run for that office. Four foreigners qualified for this honor: Dominican Generalissimo Máximo Gómez, Puerto Rican Major General Juan Rius Rivera, Chinese Captain José Bó and, of course, Polish Major General Carlos Roloff. Though they had served the cause of Cuban independence since the start of the Ten Years' War, all four repudiated presidential aspirations (Fernández 2012: 26).

Roloff served as Treasurer of the Cuban Republic from 1901 until 1907, when his health began to deteriorate. On May 17, 1907, he died at his modest residency in Guanabacoa, near Havana. The next day, his body laid in state at Havana City Hall with the Cuban flag covering his casket (Álvarez 1981: 285). Thousands of Cubans attended the funeral as a grateful nation rendered tribute to "The Polish *Mambi*."

## REFERENCES

- Álvarez, R. *La Expedición Roloff*. La Habana: Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, 5 Serie, 1969: 5-24. Print.
- . *Mayor General Carlos Roloff Mialofsky: Ensayo Biográfico*. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1981. Print.
- Báez, V. Ed. "La guerra de 1895". *La Enciclopedia de Cuba*. 14 vols. San Juan: Enciclopedia y Clásicos Cubanos, 1974a. Print.
- . "La insurrección en Las Villas". *La Enciclopedia de Cuba*. 14 vols. San Juan: Enciclopedia y Clásicos Cubanos, 1974b. Print.
- Calvo Poyatos, J. *El desastre del 98*. Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1997. Print.
- Carbonell, N. *Próceres: Ensayo Biográfico*. Miami: Editorial Cubano, 1969. Print.
- Cordovi, Y. "La delegación plenipotenciaria en Estados Unidos. Estrategias expedicionarias, 1895-1989". *Revista Brasileira do Caribe* 14 (enero-junio 2014): 401-421. Print.
- De la Cova, A. R. "Fernandina Filisbuster Fiasco: Birth of the 1895 Cuban War for Independence". *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 82:1. (Summer 2003): 16-42. Print.
- Eslinger, K. L. *And All the Men Knew the Colors of the Sea...: Historical and Archaeological Investigation of the SS Commodore's Remains, Ponce Inlet, Florida*. Ph.D. Dissertation. East Carolina University, 2005. Print.
- Fermoselle, R. *The Evolution of the Cuban Military*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1987. Print.
- Fernandez, J. B. *Los abuelos: Historia oral cubana*. Miami: Edicioner Universal, 1987. Print.

- . “Major General Carlos Roloff Mialofsky: The Polish *Mambi*”. *Polish American Studies* 49 (Spring 2012): 9-26. Print.
- Godoy, G. “José Alejandro Huau: A Cuban Patriot in Jacksonville Politics”. *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 54 (October 1975): 196-206. Print.
- Leto, E. “West Tampa and the Cigar that sparked a Revolution”. *Cigar City Magazine* (July-August 2008) 9: 5. Print.
- Márquez Sterling, M. *Historia de Cuba*. New York: Las Américas Publishing Company, 1969. Print.
- Masó, C. *Historia de Cuba*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1976. Print.
- Morris, A. & J. P. Morris. *The Florida Handbook 2007-2008*. Tallahassee: Peninsular Publishers, 2007. Print.
- Reinhart, J. *A German Hurrah! Civil War Letters of Friedrich Bertsch and Wilhelm Stängel, 9th Ohio Infantry*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010. Print.
- Roloff, F. Personal Interview. July 16, 1983.
- Ros, E. *Cuba: Mambises nacidos en otras tierras*. Miami: Ediciones Unviversal, 2011. Print.
- Stebbins, C. E. “The Insurgents of Key West and the Expedition of 1895”. *Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal* 15 (Fall 2004): 1-15. Print.
- . “The Cuban Insurgent Colony of Key West: 1868 – 1895”. *Tequesta* 66 (2006): 5-27. Print.
- . *City of Intrigue, Nest of Revolution: A Documentary History of Key West in the Nineteenth Century*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007. Print.
- Suchlicki, J. *Cuba: From Columbus to Castro*. Washington: Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1985. Print.
- Tebeau, Ch. *A History of Florida*. Miami: Uniersity of Miami Press, 1971. Print.
- Trask, D. *The War with Spain in 1898*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1981. Print. T. Hugh. *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. Print.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The word *Mambi* was used by Cuban patriots during the struggle for independence. It refers to Cuban patriots who fought against Spain during the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878) and the Cuban War for Independence (1895-1898). It is said to have derived from the name of Eutimio Mambí who fought against the Spanish in Santo Domingo during the occupation of the island in the nineteenth century.

<sup>2</sup>During the Prussian occupation of Poland Królewiec became Königsberg. Today it is the Russian city of Kaliningrad.

<sup>3</sup> Roloff married Galatea Guardiola, daughter of former Honduran President José Santos Guardiola, on February 3, 1883. They had four children. Two of them were born in the United States in 1892 and 1894 respectively. Prior to his marriage, he had a son product of a relationship with Benita Álvarez. His son Gerardo was born in 1879 and achieved the rank of captain during the War for Independence.