



Canadian Embassy (fifth floor), Vedado, 1953

**The activities** of the Canadian Embassy in Havana in the 1940s and 50s were intimately tied to the presence of the Canadian commercial community in Cuba, and the importance of Havana as a major international port. A highlight of the early years of Canada's diplomatic presence in Cuba was visits by ships of the Canadian Navy, which carried out peacetime winter training exercises in the Caribbean. These naval visits provided the pretext for elaborate diplomatic ceremonies both on and off-

board ship. The most impressive ship visit in this era was the visit to Havana in March 1950 of Canada's first aircraft carrier, the *HMCS Magnificent*.



*HMCS Magnificent*, near Havana Harbour, 1950

**The triumph** of the Cuban Revolution attracted enormous public interest in Canada – as it did everywhere around the world. Canadians received an early glimpse of the leader of the victorious July 26th movement, when Fidel Castro decided to include a stop in Canada at the end of his visit to North America in April 1959. Invited by the Junior Chamber of Commerce to speak in Montreal, he drew fascinated crowds wherever he went. Shedding both his security guards and those provided by the Canadian authorities,

he declared to reporters “there is a Latin atmosphere here that I sort of missed in the United States.” One of those reporters was René Lévesque, already well known in his province as political correspondent for Radio-Canada, who would go on to become a founder of the Parti Québécois and later Premier of Quebec.