



Hunting Che: How a U.S. Special Forces Team Helped Capture the World's Most Famous Revolutionary

Mitch Weiss , Kevin Maurer

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Hunting Che: How a U.S. Special Forces Team Helped Capture the World's Most Famous Revolutionary

Mitch Weiss , Kevin Maurer

Hunting Che: How a U.S. Special Forces Team Helped Capture the World's Most Famous Revolutionary Mitch Weiss , Kevin Maurer

The hunt for Ernesto “Che” Guevara was one of the first successful U.S. Special Forces missions in history. Using government reports and documents, as well as eyewitness accounts, *Hunting Che* tells the untold story of how the infamous revolutionary was captured—a mission later duplicated in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As one of the architects of the Cuban Revolution, Guevara had become famous for supporting and organizing similar insurgencies in Africa and Latin America. When he turned his attention to Bolivia in 1967, the Pentagon made a decision: Che had to be stopped.

Major Ralph “Pappy” Shelton was called upon to lead the mission. Much was unknown about Che’s force in Bolivia, and the stakes were high. With a handpicked team of Green Berets, Shelton turned Bolivian peasants into a trained fighting and intelligence-gathering force.

Hunting Che follows Shelton’s American team and the newly formed Bolivian Rangers through the hunt to Che’s eventual capture and execution. With the White House and the Pentagon monitoring every move, Shelton and his team helped prevent another Communist threat from taking root in the West.

INCLUDES PHOTOS

Hunting Che: How a U.S. Special Forces Team Helped Capture the World's Most Famous Revolutionary Details

Date : Published July 2nd 2013 by Berkley Books (first published July 2013)

ISBN : 9780425257463

Author : Mitch Weiss , Kevin Maurer

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Military, Military History, Historical, War, Military Fiction, Politics

 [Download Hunting Che: How a U.S. Special Forces Team Helped Capt ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Hunting Che: How a U.S. Special Forces Team Helped Ca ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online *Hunting Che: How a U.S. Special Forces Team Helped Capture the World's Most Famous Revolutionary* Mitch Weiss , Kevin Maurer

From Reader Review **Hunting Che: How a U.S. Special Forces Team Helped Capture the World's Most Famous Revolutionary for online ebook**

Jose says

So much effort to portrait che as a thug, throwing dirt to his greatness , and ideal of very well been for humanity , in the book they said he could be driving Ferrari , Benz , BMW etc women , how come someone can says so much lies about this man who gave up everything for a better cause . How the CIA agent villoldo tell that che stood on top of his friend when was beating by the Cuban , when Fidel don't let che to participated in the defence of the bay of pig . For people who wants to read a better book of che written with open mind I recommend john lee Anderson : che Guevara a revolutionary life.

Esequiel Contreras Jr says

"I am Che Guevara and I have failed"

This reading is focused on those historical figures that have been forgotten!

The Special Forces Soldiers, the village and those rangers trained by said Green Berets. In the end not much is said of Che and as in past history one can really only believe that there is more to be told as we uncover truths by those who lived the moment.

Zeke Contreras

May 2017

Judy says

When I mentioned to a friend that I really didn't know who Che Guevara was, he went out and bought me this book. That, of course, forced me to read it, and I was surprised how it kept my interest. It's not a book I would have searched out myself, but it helped that I have some familiarity with the US armed forces and with South America. It tells the story of America's involvement in the capture of Guevara in Bolivia - primarily training the Bolivian soldiers to do the job themselves. I appreciated that the authors tried to explain the motivations of each faction (politicians, the military, the guerillas, and the Bolivian civilians) and showed respect for all involved. It was very well written so, if it's a topic that interests you, it's a good, fast read.

Flowergarden24 says

This is a very informative and detailed account of the planning and capture of Che. Background information of where the people mentioned came from and their motivations was very interesting. I enjoyed the aftermath

and reasons for why we should care about this hunt.

Jeff says

Fast-paced and written in narrative fashion. This story focuses more on the training and mission of the Bolivian Rangers unit that hunted Che rather than a history of Che. The story of Che's capture is shrouded in mystery and this book does an excellent job of showing how a U.S. Special Forces team taught a rag-tag Bolivian Army unit how to hunt and fight the foreign insurgency that was attempting to topple the country and create a Vietnam-esque quagmire for the United States in South America. This does debunk some modern notions of Che Guevara, namely that he was some saint only interested in the well-being of lower class society, with actual facts and journal entries showing his bloody and barbaric nature. You would think that the guy would be rolling in his grave the way his image is used for capitalistic gain.

Art says

I picked this book up on a whim at the library last week mostly because it's on a subject I didn't know much about. Once I started reading this one grabbed me and sucked it in. Now I want to find some other materials and do further reading on the topic, which is something a good book does.

John says

Before reading this book I'd thought that Che Guevara, the Cuban revolutionary, had been killed in a hut in Bolivia, but didn't know the detailed story of his demise. Now it seems that I'd somehow equated his capture with the Sundance Kid saga, a totally different story although in same locale. Turns out that Che's capture was a much more intentional and intense endeavor than the Sundance engagement. Che was leader of a guerrilla band bent on overthrowing the Bolivian government Cuba style and then moving on to topple governments in other South American countries. This book recounts how U.S. Army Green Berets trained a bunch of unkempt Bolivian soldiers to be effective counter-guerrilla fighters and how they brought about the capture and end to Che's life. Names are numerous, many Spanish, some pseudo and some nick. Helpful is the "Cast of Characters" list.

Hrishikesh says

Enthralling book. An extremely entertaining and engaging read. The book is an account of how the CIA and US Special Forces colluded to capture Ernesto "Che" Guvera in the forests of Bolivia. For me, there are two important take-away's from this book:

1. The need to engage the local population in any operation - military or civilian.
2. The fact that like many other genuine Communists, Che had his heart in the right place (by-and-large), but did not have his head in the right place.

Provides an alternative to the usual single-strand narrative of Che; some tend to idolize him to the point of flawlessness, others tend to demonize him entirely.

All-in-all, an excellent read.

SOL 6 says

As a work of 'non-fiction' it's surprising there's not one footnote to be found. The afterword states this choice was made intentionally to not 'bog the work down.' The unintended consequence is that the reader is left to navigate a work that reads like a novel beset by every cliché imaginable: third world country run by a heavy handed military dictator, retiring officer out to do 'one last job' before retirement, ragtag group of under achievers getting whipped into shape for the big game.

The action sequences are top notch, yet are few and far between. When the mission finally begins over halfway through the book I was engaged. This was by far the strength of the book, but didn't last long.

Being set in 1967, the 800 pound gorilla in the room is Vietnam. The theme that echoes of this mission is that this is how Vietnam 'should have been': a proxy war fought completely by locals for outside interests. Would the Army and CIA invest all those resources in a campaign to just go 'laissez faire' when shots are fired? You're left to take it or leave it.

In brief, the sparse pockets of hard hitting action just weren't enough to shake the stench of mediocrity.

Ben Watson says

Fabulous tale told using declassified documents and first-hand accounts from those involved who have not yet passed of the context and capture of would-be hipster & revolutionary icon, Che Guevara. The narrative bounces easily from US Special Forces trainers to Bolivian officers and government officials, as well as by locals caught in the middle of a poor government and an even poorer revolution; then closed out with pages from Che's diary confirming what few then actually suspected with much confidence: that Che Guevara 1) was not dead and 2) was actually a desperate leader struggling to keep desperate types interested in his cause.

Vinayak Malik says

Fast read. Good narration

Jerome says

An interesting story of how Che Guevara, supposed guerrilla warfare genius, met his demise in Bolivia. The authors build their story around several interesting characters: Che himself (who was more runaway fugitive during this period than a revolutionary guerrilla leader), Major Ralph Shelton of the US Special Forces (whose ideas about counterinsurgency were ahead of their time) and Gary Prado Salmon, the noble commander of the otherwise incompetent Bolivian Rangers. Also included are two CIA officers involved in the operation: the former Cuban exile Gustavo Villoldo (who had hunted Che in the Congo prior to his

Bolivian assignment) and the more well-known Félix Rodríguez, veteran of the Bay of Pigs, who would later become involved in the Iran-Contra fiasco.

With US troops fighting a war in Vietnam at the time, Shelton's team was restricted largely to a training role, and could not actually accompany the Rangers into combat against Che's forces. Contrary to the leftist mythology and the traditions of Che's cult and myth, the CIA was not hellbent on assassinating Che; they actually wanted him alive for interrogation and knew that killing him would just transform him into a martyr. Nevertheless, they were overruled by the Bolivian government.

Afterwards, Che did, of course, become a martyr, an image to be plastered on T-shirts and coffee mugs worldwide: ironic since Che himself was hardly a proponent of this kind of free-market capitalism. "The great revolutionary," the authors write, "has become a capitalist commodity." In any case, Che was a thug who advocated slave labor and executed many innocents. "We have executed, we are executing, and we will continue to execute," he told the UN. "To send men to the firing squad," he proclaimed, "judicial proof is unnecessary. These procedures are an archaic bourgeois detail." In the early years of the Castro regime, Che continually advocated for eliminating rights of assembly, free speech, and free press. Notably, Che also failed at everything he tried to achieve on his own.

The book's title is blatantly misleading, since the role of the American Special Forces team is only briefly discussed, but the story is still rather interesting. The authors give us good, human portraits of all the characters involved; even their treatment of Che is somewhat sympathetic, thankfully without buying into the romantic revisionism of the "T-shirt Che." Che's guerrilla leadership in Bolivia was rather incompetent: he was terrible at operational security and failed to win over the local peasants. They sloppily left hundreds of documents, containing Bolivian contacts and bank accounts, in a parked jeep where Bolivian forces easily found it. The campaign also demonstrated Che's ineptitude as a tactician. Che was great as a propagandist, but an utter failure as a guerrilla leader. The authors are also good at describing the situation in Bolivia at the time and in Latin America in general.

The book reads like a novel, but not in a good way. The writing itself is rather disappointing to the point of mediocrity: the authors tell the story in a breathless, melodramatic style that reminds the reader of a docudrama or something. I also suspect that much of the dialogue was invented, but the book does stick to the facts despite the breezy writing. The book's attempts at character development are awkward, and the authors feel the need to include internal monologues that are just as poorly written and most likely imagined. For example, they'll have a Bolivian soldier undergoing rigorous Ranger training and at the same time have him contemplate the global designs of the world's superpowers. The authors frequently use clichés that are way too Hollywood for them to have much positive effect. Amazingly, the authors write on page 268 that the Iran-Contra scandal involved hostages held at the US embassy in Tehran. Are you serious? Everyone knows that the hostages were in Lebanon.

Allow me to provide some fine examples of the authors' writing style:

- They refer to "the 1929 bank collapse"--surely the authors mean the stock market crash.
- They refer to "military law"--surely they mean "martial law."
- Che Guevara was apparently "hip."
- Major Shelton's Special Forces team was "barred by diplomacy from going near the red zone."
- "He had seen war up close, and he wasn't looking for more of that ugly shit."
- building a firing range in Santa Cruz "took a lot of doing."
- Shelton's team carried "complicated rifles"(as the authors attempt to retell the arrival of Shelton's team through the eyes of a villager)
- Félix Rodríguez had "the mind of a chess player."
- "Like all good CIA operatives, Rodríguez had learned everything he could about the Bolivian government."
- "After some coordination, Rodríguez was fully able to earn asylum from the Venezuelans."
- Rodríguez was to parachute into Cuba with a radio beacon for "U.S. air-strike guidance."

-Military officers “had an ego the size of Texas.”

-”Barrientos wasn’t an idiot. He understood the way the game was played.”

-”Ability to move in the night is a tactical advantage in battle; it enables a unit to stay a step ahead of the enemy.”

-”No, Prado had no intention of shooting prisoners. That’s not what a good soldier does. That would violate every military principle--everything Prado had been raised to believe about the rules of engagement.”

-”Out, here, oh God. This was a different story.”

-”It was obvious both men were fighting a proxy war in Bolivia, and neither one cared much for the fate of the South American country. Theirs was a bigger fight.

It was democracy versus communism.

It was good versus evil.

It was the United States versus the Soviet Union and China.

In the fall of 1967, it was a fight being waged all over the world.”

This sort of thing is endless, and it makes for painful reading at times. There is certainly quite a story to tell here, and the authors succeed for the most part, but this kind of writing is just far too strange and lacking in quality for the book to live up to its compelling subject matter.

In all, the book is quite good in some ways, and pretty bad in others. In all, it succeeds for the most part.

Tony Laplume says

Fascinating account of how one of the 20th Century's most famous cult figures met his end. Fifty years later it's still difficult to separate the man from the myth, but this book does a pretty nifty job by focusing on the men behind the effort it took to hunt Che. I suspect you'll be hard-pressed to find someone who still believes the myth who could appreciate the results, but they do help explain them well. If anything I wish the writers had chosen to go more in-depth, but that's mere quibbling.

Niraj Shah says

Accounts of capture of world's most famous cult based makes this an interesting read. Does not glorify nor does it vilify Che for the reason this book does not goes into depth on Che. For that there are tons of other reads.

Sajith Kumar says

The handsome but grim face of the revolutionary wearing a beret is the most popular personal icon in the world. Many of the people who wear this badge on their tee-shirts don’t know the man or what he fought for – and died for. Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara was an Argentine doctor who abandoned the medical profession to fight alongside Fidel Castro in his rebellion against Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Che was made the head of the Cuban National Bank after the Revolution, but his heart was set on spreading the proletarian revolution to all parts of the globe. He fought in Angola in vain but came back to Cuba disillusioned. As relations between him and Castro began to sour, Che Guevara selected Bolivia as his next field of action. Even though the party machinery was weak and he had no prospects of success, Che’s fighters in Bolivia scored a few spectacular gains. Bolivia roped in US Special Forces from their Panama base to help train its

elite troops in counterinsurgency. In a span of six months from Che's activities began, he was hunted down by the Ranger battalion of the Bolivian army. Che surrendered to the troops, but they shot him dead hardly 24 hours later. This book narrates the story of the training mission by US forces and how the troops zeroed in on Che and snatched him from his hideout in its talons. Mitch Weiss is an investigative journalist for the Associated Press. He had won the Pulitzer Prize in 2004 for his series that uncovered the longest stint of atrocities carried out by a US fighting unit in the Vietnam War. Kevin Maurer is the author of several books and has seen action in Afghanistan when he was embedded with American troops operating there.

Che and Castro began their revolutionary war from a few humble mountain camps in the Sierra Maestra mountains of Cuba which later spread to all parts of the country with the support of newly recruited fighters from the famished countryside. Within a matter of a few months, Batista had fled. Castro was the leader of the revolution, but Che was its icon. But, behind the noble rhetoric of toppling governments that exploited the people, he was as brutal as any third world dictator. Che was the man in charge of executing political prisoners. He relished the job and dispatched hundreds in cold blood, with their hands firmly tied behind. He justified such brutality with a lofty flourish. "In the arduous profession of a revolutionary, death is a frequent occurrence", said Che in his book *Guerilla Warfare*. In spite of this, Che held a special place in the hearts of romantic leftists around the world, and a different spot in those of Cuban exiles who had to flee the land when Castro's fighters took power in the country and many of their fathers were killed in retaliation by the regime. For them, Che Guevara was a thug, a killer and the butcher of La Cabana prison in which he eliminated hundreds of Cubans who opposed Castro and his revolution. The CIA had a field day in recruiting agents from such groups and this book talks about two such men who set up the intelligence network in Bolivia for the US military. Che hoped to emulate the Cuban revolution in Bolivia, operating from remote jungles of the southeast. He was both feared and adored in equal measure in Bolivia.

The author provides a very good summary of how Che's insurrection began in March 1967 in the Nancahuazu river basin with a deadly ambush on Bolivian troops. The inexperienced and inefficient soldiers were no match for the diehard rebels in the initial stages. Bolivia tried to assemble a joint task force with neighbouring states to no avail. Argentina sent arms and ammunition to replace very old equipment and Brazil made a large shipment of combat rations. But none were willing to commit their own troops on the ground. The US was bogged down in the disastrous Vietnam War and was in no mood to open another front in their backyard in Latin America. However, Rene Barrientos Ortuno, the autocratic president of Bolivia, was determined to crush the guerillas and he pledged that Che won't leave his country alive. Bolivian army scored a point after three months, when Jules Debray, a French Marxist, was caught and interrogated. He confirmed Che's presence in the region. Ciro Roberto Bustos, a captured Argentine painter and revolutionary, provided the geographical details where Che was holed up. Clinching details on his exact position was obtained with the arrest of Paco, a reluctant fighter. The diary of a dead guerilla gave valuable information of the strengths and weaknesses of the rebels.

As can be expected, this American book exemplifies the help offered by their Special Forces team in imparting training to the specially constituted Ranger battalion of the Bolivian army in counterinsurgency measures. Major Ralph Shelton led the team. The Bolivians were constrained by lack of resources. Only ten live bullets were issued to a trooper for training. Shelton ensured that they be given at least 5000 live rounds. Shelton's fast-learning acolytes proved their mettle very soon. Che Guevara was captured near El Churo Pass on Oct 8, 1967 along with Simon Cuba. It is surprising to learn that Che meekly surrendered to the soldiers on account of a small bullet injury on his leg. The prize catch came with full paraphernalia – Che's detailed diary, a notebook with addresses and instructions, two notebooks with copies of messages received and sent, and two codebooks. To add insult to injury, the troops also confiscated five hard-boiled eggs Che had been saving to eat later in the day!

Like all bloodthirsty warlords who'd remorselessly sent hundreds of young men to death, Che Guevara also cringed when his own life was at stake. His unconditional surrender with the precious codebooks and contact information of sympathizers in Bolivia lend everlasting shame to his legacy. All of them were hunted down

by Barrientos' regime and severely punished. At a minimum, Che could have destroyed the books before turning himself in to the army. The book quotes his exact words at the time of capture as "I suppose you are not going to kill me now. I mean more to you alive than dead. We have always healed prisoners" (p.202). Perhaps he might have been counting on repeating the performances of Lenin and Castro. Lenin was imprisoned by Kerensky immediately after his return from Germany, but was later released. Castro was also sentenced to a long prison term by Batista's regime, but he also got out safely. Such magnanimity on the part of non-Communist regimes dug their graves. It was the Communists who learned the lesson from these episodes to annihilate its opponents at the first opportunity. In the present instance, Che was immediately taken into custody at a dilapidated schoolhouse in La Higuera village. The authors truthfully reproduce the confusion produced in Bolivian power circles with the uncharacteristic surrender of the famed revolutionary. They had expected him to get killed in battle. Death penalty was already revoked in Bolivia and the alternative was thirty years in prison. But, keeping such a high-profile guerilla in jail for all those years was going to be a nightmare which Bolivia decided to avoid at any cost. Consequently, he was shot dead at 1.10 pm the next day while still in military custody. It must be noted that Che courageously faced the executioner while he sprayed a series of rounds into his chest. A catholic priest administered the last rites when his body was tied in a stretcher to the landing gear of the helicopter which was to transport it to Vallegrande, a nearby town. It was displayed to curious onlookers in the laundry of a local hospital. The bodies of all slain guerillas were subsequently interred in an unmarked grave near that town's airstrip. Both his palms were amputated to preserve as proof of his death because there was every chance that Castro might deny it. The book presents a moving picture of the last days of Che. In the epilogue, the authors remark that a team of Cuban excavators found a skeleton near the airstrip thirty years later in 1997 with both palms missing. It was taken to Santa Clara in Cuba and put in a grand mausoleum built for Che.

Weiss and Maurer give a logical analysis of the blunders committed by Che in Bolivia that ultimately led to his capture and execution. The errors began with the choice of location of starting the revolution, with its tough and treacherous landscape of jungles and steep canyons. The inhabitants of this sturdy terrain were called campesinos whose sympathies could not be gained by the guerillas. They reported the fighters' every move to the authorities. Had the rebellion been staged closer to the mines and urban networks of La Paz, it would've had a better chance of success. There were quarrel among the rebels as well. The Bolivian communists wanted to lead the revolution staged in their country, but Che Guevara entrusted that task only on Cubans. This caused the supply lines to dry up. The guerillas were desperately wandering in the forests in search of food and ammunition in the final days. The book is very easy to read and provides a pleasant reading experience.

The book is highly recommended.
