

Castros honor revolutionary comrade del Valle

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HAVANA --

(AP) -- The Castro brothers paid homage to fallen revolutionary comrade Sergio del Valle Jimenez on Saturday, with Fidel recalling his help during the Bay of Pigs invasion and Raúl attending his military funeral.

"We have lived exceptional times," President Fidel Castro wrote in an essay carried in state media. "Your lessons and your example will endure."

Raúl Castro, Cuba's defense minister and interim leader since his brother stepped aside because of illness in mid-2006, attended Gen. Del Valle's interment at Havana's Colon Cemetery.

Del Valle died Thursday of undisclosed causes. State media did not say how old he was, but he was at least in his 70s.

Del Valle joined Castro's revolution against dictator Fulgencio Batista through a Havana underground movement in the mid 1950s and entered the rebel army as a physician and soldier fighting against Batista's troops in eastern Cuba in 1957.

After Batista fled and the rebels took control of the island on Jan. 1, 1959, Del Valle held various positions in Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces.

He was army chief of staff when a U.S.-backed exile army tried unsuccessfully to invade the Bay of Pigs in 1961, as well as the following year when the U.S. discovery of Soviet missiles on the island pushed the world to the brink of nuclear war. The Soviets eventually removed the missiles.

Del Valle was also interior minister in the late 1960s and health minister from 1979 to 1986.