

Guevara Spoke With C.I.A. Man For 2 Hours Before His Death

By JUAN de ONIS

Ernesto Che Guevara talked freely for two hours with an agent of the United States Central Intelligence Agency before he was executed in Bolivia last year.

Ramparts magazine published yesterday an article by Michèle Rey, a French correspondent who went to Bolivia last year to investigate Mr. Guevara's death. Miss Rey identified the C.I.A. agent as Eduardo Gonzales. This is an assumed name, as is the name Garcia used by his C.I.A. partner in the Bolivian mission.

"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," the Ramparts article said. The revolutionary leader was captured near La Higuera by Bolivian troops.

A full account of the agent's dramatic interview with Mr. Guevara remains secret. Some details of Mr. Guevara's final hours have been pieced together, however, from reliable Bolivian and American sources interviewed by this correspondent in Bolivia in December.

A Training Mission

The agent, a Cuban expatriate, was in Bolivia working with the army on counter-guerrilla intelligence. This training mission, in which at least one other C.I.A. agent was assigned, played a major part in the destruction of a Cuban-backed guerrilla movement led by Mr. Guevara in Bolivia.

But there is no evidence that the C.I.A. had any part in the decision to eliminate Mr. Guevara. The agent who interviewed him left him before a Bolivian Army sergeant machinegunned him to death in La Higuera, an Andean hamlet.

In fact, Mr. Guevara did not apparently regard the C.I.A. agent as his mortal enemy. He talked freely and replied to questions about the internal political situation in Cuba, the economic policies in which he had participated as Minister of Industry under Premier Fidel Castro and the organization of the Bolivian guerrillas.

Mr. Guevara attributed the failure of the guerrilla movement to the discovery of the base camp by Bolivian troops and to a lack of organized urban support for the guerrillas, who were operating in the desolate foothills.

The interview took place in the stone schoolhouse at La Higuera on the morning of Oct. 9. The previous afternoon

American-trained Bolivian rangers had surrounded Mr. Guevara and the remnants of his band in a narrow gorge near La Higuera.

During an exchange of fire Mr. Guevara staggered out, wounded in one leg. As he was seized by Bolivian soldiers, a Bolivian guerrilla tried to resist and was shot dead.

Capt. Gary Prado, commander of the ranger company that captured Mr. Guevara, described his battlefield encounter with the Argentine-born guerrilla leader.

While mortar shells boomed in the ravine, the lanky young captain faced the bearded, ragged prisoner resting his weight on the arms of two soldiers. The captain continued:

"I said, 'who are you?' and he replied: 'I'm Che Guevara. Don't kill me. I'm more valuable to you alive than dead.'

"I looked at that face closely and said to myself, 'My God! it is Che!' It was hard to believe. When I got on the radio to Vallegrande I had to confirm the message twice before they would believe me."

Captain Prado turned Mr. Guevara over to Lieut. Col. Andres Selnich of the Eighth Division headquarters. That night Mr. Guevara was questioned by Bolivian officers but gave only curt replies.

Asked his profession, he replied: "Revolutionary".

The next morning, however, he talked freely to the C.I.A. agent.

Talk Is Interrupted

At about 11 A.M. the conversation was interrupted by a burst of gunfire in the adjoining room in a two-room schoolhouse. A wounded Bolivian guerrilla had been slain.

Mr. Guevara was silent for a moment, then spoke again. "They are going to kill me, but that will not stop the revolution," he said. "The revolution will triumph."

The agent withdrew and a Bolivian noncommissioned officer, Sgt. Mario Teran, entered the room. Mr. Guevara was lying on a blanket spread on the dirt floor.

The sergeant was under orders from Col. Joaquin Zenteno, commander of the Eighth Division, who had arrived by helicopter that morning and had communicated with La Paz by radio.

Despite his wound Mr. Guevara got to his feet and said, "You are going to see how a man dies!"

Four shots killed him instantly.