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by Michèle Ray
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[THE WAR CRY OF AMERICAN BUSINESS]

THE COLD WAR, BY ACCELERATING monopolistic concentration and state intervention in the economy, had of course put the *coup de grâce* to that "free enterprise system" which Clifford and his colleagues so lovingly—and cynically—invoked. In reality, the corporate liberals were nearly as dedicated in their opposition to "free enterprise" as they were to communism. Clifford's role as an antitrust lawyer—defending corporate giants accused of dividing markets, fixing prices and generally conspiring to eliminate free competition—is a dramatic case in point.

Significantly, all the leading Cold Warriors saved their moralisms about "freedom" and "communist totalitarianism" for the general public. When they talked about Cold War policy privately, they talked *business*. War Secretary Forrestal, for example, wrote on March 3, 1947: "I felt very strongly that the world would only be brought back to order by restoration of commerce, trade and business, and that would have to be done by businessmen. . . ." Domestically, Forrestal favored further concentration of industry, urging the government to "encourage and not discourage business. . . . That would take the form of freedom from unnecessary prosecutions, etc. . . ."

The real motivations of the postwar "internationalism" expressed in the Truman Doctrine were enunciated in terms normally reserved for Marxists and businessmen, even before the war was over. Dean Acheson, then assistant secretary of State, told a congressional committee in 1944: "It seems that we are in for a very bad time, so far as the economic and social position of the country is concerned. We cannot go through another ten years like the ten years at the end of the '20s and the beginning of the '30s, without having the most far-reaching consequences upon our economic and social system. When we look at that problem we may say it is a problem of markets. You don't have a problem of production. . . . We have got to see that what the country produces is used and is sold under financial arrangements which make its production possible. . . . Under a different system you could use the entire production of the country in the U.S. . . . You could possibly fix it so that everything produced here would be consumed here. But that would completely change our Constitution, our relations to property, human liberty, our very conceptions of law. And nobody contemplates that. Therefore, you find that you must look to other markets and those markets are abroad."

One State Department official called the Truman Doctrine "a war cry." Clark Clifford said it was in the "historic tradition" of such business-motivated, interventionist texts as the Monroe Doctrine and the Open Door policy in China. As such, it had an immediate and profound impact on the international political situation, especially in Europe. Truman had thrown down the gauntlet—the world was divided between two alternative ways of life, and "nearly every nation must choose" between them. Neutrality was deemed unacceptable by the rules of the official, anticommunist extremism which has dominated U.S. foreign policy for two decades.

This proclamation, backed by the entire diplomatic/military/

economic arsenal at Washington's command, had dramatic effects. In the ensuing months communists were ousted from the cabinets of France and Italy; the noncommunist Smallholders Party in Hungary was eviscerated and the noncommunist Peasants Party in Poland reduced to impotence. By fall, Moscow had organized the Cominform, which issued a counter-challenge to the Truman Doctrine, echoing the message of fundamental world division. The year 1948 saw the coup d'état in Czechoslovakia, the Berlin blockade and airlift, the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, and the first steps toward NATO, which was formed the following year.

[COMING HOME TO ROOST]

THE COLD WAR HAS MEANT permanent mobilization, a peacetime conscription unique in American history, a militarism alien to American traditions, gigantism in government, and a vast extension of that incestuous relationship between government, the corporations and the military which had grown up during World War II. It has meant Pyrrhic hot wars for control of two strategic Asian peninsulas. It has meant an unbelievable accumulation of surplus capital in the United States, capital panting for profitable, "economically free" and "politically stable" places to invest. Since the Second World War the yearly outflow of U.S. investment capital has increased *fifteen-fold*—from \$230 million to over \$3 billion annually.

The role of the military/political Cold War program in providing these capital outlets was gratefully acknowledged in recent comments by a man who should know: Alfred Wentworth, vice president for Far Eastern operations of the Chase Manhattan Bank. "In the past," he said in a summer 1965 interview, "foreign investors have been somewhat wary of the overall political prospect for the [Southeast Asia] region. I must say, though, that the U.S. actions in Vietnam this year—which have demonstrated that the U.S. will continue to give effective protection to the free nations of the region—have considerably reassured both Asian and Western investors. In fact, I see some reason for hope that *the same sort of economic growth may take place in the free economies of Asia that took place in Europe after the Truman Doctrine* and after NATO provided a protective shield. The same thing also took place in Japan after the U.S. intervention in Korea removed investor doubts." (Italics added.)

It was on the Cold War that Clark Clifford rode to power, as its organization manservant. It was on the Cold War that Clifford rode to fortune, in his 18 years of arranging multi-million dollar favors for the corporations that benefit most from war and overseas investment. And now, as the slaughter he consistently advocated in Vietnam grows to ever more bloody climaxes, as the crisis of American empire grows ever more intense, it is only fitting that Clifford should be appointed secretary of Defense—at the very center of the military/industrial power network—and face the consequences of a 20-year policy of unbridled greed and indifference to suffering. Because all the chickens, as Malcolm X prophesied, are coming home to roost.

Reporters: Judy Buchbinder, David Kolodney, Marc Sommer, John Spitzer.



In Cold Blood

How the CIA Executed Che

Michèle Ray, formerly a model for Chanel and an amateur race car driver, traveled to Viet-Nam in 1966 as a reporter for Le Nouvel Observateur and other French publications. She had been there for seven months when she was captured by the Viet Cong and detained for 21 days. Upon her release she wrote several articles interpreting the Viet Cong and their revolution to the Europeans.

A month after the death of Che Guevara, she went to Bolivia as a correspondent for Paris Match and spent seven weeks investigating the circumstances surrounding the guerrilla leader's death.

Michèle Ray is the author of Two Shores of Hell (David McKay, May 1968).

[I. THE RELICS OF ST. CHE]

FROM ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD they came to search for relics of St. Che. The vultures were already circling the body of the martyred revolutionary hero. As I flew over Mexico and Lima, across the Andes, over Lake Titicaca, across the barren and arid Altiplano, I made my plans. I knew that Don Schanche, who had been editor of Holiday, was now closing a deal with the corrupt Bolivian generals so that Magnum, the big U.S.-dominated news consortium, could traffic in Che's literary remains. A kind of romanticism left me repelled at this prospect. I found it bizarre and unjust that the diary of this man who had dedicated

his life (and death) to the fight against American imperialism should be exploited, expurgated, perhaps falsified, to the profit of the very political line he had abhorred.

I resolved to see the diary before the Americans took it from Bolivia so I could discover just what had motivated this unique rush to publish it. I also resolved to make the deal as difficult for the Americans as possible. I had one card to play, a bluff. When I left Paris, my friend, publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert, gave me blanket accreditation to negotiate for the purchase of the famous diary. He felt he would have little chance against American money but told me to try. At least Pauvert would treat Che's remains with the reverence they deserved. I had no idea that weeks later I would leave having reconstructed the last day of Che's life and assured myself that the CIA was responsible for his death.

I landed at La Paz along with Schanche. He didn't know who I was, so I stuck to his trail through customs and checked in at the same hotel, the Copacabana. The project which had brought Schanche to Bolivia, with me at his heels, had been planned and organized by Andrew Saint George, a photographer-journalist from Magnum. A Hungarian by birth, Saint George was named by Che Guevara in his history of the Cuban Revolution as an agent of the FBI who had been sent to visit the guerrilla band in the Sierra Maestra.

This same Saint George had landed in La Paz just a few days after the press had announced the presence of a diary in Che's saddlebag. It hadn't been much trouble for him to persuade the Bolivian government to abandon its plan to publish the diary and to put it up for sale instead. The New York Times had come in on the deal with the Magnum consortium and so Juan de Onís, their Latin American correspondent, had also flown to La Paz. The deal was set. Schanche had only to come to La Paz, take a look at the documents and sign the contract.

It was Saturday and Schanche counted on being back home by the next weekend. I didn't have much time. I had arrived too late to find and talk with the intermediaries who are always vital to these sorts of negotiations. So I had to go right to the top: President René Barrientos and General Alfredo Ovando, Bolivia's military strongmen. I already knew them, having interviewed them in August 1965, when they headed the military junta. This made my task easier, and 48 hours after I arrived I had obtained an interview with Barrientos in the presidential palace. But Schanche had worked even faster: his interview was set for four o'clock, mine for five. I was afraid the one-hour difference would be crucial and I walked into the President's office expecting the worst.

STOCKY AND SWARTHY, his hair cropped short, the President was open and relaxed, even voluble with me. He began by speaking of the circumstances surrounding the death of Guevara. "You know," he told me, "La Paz is far from La Higuera, and I can neither confirm nor deny for you any of the accounts which have been given of the details of Señor Guevara's death. Was Barrientos implying he had no idea of what had gone on in La Higuera the day Che died? A difficult position for a chief of state to take, especially in a country as closely controlled as Bolivia.

"I am in Bolivia as a journalist," I told the President, "but along with my study of the history of the guerrilla movement, I also represent the French publishing house of Pauvert, which is interested in buying the captured documents, among them, of

course, the famous diary."

You could have heard a pin drop. Barrientos, composed as before, said nothing. I went on: "Furthermore, if you negotiate with a non-U.S. firm on equal terms, the international press can't accuse you of being in the hands of the United States. Whatever you decide in the long run, having two competitors can only be advantageous to the Bolivian government."

But Barrientos already understood. "I've just seen Schanche and the other," he said. "Everything had been decided, and the business was supposed to be finished by the end of this week. But it's okay with me if you enter the competition. You can appear tomorrow before the Diary Commission."

Bolivia's grapevine worked even faster than I thought, for Schanche was waiting for me at my hotel; relaxed as ever, he introduced himself, stating he was still sure that "the most important narrative of the last few years" would soon be his. "Who is this Pauvert? Michèle, you're crazy to compete with a trust like Magnum. This stupid competition is only helping a handful of generals make a killing."

Schanche had a lingering smile for the woman in me, but he had declared war against the competition I represented. Captain Philip Wimset from the American Embassy—a personal friend of Saint George—had obligingly furnished Magnum with very detailed "intelligence reports" on everything I had written, all my movements and how much I had in the bank. The information was passed through Schanche to the Bolivians.

The next day, while Schanche, de Onís and Saint George, accompanied by Captain Wimset and by Colonel Arana from the Bolivian secret service, examined the captured documents, I appeared before the "Diary Commission."

In reality, the commission was composed of only two members: Hector Mejica, director of information for the President's office, and Jaime Cespedes, director of information for the General Staff. The former represented Barrientos, the latter Ovando.

I submitted an initial offer of \$80,000, knowing very well that this was too little, but I left the door wide open for further bids. I cabled Pauvert that the documents included not only Che's diary, but also that of Joaquín (one of the guerrillas), a book of Che's poems, the records of the guerrillas' interrogation of various Army prisoners, the photos taken by the guerrillas and the Bolivian Army's filmed reconstruction of the guerrillas' main ambushes. It was really big business.

Naturally, the Bolivian authorities and my competitors had a good look at my cables and the replies. But I have to admit that this telegraphic espionage was mutual—and Schanche didn't make it any easier by sending a yard of Telex to New York every day. I "borrowed" the key from the hotel desk and visited his room at a time when I knew he had a regular appointment, taking care that I didn't do my "research" at the same time as the agent for the Bolivian secret service, who came every day to visit my room and those of my "friends."

GENERAL ALFREDO OVANDO, chief of the Bolivian Armed Forces, received my offer—reluctantly. A few days later, he called me to his office.

Unlike Barrientos—who seems the very image of the American Way of Life—the general, with his stiff military uniform and his tiny mustache, is a prototype of the South American military man. Also unlike Barrientos, Ovando had a

specific answer to the question of how Che died: "Commander Guevara, mortally wounded when he was captured, died of internal bleeding seven or eight hours after his capture. Some officers were able to speak with him."

He got down to the point: "Your offer is too low. The Americans have offered \$200,000 plus royalties. However, we aren't too happy with a royalty agreement. Make us a better offer in cash. I'll give you a few days."

Because I had seen the Magnum cables, I knew that the figure he quoted as the American offer was correct. Pauvert cabled me: "Stall a little." Since I knew that Pauvert could never beat the Magnum offer, I decided to bluff, and had a lawyer draw up a contract for \$400,000. Why not? And I inserted an important escape clause: my offer would hold only after I had seen the documents.

In reality I wasn't fooling anyone. Certainly not the Bolivians, since Ovando had copies of all the cables I had sent to Paris. But it was in his interest for me to stay in the competition. He played the game. Together, we were driving the price up to an indecent level. Of course, our motives were different. He wanted to force Magnum to raise its bid; I wanted to see the documents. Also, as I told him: "The diary in the hands of the United States is like the Koran in the hands of the infidels."

ALTHOUGH THE NEGOTIATIONS for the documents were still nominally secret, by now the matter had become a public duel between France and the United States. The bets were on the table; the embassies rose to the occasion. And if Andrew Saint George was rumored to be working for the CIA, I in turn became a dangerous international spy. But for whom was I working? "For the Cubans," claimed Saint George. And he asked his influential friend, Captain Philip Wimset, to take me out of circulation for 48 hours to ask me a few questions. But Ovando, who knew very well that I was bluffing, wouldn't let him.

Because I didn't want him to cut my negotiations short with a cable of withdrawal, I never informed Pauvert that I had put "his" \$400,000 on the table. But finally, since time was running out, I decided to make all the negotiations public and gave the story to Agence France Presse. Barrientos had declared that very day at Cochabamba that "the diary will be sold to the highest bidder"; my object was to make the destination of the sale money a public issue.

In Paris, Pauvert nearly had a heart attack when he found out just how much money he had "offered." He cabled me to withdraw officially from the bidding.

We had interviews with Ovando scheduled for that afternoon: Schanche at five o'clock, myself at four. General Ovando, fingering a cable—which, as I later understood, was Pauvert's withdrawal—said to me: "I assume that you are still in the running. I hope that you have received no negative reply." My competitors were all waiting in the next room. Sitting there with a copy of Pauvert's telegram, they imagined that I had come to announce to Ovando that I was pulling out.

But the original cable was in Ovando's hands, the copy in the hands of my competition—and I had never seen it. Now it was General Ovando who ran the bluff. With a smile he told the gathering in the other office: "*¡Qué no!* Michèle hasn't come to withdraw, but to confirm her offer. You had better raise yours, gentlemen."

Two days later another cable arrived from Pauvert: "Con-

firm previous cable withdrawing." This time Ovando obligingly had it sent directly to me.

But Schanche wasn't finished with the French. The French members of the Magnum consortium, as well as some of the Americans, took my place in the fray, threatening to leave the trust unless the negotiations were broken off. In New York there were, I found out, doves as well as vultures.

Finally, in Havana, with the news of the bidding now public, Guevara's heirs threatened to file suit against whoever claimed the copyright, for there was every reason to believe that the diary had been altered either in La Paz or by the CIA in Panama. And the prospect for such a legal entanglement was enough to scare off many of the remaining vultures.

Weeks after he had left New York to take a look at the documents and sign the contract, Schanche returned, observing that he regretted that the affair appeared to have been compromising for him. The New York Times sent Juan de Onís to greener pastures in Cuba. Only Saint George, who had given the diary its commercial value in the first place, continued to try to interest publishing houses in the document.

I had no business left with the diary, so I resolved to begin my investigation of the circumstances of Che's death.

[A GHOST OF CHE]

THE DAY BEFORE I LEFT LA PAZ a young journalist came to see me with some information. This wasn't the first time that I had been approached, usually with bad leads, but always for a healthy number of dollars. I asked him how much.

"I don't want any money," he answered, "but I do want to go to France to study. Besides, I have no way of publishing what I know here. And I'm afraid, because they know that I know the whole story of the death of Che. I spent four days in La Higuera after he was shot."

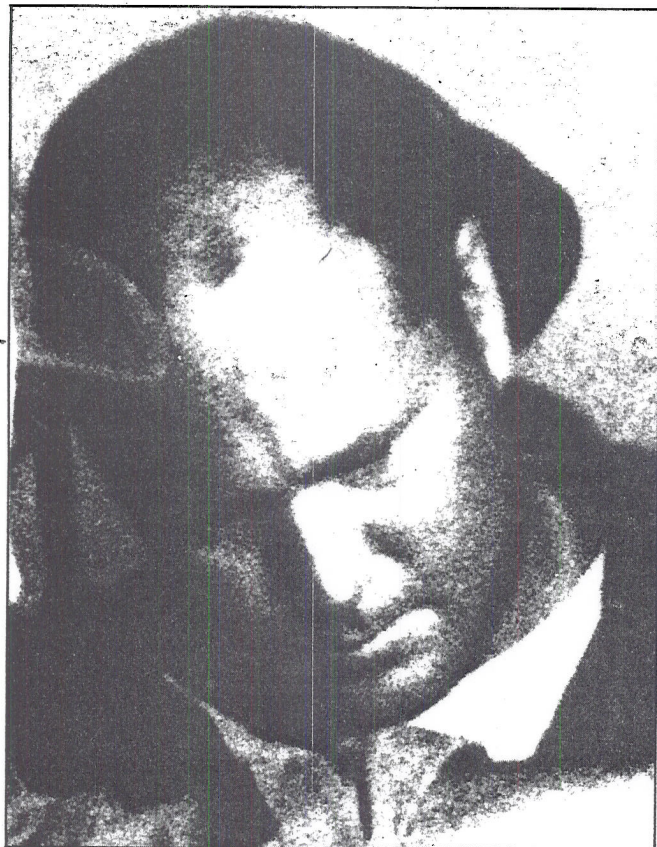
If this was true, it was a bombshell. Since the 9th of October no journalist had been able to reach La Higuera; the village had been quarantined by the Army.

Jorge Torricó was the man's name, and I listened to his story with growing interest. "As a journalist for a military magazine," he contended, "I was accredited by the General Staff, by the secret service and by the President's office. Moreover I had followed the anti-guerrilla operations since the very beginning. I had gone on missions with the Bolivian Rangers, and they all knew me. So I had no difficulty in getting to La Higuera and in staying there. Showing my official papers, I told the peasants that I knew the whole story and said I was supposed to write up a secret report. I was there for four days; I explored on foot the whole area where Che passed the last weeks of his life. I got back just two days ago. The authorities threw me right out the door and took away my papers."

Why had he come to see me and not Juan de Onís of the New York Times, for example?

"I want to go to France. You are the only French journalist in La Paz at this moment except for the representative of Agence France Presse. You are well known and are working for a big magazine."

I was leaving the next day for Camiri and the guerrilla zone and I was still innocent enough to think that I could get to La Higuera myself. So I told Torricó when I expected to be back. "O.K." he replied. "Call me when you get back 20 days from



FELIX RAMOS, Cuban exile and CIA agent, specialist in counterinsurgency operations, shown here overseeing the preparation of Che's body. No pictures are available of Eduardo Gonzales, the other CIA agent.

now. I will speak to no one until you return to La Paz. If you go to La Higuera, look for bullet holes inside the schoolhouse in the larger classroom, to the left of the door. One more thing: Che wasn't mortally wounded when he was captured. He had only one wound—in the left leg, nothing serious. He was shot down in cold blood."

Torricó didn't want to say more than this before I'd committed myself to help him get to France. But this was more than enough for me to begin my investigation.

[THE MYSTERIOUS *Gringo*]

SANTA CRUZ, FOR EIGHT MONTHS the center of the anti-guerrilla operations, is the most pleasant city in Bolivia. Its residents are casual, yet at the same time full of the *joie de vivre* which is the heart of the city's charm. And the most beautiful girls in Bolivia, mini-skirted and pony-tailed, live here. Their looks are Spanish rather than Indian, with pale skins and blue eyes. Although the streets are newly paved, Santa Cruz is still infested by dust driven everywhere by the wind.

At the General Staff headquarters I taped an interview with Colonel Joaquín Zenteno, commander of the 8th Division, now famous as the man who captured Che. Elegantly dressed, wearing a small mustache, Colonel Zenteno had another version of Che's death, different from those of Barrientos and Ovando. One month after the event—more than enough time for a common version to be decided upon—Zenteno told me that Che had never spoken at all after his capture; that he had

died while being transported from Quebrada del Churo to La Higuera. But Colonel Zenteno was not eager to talk about Guevara's death, although he waxed eloquent on the subject of anti-guerrilla tactics and military strategy in general. He commented with dry humor on the anti-guerrilla training which the U.S. Green Berets had given his Rangers, where the Bolivians spent whole days shouting: "I'm the strongest! I'm the best!" hoping that they would begin to believe it.

In Santa Cruz I rented a jeep and, accompanied by Terry Malick from the *New Yorker*, headed towards Vallegrande, the town to which an Army helicopter had brought Che's body from La Higuera. We took the main road out of Santa Cruz, finding it thick with traffic. Four hundred kilometers long, it is the only tarred highway in all Bolivia. We followed it for 90 kilometers, arriving at the village of Samaipata. It was here at 11 p.m. on July 6th that Che and nine of his men audaciously captured the town in a truck they had borrowed nearby.

Legend has it that Che was giving orders from the top of a nearby hill. But the owner of the Hotel Velocidad, a very talkative woman, knows better. For she shook the hand of Che Guevara in town, telling him: "I am not afraid to shake the hand of a guerrilla." Five months later this event is still the principal topic of conversation.

Three more hours by jeep over an almost completely overgrown road and we were in Vallegrande, where two months earlier Che's body had been on display to the press for 24 hours. We could go no further. A roadblock had been thrown across the path leading out of the town towards La Higuera, which was still quarantined. In La Higuera there are 400

campesinos who know the truth. And despite all the threats and promises, the Bolivian government still fears that one of them might talk. Besides the authorities, the only person authorized to go there is the Dominican priest, Father Roger Schiller. He was in La Higuera on that fateful Monday of October 9th, arriving just an hour after the death of Che.

About forty-five years old, Father Schiller has been living in the La Higuera area for seven years. I was to see him three times. Our conversation was made more comfortable and secrets easier to keep by the fact that we spoke the same language—Schiller is a French Swiss. Also, the information that Torricó, the young military journalist, had given me in La Paz made it easier for me to broach the topic of the murder of Che. Schiller's testimony corresponded exactly with the little that Torricó had told me. He repeated in detail some of the stories that the peasants told about what had gone on in La Higuera that day. He also told me that a *gringo* had been in the village the day of Che's death. "Who was he?" I asked. "I'm not sure. They called him Gonzales."

I ran into Father Schiller again in Pucara, which I reached with Juan de Onís and a couple from the Peace Corps only by sneaking past the roadblock at the exit to Vallegrande. It was a four-hour trip by jeep across barren mountain ridges. No houses, nothing. The *campesinos* were startled to see us, because since the strange series of events two months before, we were the first strangers who had gotten that far.

But even before we had saddled the horses to push on to La Higuera, Major Mario Vargas stormed onto the scene. Vargas absolutely forbade us to go any further, saying: "I have given orders to my men in La Higuera to stop, and if necessary to shoot down, any journalist, Bolivian or foreign, who tries to get there. We will recognize no papers. And what is more, the *campesinos* will not talk to you. They know that journalists only tell lies.

To guarantee that we left the area promptly, Vargas began to escort us back to Vallegrande. Just as we parted, he couldn't keep from saying: "Don't tell Zenteno or Ovando that you got as far as Pucara. It's off limits."

On the road back to Vallegrande we suddenly saw a great stir ahead of us. A company of Rangers had just arrived, clambered down from their trucks and spread across the road amid a chorus of shouts and whistles. The remnants of the guerrilla band, commanded by Ínti Peredo, had been sighted in the area. Two soldiers, armed with light machine guns, inspected our jeep and verified our papers. We were allowed to pass.

BEFORE RETURNING TO LA PAZ, I had one more visit to make: to La Esperanza, the camp where American Green Berets from the 8th Special Forces in Panama had for 19 weeks trained the battalion of Bolivian Rangers which was to capture Che Guevara.

World opinion in April still refused to accept the story that the elusive Che was really present in the Bolivian *selva*. But I learned at the Special Forces camp that the CIA, which had pursued Che constantly since his disappearance from Cuba in 1965, no longer had any doubts. This "Ramón" was Guevara, and it was from Bolivia that he had sent the message to the Tricontinental: "Create two, three, many Vietnams, that is the watchword."

It was only after completing my stay at La Esperanza and returning to La Paz to talk at length with Torricó that I was

finally able to understand the incredible lengths to which the Americans had gone to get Che. They had begun by sending CIA agents into the area of the guerrillas' ambush; they had been armed with his entire dossier, and their mission was to verify that it was indeed Che who was leading the guerrillas. They were also determined to coordinate the intelligence efforts of the Bolivian military with its secret service. There were two CIA men heading the "get Che" campaign in Bolivia: one was known as "Ramos"; the other was the mysterious "Gonzales"; both are Cubans and members of the CIA counterinsurgency team composed of Cuban exiles operating out of Panama.

Dividing their time between La Esperanza, Camiri and the presumed guerrilla zone, Ramos and Gonzales did not advertise their presence. Both had good covers. The first evidence of Gonzales' presence is contained in Régis Debray's testimony: "Three days after my capture, I was interrogated by a certain Gonzales, the mysterious finger-man for the CIA." In a letter smuggled out of jail, he wrote: "When I was first arrested . . . I was told by the mysterious mastermind of the CIA, Dr. Gonzales, who is probably a Puerto Rican and was in daily contact with both Barrientos and the American Embassy, 'you interest them more alive than dead.'"

Ramón-Guevara was the CIA's man, and they did not intend to let him escape because of the incompetence of the Bolivian military. The United States was determined to make Bolivia a model counterinsurgency operation. The Pentagon knows quite well that they cannot afford two or three more Vietnams.

I left La Esperanza and Santa Cruz and returned to La Paz. By now I had most of the threads of the story in my hands: Che was not mortally wounded when he was brought to La Higuera; Prado had handed him over to Selnich alive. I understood the role of the American Green Berets in training the Bolivian Rangers and I was beginning to suspect the presence of the mysterious Gonzales in La Higuera during the hours before Che died. I was anxious to talk to Torricó so that he could confirm what I already knew and pin down some of the missing details.

I found him quickly in La Paz. He was even more anxious to get to France now, and this made him talkative. Soon we found that by combining what each of us knew we could piece together a coherent, if not detailed, account of Che's last 24 hours. Together with insights and details which other sources later provided me, the story, including the crucial role of the American CIA, is reasonably complete.

[THE DEATH OF CHE GUEVARA]

ON THE NIGHT OF SATURDAY the 7th of October, Che Guevara—or rather Ramón—and his men arrive in a canyon called Churo, one of the deep ravines that score the *selva* in the area to the south-east of Santa Cruz. Their last battle had taken place 11 days before, only a few kilometers away, near the village of La Higuera. That day, September 28, Coco Peredo, the Bolivian leader of the guerrilla movement, had been killed. Since then the band has been maneuvering back and forth around the area, passing from canyon to canyon. They choose to stop at a little field of sweet potatoes at the edge of the stream and at the foot of a huge fig tree. It is after midnight.

A *campesino* who is sleeping nearby to guard his crops hears

them coming. He sets out in the direction of La Higuera; the governor had promised a reward of 50,000 pesos for the capture of Guevara. His report reaches La Higuera, where Captain Prado and the 184 men he commands are stationed.

Prado, in a taped interview with the Chilean journalist Augusto Carmona, later said, "The information was transmitted to us by one of our informants who was operating in the area." This may explain why the reward was not paid to the *campesino*, but to the town of La Higuera. To this day, no one knows exactly who that *campesino* was.

While the guerrillas sleep the Army takes up its positions in the Quebrada del Churo. By morning there are four platoons posed on two slopes of the canyon and two units cutting off the exit towards the Rio Grande. The Rangers are armed with mortars and Browning machine guns.

The first contact between the two forces takes place at about one o'clock at the point where the path to La Higuera comes into the gorge. The guerrillas try to escape by this route, but it is blocked, and the only way out for them is to descend the canyon and reach the Rio Grande.

A second engagement 20 minutes later lasts for around a quarter of an hour. Already there are two dead and two wounded among the Rangers. Then comes silence, almost more ominous than the staccato bursts of machine gun fire.

Suddenly, around three o'clock in the afternoon, all hell breaks loose: mortars, machine guns, grenades. Rocks are broken off, boulders come rolling down. The Ranger platoon of Sergeant Huanca ascends the canyon from the Rio Grande to cut off any escape.

Ramón is wounded in the leg. A bullet breaks the barrel of his Garant rifle. His comrade Willy bears him along on his shoulders up about 60 feet of steep climb to a tiny level spot and then up again. They climb by grabbing hold of briars and thorns. Willy helps Ramón, who can't move his leg and is beginning to choke; he is having an attack of asthma. Both of their hands are covered with blood. Below them the firing continues.

Suddenly four soldiers spring up in front of them and surround them. Willy doesn't even have the time to let go of Ramón and raise up his gun. They are prisoners.

"I am Che Guevara," Ramón says simply.

Gary Prado arrives. He takes a photo from his pocket and looks at the scar on Ramón's hand. "It's him all right," he says.

The impossible has happened. Che is in his hands. "I felt a kind of shock," he reported in a later interview, "a sort of elation. But I had no time to talk to him. I had to return to my command. We kept fighting until dusk."

At Vallegrande at about four o'clock, Colonel Joaquín Zenteno, who commands the 8th Division, receives a coded message: "500 *Cansada*." "500" means Guevara. "*Cansada*" (tired), means prisoner. "Pappy" Shelton receives the same message at American headquarters in La Esperanza.

Prado has handed the prisoners over to five of his men with explicit orders not to speak to them. Che is seated next to Willy, racked by another attack of asthma. The soldiers whisper and stare at him.

At dusk the little caravan hits the road. Willy walks by himself with his hands bound and Guevara, limping on one foot, is held up by two soldiers. Behind them mules carry the dead and wounded Rangers in blankets. It is late night when they finally reach La Higuera.

IN THE VILLAGE—which I was never able to reach but where Torrico had spent four days—400 people live in tiny adobe huts with tile roofs. No cars, not even a jeep. A few narrow stone streets, the largest of which, a mule path, widens in the center of town to make a little square. On the square is a school with two low doors; there are two windows latticed with bamboo bars in the two tiny classrooms.

Che is seated in the larger of the two rooms on a bench with his back to the wall, his hands tied. The soldier who brought him has packed and lighted a pipe for him before leaving. He keeps Che's matches as a souvenir. There is no electricity, not even a lantern. The prisoners are alone in the darkness, listening to the babble of voices which reach them from outside.

The parade of commanding officers, which will last until noon the next day, begins with Colonel Selnich. He arrives in a helicopter supposedly to bring supplies, but really at Colonel Zenteno's orders to keep the Rangers from talking too much with the prisoners, and to keep things calm while he awaits a decision from his superiors.

In the village square, Prado passes out to his men the belongings of the prisoners. When he was wounded, Che hid the saddlebag full of documents in the brush, to be found by a peasant two days later. But he kept his knapsack.

Around the knapsack the soldiers are grabbing for souvenirs, making trades. Arguments break out. In a little box there are cuff links. (It's hard for them to imagine Che in a white shirt.) Second Lieutenant Pérez roughly shoves open the classroom door: "These are yours?" he asks Che.

"Yes, and I would like them to be given to my son."

Pérez doesn't answer. He leaves.

Another officer, Espinosa, wants a pipe for himself. The one in the knapsack has already been taken. He wants to trade. What to do? He rushes into the school, goes up to Che, takes him by the hair, shakes him and snatches the pipe he is smoking out of his mouth.

"Ha! You are the famous Che Guevara!"

"Yes, I am Che! A minister of State too! And you're not going to treat me like that," answers the prisoner.

And with a quick movement of his foot he sends Espinosa flying into the benches against the wall. Colonel Selnich intervenes at that point. Che knows him—Selnich has already come in once to try to interrogate him. But Che refuses to speak to him or any of the other officers. The soldiers, though, he answers quietly.

Finally a medic is sent to him. "After having passed the entire afternoon in the combat zone and part of the evening with our wounded, I went to examine Che," medic Fernando Sanco told Jorge Torrico. "A single wound in the leg—the left leg. That was all he had. I washed it with a disinfectant."

After having tried vainly to interrogate the prisoner, Selnich decides to leave him alone. He has the guard outside reinforced. On Monday morning Che asks to see the *maestra*, the schoolmistress of the village.

Twenty-two-year-old Julia Cortez told Father Schilier: "I was afraid to go there, afraid he would be a brute. But instead I found an agreeable-looking man, with a soft and ironic glance. . . It was impossible for me to look him in the eye."

"Ah! you are the *maestra*. Do you know that there is no accent on the 'se' of *ya se leer*?" he says as a preface, pointing at one of the drawings that hangs on the wall. "You know that in Cuba there are no schools like this one. We would call

this a prison. How can the children of the *campesinos* study here . . . It's antipedagogical."

"We live in a poor country," the schoolmistress replies.

"But the government officials and the generals have Mercedes cars and plenty of other things . . . *¿Verdad?* That's what we are fighting against."

"You have come a long way to fight in Bolivia."

"I am a revolutionary and I've been in a lot of places."

"You have come to kill our soldiers."

"You know, a war is either lost or won."

The *maestra* repeated this conversation to Jorge Torrico. "I had to look down while I talked to him . . . his gaze was unbearable. Piercing . . . and so tranquil."

SINCE EARLY MORNING on the 9th helicopters have been coming and going. "It's hard to say who came, or when," the mayor of the village told Torrico. "Too much coming and going, too much movement. But I know that General Ovando was there, and General Lafuente, Colonel Zenteno, Rear Admiral Urgateche. And also a *gringo*. Wearing a uniform. Gonzales."

Eduardo Gonzales.

As he climbs out of the helicopter Urgateche rewards the Rangers for getting Che, handing out money to them.

Then all of the high-ranking officers file past this man who does not fear to die. Together and in turn, they try to make him talk. Rear Admiral Urgateche walks up. Suddenly he starts back, purple with anger. Che has spit in his face. Che knows that the interrogation is a mere formality—that the decision about what to do with him has already been made. His wrists bound, seated on his bench, his back to the wall, Che looks at them. He mocks them. Little by little their elation turns into an impotent rage. Who knows whether Che Guevara dead won't be even more dangerous than Ramón alive with the guerrillas? A little before 12:30 the superior officers depart by helicopter, leaving explicit orders.

During the morning another guerrilla, "Benjamín," has been taken prisoner in the Quebrada del Churo by another company of Rangers. He is brought to La Higuera, wounded and exhausted, and thrown into the other room with Willy. Some of my sources claimed that this was not Benjamín, but a man called "El Chino." Torrico and I could not decide on this point.

It is about 1:00 p.m. in La Higuera. Che has managed to make his way across the room and lean up against the opposite wall. The orders have come down to the junior officers. Three of them are competing for the "privilege and honor" of murdering Che. The door to the school opens and Mario Terán enters with his M-2 carbine on his hip. He paces to the other end of the room and turns around. "Sit down," he says.

"Why bother? You are going to kill me," Che answers calmly.

"No—sit down."

Terán makes as if to leave. Suddenly a burst of fire and Che crumples. Behind him, in the wall next to the door, the bullets have made two bloody holes, each as big as a fist.

Terán puts up his gun and calls outside: "That's it. I got him." Then (according to Father Schiller) he goes out to drink a beer.

Che lies on the floor in agony. Pérez comes into the room, a revolver in his hand. He walks over and puts a bullet in Che's neck. "A good hole for the formaldehyde," Doctor Moisés

Abraham says the next day to the reporters in Vallegrande.

Two or three men have followed Pérez into the classroom. Now all of them want to fire on the adversary who has so long been invincible. "Okay," reportedly says the officer, "but not above the waist."

So they shoot him in the legs. Among them is the medic, Fernando Sanco, the one who had tended the captive's leg the night before.

In the next room, Willy and Benjamín have heard. When their door opens, they know the fate that awaits them. Sergeant Huanca enters with a gun in his hand; he faces the two men tied together on the floor.

"You have killed him," cries Willy, "I'd just as soon die, along with him."

Another burst of fire; Willy and the other fall to one side. On the wall, around the holes made by the bullets, there is blood mixed with hair.

Peasants come from all sides, mingling with the soldiers who are looking for stretchers to put the bodies on. There is great confusion. Those who know what has happened explain to the people who are arriving. In ten minutes everyone knows. And it is precisely for this reason that two months later the village is still quarantined.

An officer lifts Che's clothing and counts the wounds. Five in the legs, one in the left breast, one in the throat, one in the right shoulder, one in the right arm. Nine wounds, not seven as the doctors at Vallegrande will say.

It is three o'clock and the stretchers are next to the helicopters when Father Roger Schiller arrives on horseback. "As soon as I got the news that morning that Che had been taken alive, I hurried here, hoping to see him before they took him away. But when I arrived they had already shot him down.

"I went to the school," continues the father. "It still hadn't been cleaned up. On the ground I found a bullet. Here. Look. It is shattered. I will keep it as a souvenir. The blood was mixed with earth. In the classroom where Willy and Benjamín were, blood was spattered all over. I cleaned it up."

At five o'clock in the evening Che's body arrives in Vallegrande strapped to the runner of a helicopter. Most of the Bolivian officers who had interrogated him in La Higuera have already arrived sometime during the morning. Ramos has been in Vallegrande all day long. Gonzales arrived in the early afternoon, in a helicopter coming from the direction of La Higuera. But when had he left La Higuera? Before Che was killed, or after? Did he stay to supervise the execution? I was never able to find out.

A Chevrolet panel truck is waiting on the airstrip at Vallegrande. Inside it are Ramos and Gonzales. As the helicopter lands, Ramos springs out of the truck and hastily directs the soldiers to load the corpse into the back. The truck races off to the morgue which has been improvised in a nearby shack. It stops. Ramos yells to Gonzales: "Let's get the hell out of here" . . . in English . . . letting down for one telltale moment their carefully maintained anonymity. The disguise is quickly reestablished, however, and Ramos refuses to speak another word of English to the journalists who are arriving on the scene.

Inside the shack, Ramos quietly directs the operations. He helps the doctors inject formaldehyde into the corpse, and he takes the dead man's fingerprints, comparing them with those in the dossier. (The news dispatch sent by Chris Roper of Reuters mentioned the presence of a CIA agent at the morgue.

But the paragraph was cut from most American papers.)

After October 10 the traces of the CIA in Bolivia fade out. Ramos was spotted once two days later at a hotel in La Paz, registered once more as a businessman. After this, nothing. Che is dead. They can return to Panama and seal his dossier: mission accomplished. All of the men, money and time used against the small, isolated band of guerrillas has paid off.

[MADE IN THE U.S.A.]

I MUST HAVE ASKED TOO many questions while reconstructing the story of how they shot down Che, for the last week of my stay in Bolivia was particularly hectic. The French Embassy and the manager of my hotel received three or four anonymous calls every day threatening my person and advising me to get out of the country as soon as possible.

President Barrientos, on his way to New York, put in the last word for the Bolivian government: "The French señorita has spent a very agreeable and peaceful visit in our country, and I don't think she could have had time to inform herself."

But despite the President's certainty, subsequent digging allowed me to "inform" myself in even greater detail about the roles of the CIA men, Ramos and Gonzales.

As the net of American-trained and advised Bolivians tightened around Che, both men arrived on the scene to oversee his capture and execution. On August 5, they came to Santa Cruz, registering at the Hotel Santa Cruz as businessmen. Felix Ramos, aged 26, carried passport No. 0152052; Eduardo Gonzales, 32, carried No. A8093737. They left the hotel on August 12 and were identified by British journalists in Vallegrande some days later—in the company of Major "Pappy" Shelton. At this time they had dropped their cover. No longer posing as businessmen, they wore military uniforms without identifying insignias, with revolvers strapped to their waists.

Ramos and Gonzales were again in Vallegrande at the end of September, making that city the base of their operations and flying periodically to La Esperanza. All the testimony I have gathered has placed Ramos in Vallegrande all day on October 9 and Gonzales in La Higuera that morning. Whether or not Gonzales ordered the manner and time of Che's murder, it is clear that he flew into La Higuera to make sure that the revolutionary hero died, that his fantastic career was finished once and for all.

The murder of Che was a symbol of the power of the United States throughout Latin America. But as far as the U.S. operations in Bolivia were concerned, it was only a bonus. For in Bolivia the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign has been well-established for years. The United States has pumped \$15 million in military aid into Bolivia since 1962 and maintains a permanent military mission in La Paz.

Since 1965 the American "advisors" have trained a number of Bolivian regiments. Many Bolivian officers have been trained in Panama, and some, like Gary Prado, at Fort Bragg by the Special Forces. The operation at La Esperanza, however, dated only from April 1967, and was initiated as a direct result of the first engagement between the guerrillas and government troops at the end of March.

For the guerrillas (although they were not yet contemplating real military operations) hostilities began on March 11, 1967, when two of their men deserted. One of these said later in written testimony that he had come to the guerrillas to gather information, thinking that he could profit by denouncing

them. Their statements also included a very schematic outline of the organization of the movement, the names of the guerrillas and, of course, the presence of "Ramón."

As soon as it got this information, the Army began to mobilize the campaign against the guerrillas. On March 16 it seized the home of Coco Peredo. On the 20th, Che, who had come to the central camp from a reconnaissance mission in the neighborhood of Vallegrande, made the decision to defend the area against every incursion of the Army. Although the Army was surprised tactically by the "ambush," strategically the guerrillas remained permanently on the defensive.

The encounter was a setback for the Army—seven soldiers were killed. Less than eight days after the ambush, a group of American military men from Panama, including the intelligence chief of the 8th Special Forces, visited the guerrilla area and conferred with Barrientos.

The first move of the U.S. was to increase the arms shipments to the Bolivians and to secure their supply lines. C-130 transports coming from Panama landed regularly in Santa Cruz, bringing small arms, radio equipment, napalm and medical supplies. At the same time, three-week training courses were hurriedly organized for Bolivian soldiers in the combat zone. Less than eight days after that first ambush on March 23, a photo published in the Bolivian press showed two Green Berets training Bolivians at Lagunillas, a few miles south of Casa de la Calamina, formerly the guerrillas' own training center.

American military operations in Bolivia started in earnest around the 12th of April when a 16-man team of Green Berets arrived from the Canal Zone to set up shop at La Esperanza under the command of "Pappy" Shelton. Their mission, as reported in the Bolivian press, was to train a hand-picked battalion of Rangers in counterinsurgency tactics designed specifically for the Bolivian *selva*. "El Soldadito," as the common soldier is called in Bolivia, had to be transformed into "El Ranger." His nationality would remain the same, but his mentality and training were "made in the U.S.A."

The team of Green Berets, according to American Ambassador Henderson—who is anxious to maintain appearances—was under strict instructions not to enter the guerrilla zone itself and not to participate in the fighting. And, for the most part, these instructions seem to have been followed. However, radio contact was maintained between La Esperanza and the staff of the 8th Bolivian Division, and, from September 27th on, with the 2nd Ranger Battalion in the field.

All in all, American military intervention in Bolivia was remarkably "clean." All the dirty work could be left to the CIA agents. And—controlling the operation from the beginning, using a ruthless overkill to make the trap lethal—they were successful. Their plot to see Che Guevara dead worked with machine-like precision from the moment the machinery was put into operation. Their efficiency was almost uncanny. In April the London Times correspondent in Bolivia reported that "American military here say it will take six months to turn out a fully trained Bolivian battalion for jungle fighting."

Six months later Che was dead. A model exercise in counterinsurgency. "Create two, three . . . many Bolivias"—that is the watchword at the Pentagon.

But, revolutions are made by conditions, not by men. "This great humanity has said 'enough'"; it will not soon forget Che Guevara.