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Comandante Che: Guerrilla Soldier, Commander, and Strategist, 1956-1967

Paul J. Dosal

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The victory of Fidel Castro's rebel army in Cuba was due in no small part to the training, strategy, and leadership provided by Ernesto Che Guevara. Despite the deluge of biographies, memoirs, and documentaries that appeared in 1997 on the thirtieth anniversary of Guevara's death, his military career remains shrouded in mystery. *Comandante Che* is the first book designed specifically to provide an objective evaluation of Guevara's record as a guerrilla soldier, commander, and strategist from his first skirmish in Cuba to his defeat in Bolivia eleven years later.

Using new evidence from Guevara's previously unpublished campaign diaries and declassified CIA documents, Paul Dosal reassesses Guevara's impact as a guerrilla warrior and theorist, comparing his accomplishments with those of other guerrilla leaders with whom he has been ranked, including Colonel T. E. Lawrence, Mao Tse-Tung, and General Vo Nguyen Giap.

This reassessment reveals that Guevara was often underrated as a conventional military strategist, overrated as a guerrilla commander, and misrepresented as a guerrilla theorist. Guevara achieved his greatest military victory by applying a conventional military strategy in the final stages of the Cuban Revolution, orchestrating the defensive campaign that held off the Cuban army in the summer of 1958. As a guerrilla commander, he scored impressive victories in ambush after ambush in Bolivia, but in winning the battles he lost the war. He violated most of his own precepts during the Bolivian campaign, compelling analysts to question the validity of both his strategies and his command skills.

Though he is credited with developing foco theory, Guevara never attempted to advance a new theory of guerrilla warfare. He was a fighter, not a theorist. He wanted to defeat American imperialism by launching guerrilla campaigns simultaneously in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but his tricontinental strategy resulted in failures first in the Congo and then in Bolivia. *Comandante Che* presents the full record of Guevara's successes and failures, separating myth from reality about one of the twentieth century's most controversial revolutionary figures.

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