



## **BOLIVIA**

### **The Search for "Che" Guevara**

In November 1995, Bolivian General Vargas Salinas gave U.S. journalist Jon Lee Anderson an interview, in which he claimed that the remains of Ernesto "Che" Guevara Lynch were buried under the landing strip of municipal airport at Vallegrande, a town in the Department of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Che's corpse was taken to Vallegrande and publicly exhibited there after he was executed in the neighbouring town of La Higuera on October 9th, 1967.

In response to this testimony, Bolivian President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada formed a Government Commission to investigate the events surrounding Che's death and to try to recover his remains. At the request of the Association of Families of the Disappeared and Martyrs for the National Liberation of Bolivia (ASOFAM), the Commission composed of civilian and military representatives from the Ministries of Government and Defense invited EAAF to participate in the search for the bodies of Che Guevara and his companions. The remains of five people who accompanied Che in Bolivia were found. El Che remained unfound.

## Historical Background

Ernesto "Che" Guevara was born in Argentina, and studied medicine in Buenos Aires, where he graduated as a physician. In 1955 he joined Fidel Castro's small group of revolutionaries in Mexico. During the fighting against Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, Guevara became the rebel army's first military commander. After Castro's rebel movement took power in Cuba following its victory over Batista in January 1959, Guevara was considered the second most powerful man in Cuba. Guevara was passionate about what he perceived as the need for Cuba to support guerrilla movements in Latin America and Africa. He tried unsuccessfully to establish or assist guerrilla movements in Argentina in 1964, and in the Belgian Congo in 1965. He then disappeared from public view.

"Shorn of his customary beard and beret and disguised as a middle aged Uruguayan economist, Guevara entered Bolivia in November 1966 and was joined by 50 or so Cuban, Argentine, Peruvian, and Bolivian guerrillas at a base in southeastern Bolivia's tropical desert. There, he intended to train guerrillas from several countries to touch off a continental revolution. But



Second from left, Che Guevara, having entered Bolivia under heavy disguise, along with guerrilla companions.

Guevara's effort was troubled since the beginning. Bolivia's pro-Moscow Communist party, on which he depended for backing, withdrew its support. This was followed by desertions, betrayal to the army by suspicious peasants and the capture and death of key members of his group. And combat losses, sickness, fatigue and demoralization took a heavy toll. Alerted of the presence of Guevara in Bolivia, Washington sent Special Forces experts to train a Bolivian battalion in antiguerrilla techniques. Several agents of the Central Intelligence Agency were sent to assist in intelligence gathering."<sup>1</sup>

On October 8th, 1967, Che's guerilla column was ambushed in the Quebrada del Yuro by the Bolivian Army. Four guerrillas died in combat, or were assassinated in the ravine, the details of the



The capture of El Che.

incident varying in different accounts. Che and "Willi" (Simon Cuba Saravia, a Bolivian miner) were taken prisoner and carried to La Higuera, a village near Vallegrande. On the following day, General Rene Barrientos, then President of Bolivia, ordered Guevara's execution. He and Simon Cuba were executed by the Bolivian army in the village school. On October 10, Guevara's body was put on public display in the laundry house of a hospital in Vallegrande. Hundreds of locals went to see him, and photographers took pictures.

"On the night of October 10, the military ended the public spectacle by sealing off the hospital. The Bolivian government had decided to "disappear" Guevara's body, apparently to deny him a burial

1. "Where is Che Guevara Buried? A Bolivian Tells," by Jon. L. Anderson, New York Times, Nov. 21, 1995

site that could become a place of public homage. But first, mindful of the lingering disbelief in Cuba and elsewhere at the reports of his death, steps were taken to preserve evidence of his identity. General Vargas Salinas said he witnesses the grisly events that followed: the making of a wax death mask of Guevara, the amputation of his hands by Argentinian agents and his nighttime burial."<sup>2</sup>

Argentinian agents checked his fingerprints against those on file in his native Argentina and confirmed the identification. The Bolivian soldiers took his body to a secret burial place. Many stories give different versions of what happened to Che Guevara's remains: some say his body was dumped from an helicopter into the Bolivian jungle, others that he was cremated, or buried in one of many sites around Vallegrande, in an individual or a mass grave.

Vargas Salinas, a retired General in the Bolivian Army who fought Che's guerrilla group, told American journalist Jon Anderson, who is currently writing a biography of Che Guevara, that he was one of the three military officers who participated in the disposal of Che's remains. This is not denied by any official sources.

After 28 years of silence, Vargas Salinas, decided to talk: "Enough time has passed, and it's time the world knows," he told Anderson. "He is buried under the airstrip of Vallegrande."<sup>3</sup>

### *The Role of the EAAF*

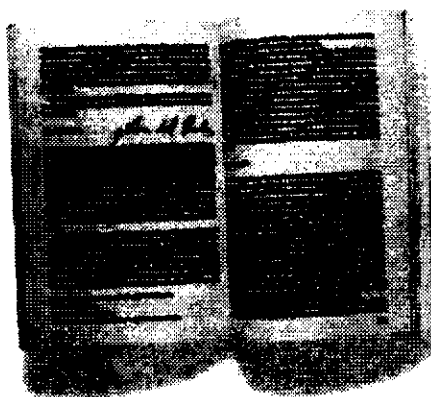
Accompanied by members of the Government Commission, Vargas Salinas travelled to Vallegrande and walked about the landing strip, but did not specify exactly where Guevara's remains were buried. He said simply that he and other military personnel had interred them under the landing strip, or in the

immediate vicinity, in a common grave on the night of October 11th, 1967. At the request of the Association of Families of the Disappeared and Martyrs for the national Liberation of Bolivia (ASOFAM), the Commission then invited EAAF to provide technical assistance in the investigation.

The bodies of most of the other guerrillas from Che's company who died in combat or were executed in Bolivia had also never been found. Therefore, ASOFAM was also interested in recovering the remains of all the persons whose bodies had not been returned to their families in 1967. According to several historical accounts, the corpses of some of these persons had been buried together with Che's remains. They are approximately 32 people:

Jesus Suarez Gayol, cuban;  
Eliseo Rodriguez Reyes, cuban;  
Antonio Sanchez Diaz, cuban;  
Jorge Vazquez Viana, bolivian;  
Carlo Coello, cuban; Jose Maria Martinez Tamayo, cuban; Raul Quispaya Choque, bolivian;  
Antonio Jimenez Tardio, bolivian; Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez, cuban; Israel Reyes Zayas, cuban; Apolinar Aquino Quispe, bolivian; Gustavo Machid Hoed Beche, cuban; Walter Arancibia Rodriguez, bolivian; Moises Guevara Rodriguez, bolivian;

Tamara Haydee Bunke Bider, argentine-german; Fredy Maimura Hurtado, bolivian; Jose Restituto Cabrera Flores, peruvian; Julio Velazco Montaño, bolivian; Roberto Peredo Leigue, bolivian; Manuel Hernandez Osorio, cuban; Mario Gutierrez Ardaya, bolivian; Orlando Pantoja Tamayo, cubano; Rene Martinez Tamayo, cuban; Alberto Fernandez Montes de Oca; Aniceto Reinaga Gordillo; Juan Pablo Chang Navarro, peruvians; Simon Cuba Saravia, cuban; Octavio Concepcion de la Pedraja, cuban; Jaime Arana Campero, bolivian; Fransisco Huanca Flores,



The diary of El "Che" in Bolivia.

2. *Ibid* 3. *Ibid*

bolivian; Lucio Galvan Hidalgo, peruvian and Julio Luis Mendez Korne, bolivian.

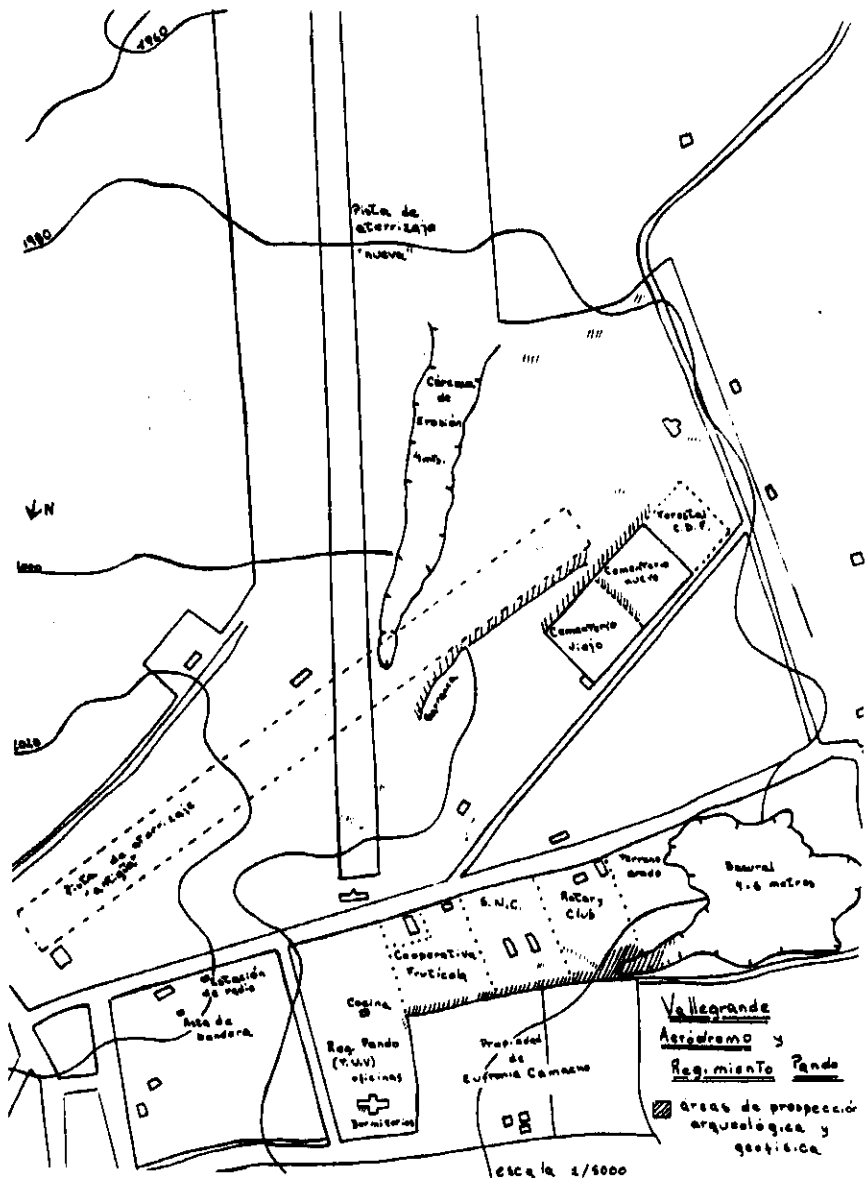
The forensic investigation proceeded in four stages. The first stage lasted from November 29th to December 22nd 1995; the second stage took place from January 7th to February 15th, 1996; the third lasted from March 1st to March 31st, 1996, and the fourth stage lasted from the 21st to the 25th of June 1996. Members of the Government Commission and ASOFAM were present on an almost permanent basis during all stages of the investigation.

### First Stage: The Identification of Jaime 'Chapaco' Arana Campero

The first stage began immediately after Gen. Vargas Salinas made his announcement. On November 29th, EAAF members Alejandro Inchaurregui and Anahi Ginarte travelled to Vallegrande. They were subsequently replaced by two other team members, Patricia Bernardi and Carlos Somigiana.

Dr. Jorge Gonzalez Perez, Director of the Legal Medicine Institute in Havana also joined the investigation as a representative of the families of the Cuban combatants who died during Che's campaign in Bolivia, with the intention of identifying their remains and repatriating them to Cuba. Dr. Gonzalez participated in all the subsequent stages of the forensic investigation.

Two witnesses were also present during the investigation: a man who was supposedly the bulldozer operator who dug the grave where the bodies of Che and his companions were buried, and an old man from Vallegrande who had



Map of the area, showing airstrip on the top and other excavation sites at the bottom.

observed some of the events. On the basis of their testimony, EAAF delimited an area bordering the so-called old landing strip of the Vallegranda airport.

Because the demarcated area was quite large, EAAF decided to carry out a systematic geophysical survey, with the aim of delimiting areas to excavate. During the first and second stages of the project, the private Argentinian firm Area

Geofisica provided both equipment and personnel free of charge to aid the investigation. Giorgio Stangarino, engineering, Nestor Braidod, engineering and Sergio Katabian, geophysic from Area Geofisica participated in this first stage. Through the use of a georadar, distinct anomalies in the geological strata of the terrain at depths of up to three meters were located. The georadar is a high resolution instrument that is capable of providing information about the subsoil of an area. It emits electromagnetic waves through an antenna placed on the surface of the area to be studied, and receives signals reflected back from under the ground through another antenna. This enables an investigator to survey the subsoil rapidly and without causing any destruction, and shows the location of structures, tombs, pipes, wells, and other natural and artificial discontinuities in the subsoil.<sup>4</sup>

On the basis of information provided by Area Geofisica, EAAF dug test pits at each of the sites in the demarcated area where the georadar indicated the presence of anomalies. Unfortunately, excavations revealed that all the anomalies were the result of natural geological occurrences.

On the basis of other testimonies, test pits were then dug in another area, a site now occupied by the offices of the Agrarian Investigations Service, some 500 meters from the aerodrome. This effort also produced only negative results.

### **Cañada de Arroyo: The Identification of Jaime Arana Campero**

Mr. Vicente Zavala claimed that one night in 1967, at a site on the property known as Cañada de Arroyo, 5 km from Vallegrande, Army troops buried the bodies of guerrilla fighters.

On the 12th, 13th, 16 and 17 of December

EAAF members conducted excavations on the property of Mr. Zavala and recovered three human skeletons. These remains were studied in the Señor de Malta hospital in Vallegrande. At that point, it was possible only to identify one of the bodies, which was distinguished by an old or premortem lesion on the sixth right rib. This lesion was compatible with information provided by the family of Jaime Arana Campero. Years before, in 1958, Campero had undergone a surgical operation to remove a cyst from his right lung. This fact, together with premortem information of a more general character, allowed for the positive identification of the Bolivian Jaime Arana Campero, aged 29 years and known as "Chapaco", who died in the clash of "Cajones" on October 12th, 1967.

#### *Clash in Cajones*

After the capture and execution of Che and members of his group on October 8th 1967, the guerrillas who survived the Quebrada de Yuro incident, divided into two groups and travelled off in different directions. A few days later, on October 12th, the first group, composed of four survivors, was taken prisoner at the confluence of the Grande and Mizque rivers. According to Regis Debray<sup>5</sup>, the group was executed immediately; according to military sources like Gary Prado<sup>6</sup> the four died in combat. The names of these four were: "El Moro" (Octavio Concepcion de la Pedraja, 32 years old, a Cuban military doctor), "Chapaco" (Jaime Arana Campero, a Bolivian and former Communist Youth member) "Eustaquio" (Lucio Galvan, 30 years old, a Peruvian guerrilla radio technician and a militant of the National Liberation Army) and "Pablito" (Francisco Huanca, 22 years old, a young Bolivian peasant and student).

The remains of Jaime Arana Campero were returned to his family, who decided to reinter them at the cemetery of Tarija, the town where he came from.

4. The electromagnetic georadar is principally constituted by a wide-band transmitter, and corresponding receiver. The instruments included were: SIR-SYSTEM Principal Unit, with 14-bit A/D converter board; Color and/or Monochrome monitor; and various antennae, from 20 to 2,500 MHz.

5. *Ibid*, Anderson. 6. *Ibid*, Anderson

### *Second Stage*

Five EAAF members participated in the second stage of the investigation: Patricia Bernardi, Luis Fondebrider, Mercedes Doretti, Anahi Ginarte and Silvana Turner. During this period no findings of human remains were made.

Area Geofisica's team and equipment was obtained again, in order to conduct further surveys.

From January 16th to March 25th 1996 three Cuban geophysicists from Geominera Geofisica of Cuba joined the project. These experts, specialists in radiastecist, gravimetry and seismology, were: Beatriz Rodriguez Basante, geophysical engineer and specialist in seismics at the Institute of Geology and Paleontology in Havana; engineer Jose Prol and engineer Leodegario Lufriu. Their studies complemented and expanded upon those performed by the georadar team.

This stage of the work was characterized by the beginning of the systematization of the different historical versions provided by several witnesses and written sources, the geophysical inspection using different methods and the amplification of the excavation areas to areas marked by new testimonies and the geophysics teams.

The excavation areas were initially selected on the basis of historical accounts gathered at the beginning of the investigation that identified possible burial sites. These sites were located at the following places: the old and new airstrip; the terrain currently occupied by the National Road Services, the Rotary Club, the Center for the Study of Fruit Cultivation; and areas immediately in and outside the old and new cemetery.

Within these areas, specific zones were demarcated according to three criteria: 1) sites of anomalies registered by the georadar; 2) alterations identified by the Cuban geophysic team; and 3) sites or areas identified by historical versions collected during the investigation.

The Cuban geophysical team performed the

following tasks. They studied the areas previously surveyed by the georadar and compared the results obtained by these different methods, and they expanded the survey in areas demarcated before. They also studied new areas such as a site within the Sr. de Malta Hospital and Cañada de Arroyo. In addition, they analyzed maps and aerial photographs to reconstruct certain features of the landscape as it was 30 years ago.

### *Cultural and Natural changes in the landscape*

Almost 30 years have elapsed since the events under investigation took place, and the landmarks in the terrain which witnesses refer to in their account have changed substantially.

Topographic maps of the region and aerial photographs from the year 1959 and 1984 were obtained. By comparing these different sources it was possible to partially reconstruct the landscape as it appeared in 1967. The identification of landmarks in the rural terrain that by now have disappeared or undergone changes allowed the testimonies given by witnesses to be situated more precisely. Of particular significance was the fact that in those years the Pando Regiment post occupied the area on which the National Road Service, the Rotary Club, and The Center for the Study of Fruit Cultivation are now situated. Streets that crossed Pando's military post no longer exist, while new roads have been opened as former parcels of land have been redivided.

The erosion that has occurred in the area is one of the principle natural forces that has modified the landscape. The geological fault in the area of the Rotary Club has advanced approximately 22 meters between 1967 and the present.

As part of its investigation into the history of the events of 1967, EAAF continued to compile witnesses' testimonies. These testimonies led to the identification of new areas to be surveyed and excavated. EAAF conducted numerous interviews with farmers, local residents, former soldiers, mechanics, and all other persons capable of providing relevant information. Then all information concerning the burial site of Ernesto

Guevara and his groups taken from the different accounts could be systematically compared. The information gathered from these sources was subsequently transferred to maps of each of the areas identified in witnesses' testimonies. This made it possible to visualize more clearly the specific sites within the areas mentioned in the majority of the witnesses' accounts. In some cases, the areas thus identified had already been excavated on the basis of information provided by the georadar, by the geophysical studies, or



Excavation in progress at Vallegrande.

by stories collected before the information from witnesses' accounts was systematized. In other cases, the historical accounts indicated new areas for geophysical exploration and excavation.

The search for family members of the victims who could provide information about the physical histories or their deceased relatives also continued.

The new zones delimited at the second stage for further investigation were:

a) The area adjacent to the north wall of the cemetery, bordering the Vallegrande airport; b) the old and current landing strips of the Vallegrande airport; c) the site currently occupied by the offices of the National Highway Services; d) and e) the site currently occupied by the offices of the Rotary Club; f) the site cur-

rently occupied by the regional Center for the Study of Fruit Cultivation; g) the interior of the new cemetery, which is currently in use; h) fault partially located on the Rotary Club's property; I) a structure that in previous years was used as a kitchen by the Pando regiment, located on the property currently used by the Technical University of Vallegrande (TVU); j) Cañada de Arroyo, a private property containing the site where four skeletons were found.

In December 1995, the EAAF began working on the southern side of the old airstrip and at the Center for the Study of Fruit Cultivation. During the second stage of the investigation, the georadar survey was expanded to zones A, B, C, and E. These zones were cleared and prepared for survey with georadar. The information obtained was analyzed in Buenos Aires and the coordinates from the areas showing anomalies were sent back to Vallegrande.

There were no findings of importance in any of the areas excavated. The points indicated by the georadar and geophysicist, until now, have all corresponded to alterations produced by natural or cultural causes, but did not convey to the finding of human remains. Between February 15th. and March 1st, archaeological excavations were suspended, but geophysical surveys and historical research on the case continued.

### *Third stage*

Through the month of March, three EAAF members, Anahi Ginarte, Dario Olmo and Patricia Bernardi, resumed excavations and the study of the remains that were retrieved.

The third stage of the excavation took place over smaller areas, much more clearly defined than in the previous phases, by excavating in the remaining sites presenting anomalies detected by the two teams of geophysicists and by historical data.

At the same time, excavations were conducted

## SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

Zone	Total excavated	No. surveyed by georadar	No. surveyed by geophys.	No. described by historical investigation	Total m <sup>2</sup> excavated
Cemetery Exterior/A	12	5	3	4	58.59
Pista/ B & Extension	26	10	8	8	119.11
Road Service, C & Ext.	57	4	3	50	393.15
Rotary Club/ D, E & Ext.	26	3	4	19	216.3
Frut. Co-op/ F & Ext.	29	10	1	18	108.37
Interior Cemetery G	17	-	-	17	141.8
Garbage or Zanja/ H	12	-	-	12	123
Reg. Kitchen Pando/ I	-	-	-	-	17.23
Cañada de Arroyo/ J	26	-	3	23	79.687
Pando Regiment/ K	2	-	1	1	14
Hospital Sr. de Malta/ L	6	-	6	-	24
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>1295.237</b>



in new areas identified by witnesses, such as the backyard of the Señor de Malta Hospital in Vallegrande (where Che's body had been exhibited in the laundry room) and two areas of what used to be the Pando Regiment.

Work was also continued in Cañada de Arroyo, where a fourth skeleton was found inside a small fault near another site where the three previously exhumed bodies were found.

*Summary of the archaeological excavations:  
Laboratory Analysis*

The four human skeletons found in Cañada de Arroyo were analyzed to determine identity and cause of death. (See Table, p. 58) They correspond to four adult males, all of whom exhibited bullet wounds in the head thorax, upper limbs, and abdomen.

On the basis of the identification of Arana Campero, together with historical information, it was possible to establish hypotheses with respect to the identity of the remaining skeletons. In the absence of any significant premortem data for any of the three skeletons, bone samples were taken for genetic analysis. These were sent to Cuba, together with blood samples from two possible relatives of two of the dead. The third family has still not been contacted. Up till now, the comparison of the genetic material extracted from the bones and the blood samples has not been finished.

At the end of this stage, the Vallegrandina Committee was established. This committee petitioned the Government Committee for official recognition so that it could join the ongoing investigation.



The body of El Che on exhibit at the laundry room of the Señor de Malta Hospital in Vallegrande.

### **Fourth Stage: Exhumation and Identification of Carlos Coello Coello, "Tuma"**

According to data collected from different sources, Carlos Coello Coello, "Tuma", a lieutenant in the Cuban army, arrive in Bolivia in November 1966. He was fatally wounded in an ambush known as "La Poza" on June 26th., 1967, near the Piray river, department of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Coello had been wounded in the abdomen and died while being operated on in a peasant's house.

His body was buried the next day by his companions. It was later discovered by army soldiers, who were unable to identify it. They subsequently reburied it in a nearby place known as Laguna Seca or Rio Seco, close to the village of Florida, Department of Santa Cruz de la Sierra

According to premortem physical data provided by his family from Cuba, "Tuma" had suffered an injury in his left elbow as a result of an accident.

Between March and June 1996, the Committee in charge of the historical research in La Paz located the person who had led the army into the area. After several visits to the site, the witness was able to locate the spot of the second grave.

The discovery of the bone remains occurred on June 16th. 1996, on the basis of additional information provided by the residents of Laguna Seca, 133 miles from the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, and 80 kilometers from the road which goes from Florida to Tejeria, in the mountain department of Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

Two EAAF members, Patricia Bernardi and Dario Olmo, travelled again to Bolivia and on June 21 were authorized by the Governmental Committee to exhume and identify the remains found at Laguna Seca.

The skeleton was analyzed at the Japanese Hospital in Santa Cruz de la Sierra on June

22nd, and revealed the following information: it belonged to a male individual, whose age at the time of death was between 22 and 32 years old, and height was 165cm +/- 3cm. A premortem fracture at the distal extreme of the left humerus (elbow) was also found.

Correlating the information from the study of the bone remains with the physical data provided by the family of Carlos Coello Coello, it was possible to establish a positive identification.

It was not possible, however, to determine cause and manner of death from the bone remains or surrounding evidence. According to historical data, Coello was fatally wounded in the abdomen, affecting his liver and producing a perforation in the intestines. The skeleton did not present any evidence that would confirm or deny the testimonies regarding his cause of death. If the location of the wound was described correctly in the historical sources, it could well be that the gunshot wound did not affect skeletal remains.

The remains of Carlos Coello Coello were transported to Cuba and returned to his family, his wife and a son whom he never knew.

#### ***Current Situation:***

Excavation work was suspended for the moment, given the impossibility of locating the probable sites of burial with more precision. Currently, two groups, one from Cuba and one from Bolivia are working together to continue the historical investigation of the facts. The task is not yet finished and is of vital importance to complete the historical investigation in order to locate new burial sites and/or mark out the areas already surveyed.

# SUNDAY

MAY 12, 1996

# CHE'S GHOST

Scientists have launched a search for the remains of the Marxist leader, whose fierce idealism still haunts Latin America nearly 30 years after his execution. His appeal has proved so enduring that he is now a cult figure in the nation he had hoped to rally to revolution.

By John Otis  
CHRONICLE FOREIGN SERVICE

Vallegrande, Bolivia

**H**e was an elusive guerrilla prince with a burning cause and a three-letter nickname that came to stand for the coming insurrection.

So when his limp body — pocked with bullet holes and reeking of formaldehyde — was dumped in a hospital laundry room for the world to witness, the Bolivian army understandably thought it had shot down the legend of Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

On that day, Oct. 10, 1967, hundreds of townsfolk lined up at the Lord of Malta Hospital in Vallegrande for the makeshift wake. Che was dead, says Eric Blussl, an agricultural technician who was in the line, but there was something about the look on his face.

"You know the images of Christ that you see everywhere — with the slender face and the pointed nose? He looked like

that.

"What's more, his eyes were open. So no matter where you were when you looked at him, it always seemed like he was watching you."

The army must have been spooked as well because officers suddenly decided to erase all traces of the Argentine-born Marxist. His body vanished the next day.

But instead of disappearing, Che remains, nearly three decades later, a hovering specter in Latin America.

In Vallegrande, at the western edge of the southeastern state of Santa Cruz, old-



Associated Press

Forensic anthropologists dig — fruitlessly so far — for Che's remains.

▶ CHE: Page 4 Col. 1

# Digging for the Remains of the Martyred Marxist Leader

► CHE  
From Page 1

timers pull out locks of Che's hair that they snipped at the wake and request special Masses for his soul. On taxi cab dashboards, images of Che outnumber statuettes of Jesus. Captured on a university mural, his eyes gaze out across a pasture toward the rugged mountains where he fought his final war.

Since Che is everywhere, the mystery over the whereabouts of his remains faded into the background — until last November. In a startling breach of the military's code of silence, retired General Mario Vargas Salinas said the army had buried Che underneath an abandoned airstrip in Vallegrande.

The news was irresistible. The government formed a special commission to investigate. Forensic anthropologists arrived from Argentina. The Guevara family sent three Cuban geologists. But although

they've combed the airstrip with radar, followed hundreds of tips and turned over tons of soil, Che's bones are nowhere to be found.

**C**arlos Somigliana digs like a chain-gang convict one minute, then uses tweezers to piece together bits of a shattered cranium the next. He is a member of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, a group of world-class grave-busters who have unearthed dirty war secrets from Ethiopia to El Salvador.

Here on the edge of the weedy airstrip, Somigliana wants to compare the color and texture of the soil with samples from nearby pits. Unnatural alterations could be the sign of a clandestine tomb.

The shovel brigade digs in with gusto. But after opening a six-foot-long trench, a light mist turns into a downpour and the pit turns into a wading pool. Later, huddled under a plastic tarp, Somigliana admits that

the search for Che — and for the remains of two dozen fellow fighters — has been bogged down from the beginning.

After admitting the deed in an interview with the New York Times last November, Vargas failed to pinpoint the secret tomb. He claims he just doesn't remember.

Other accounts have Che interred beneath the telephone company or inside a false wall in the old City Hall building.

"Everything has its limits," said Patricia Bernardi, one of the exasperated anthropologists. "We're not going to dig up the telephone company."

They will, however, go the extra dozen miles. The morning after the downpour, Somigliana strooped by the shack of a wrinkled and stooped old man named Gonzalez, who claims to know about a field full of bodies. He is lured out of bed with the promise of 20 Bolivianos, about five dollars.

The four-wheel-drive Toyota Land Cruiser struggles out of Vallegrande on a twisting dirt track that crosses the same stream four times within a quarter-mile. Twenty minutes later, on Gonzalez's orders, the truck stops halfway up a misty slope.

It's a sublime setting for a secret burial, but a testy farmer insists that the only thing in this dirt is his bean crop. "We never heard anything about the guerrillas, in all my years," he says.

Somigliana is used to the cold shoulder. Under a municipal decree, land owners must temporarily turn over plots at the search party's request. But the campesinos don't trust the government to give back the land, and they treat anthropolo-

gists like trespassers.

**I** believe armed struggle is the only solution for peoples who are fighting to be free, and I live in accordance with my beliefs.

"Many will call me an adventurer, and I am.

"Except I'm an adventurer of a different sort, one who risks his skin to test his beliefs."

— Che Guevara in a farewell letter to his parents

In 1996, the Cuban utopia Che envisioned is a bad dream of dictatorship. Most guerrilla groups in Latin America have jettisoned the prolonged people's war for electoral politics. Instead of dropping like Communist dominoes, the Ameri-

cas are knit together with elected governments.

So what explains this protracted effort, 28 years after the fact, to get at Che's tomb? Is this a south-of-the-border version of Cerakko Rivera breaking and entering Al Capone's empty vaults?

To make sense of it, you have to connect to a time when socialism promised to right Latin America's wrongs.

For the left, Che was a source of light in an era of gray military rulers who demanded "Order and Progress." He was dashing and dangerous and helped pull off the revolution that overthrew President Fulgencio Batista and put Fidel Castro in power 90 miles from Florida.

For Washington, Che was a Spanish-speaking Ho Chi Minh bent on turning all of Latin America into revolutionary salsa.

After the triumph in Cuba, Che spent the rest of his short life living up to his legend. He would log marathons hours in his Central Bank office, then peel off his shirt to join a sugar cane-cutting brigade. More demolition man than architect, he left Cuba in 1965 for armed missions impossible to the Congo and Bolivia.

"He didn't live for victory, but for the struggle," wrote Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano. "And he didn't even turn his head to look

► CHE: Page 5, Col. 1

# 'Scientists Search for Guevara 30 Years After His Death

► CHE  
From Page 4

back at the lovely fire rising from the bridges he had burned."

Even Che's killers were moved by his commitment. After ordering Che's execution following his capture Oct. 8, 1967, by U.S.-trained Bolivian Rangers, President Rene Barrientos declared: "An idealist has died."

Today, idealism itself is on the ropes. The only leftist to capture the public imagination in recent years is Subcommander Marcos, leader of the Zapatista rebels in southern Mexico.

But much of the Marcos mystique is cosmetic: He refuses to remove his ski mask. Che, in contrast, was one of the most glorified fighters of the 20th century. And that, says Jose Prol, a Cuban geologist who joined the search in February, is reason enough to give the man a proper burial.

When a young Bolivian Communist named Loyola Guzman heard that Che Guevara was organizing the National Liberation Army in January 1967, she set out to his base camp in the Nancahuazu canyon to enlist.

"He was convinced that this was the right time to begin the fight. He had a continental approach. It was not just Bolivia, Argentina and Peru would be next," said Guzman, who became an urban organizer for the guerrillas in La Paz.

But Bolivia was hardly a cauldron of discontent, and President Barrientos was no Batista. He won peasant support by distributing 25-acre plots to hundreds of families in the rebel zone. He adopted Indian rights measures and helicoptered into villages to chat with the locals in Quechua.

Che knew neither Quechua nor the lay of the land. His top officers were Cubans and they were viewed as foreign invaders. Even though Havana sent a \$25,000 gift, not even the Bolivian Communist Party would support Che. In 10 months, the rebels recruited only 29 Bolivians.

"I don't understand why Che didn't stop and admit that he had no future, and try to get out," said Eric Blussl, who has lived in Vallegrande

since the 1960s. "Here, the army was loved. They built roads for the farmers and they didn't have problems with the people."

In a matter of months, the Army surrounded Che's foco of 50 guerrillas. They lacked medicine, food and water. Several rebels grew so thirsty that they drank their own urine. Suffering from asthma attacks kept Che awake at night. He lost his shoes while crossing a stream and dirtied his pants from a bad case of diarrhea.

Although Bolivians ignored Che's call to arms, they can't resist cashing in on Che-mania. Since the excavation began, tourists, researchers, foreign journalists and an assortment of Che fanatics have made the pilgrimage to Vallegrande.

"There is a special attraction to the figure of Che Guevara," said Julio Boni, a vacationing psychologist who came from Uruguay. "Even people who weren't alive during the time when he was fighting identify with his ideals and his struggle."

Shops sell Che's war diary. Taxi drivers will take you on the bumpy trip to La Higuera for a tour of the tiny schoolhouse where Che was captured. Nurse Susana Osnaga, who helped embalm Che's corpse, wants \$50 for a brief interview.

Vallegrande town leaders are designing a scaled-down memorial, with a mausoleum for Che's bones and a museum. Fans have already turned the hospital laundry room into a shrine. "Che," says one message on the graffiti-scarred wall, "I will follow you forever."

Che even charms latter-day officials of the government he tried to overthrow. His mission had "redeemable values," Tourism Secretary Ricardo Rojas said recently as he unveiled plans for a "Route of Che" tourist trail that will follow his winding death march.

Far beyond Vallegrande, Che is still radical chic. His bearded mug with the beret and live-pistol star is featured on a new Swatch watch. Beer drinkers can chug a London brewery's "Che" lager. He's back in the bookstores with a new memoir. "The Motorcycle Diaries," chronicling his 1952 trip around South America on a Norton 500.

Hundreds of people had been killed in the El Salvadoran village of El Mozote by an elite U.S.-trained army battalion. But the Salvadoran army insisted on calling the Dec. 10, 1981, bloodbath a "cross fire" between its troops and leftist rebels.

Eleven years later, the civil war was over and a U.N.-sponsored Truth Commission was about to weigh in with the final judgment. The Argentine team began digging in October 1992 at a small convent adjacent to the village church.

They found 143 skeletons, 131 of which belonged to children under the age of 12. The bullet cartridges said they were manufactured in Lake City, Missouri.

Due to their definitive forensic evidence, the Truth Commission's report called El Mozote a massacre and blamed the Salvadoran military. "They couldn't keep talking about a cross fire," said Bernardi, a founding member of the team. "The bones tell the true story."

In emotional terms the search for Che Guevara is a much lighter workout. There is no debate over the cause of death or who was responsible. There are no grieving relatives on hand. And no one is trying to prosecute the army officers involved in the killings.

There was also no pre-dig investigation and that's why this mission is such a mess.

At El Mozote, Tutela Legal, the human rights office of the Roman Catholic archdiocese, had spent more than two years putting together a dossier on the killings and the site.

Vallegrande is seat-of-the-pants all the way. No one expected General Vargas to speak up, and when he did, it was assumed that he would take investigators by the hand and lead them straight to Che's grave. In a matter of days, the forensic team was on a flight to Bolivia.

Last month, a farmer provided another breakthrough. He led the search party to a canyon a few miles outside Vallegrande where he had seen human bones sticking out of the dirt, just below the surface were the remains of three guerrillas.

The anthropologists have been unable to identify two of the skeletons. The skull of the third was

crushed, but they were intrigued by a scar on one of the rib bones.

By contacting relatives of the rebels, they learn that Jaime Arana Campero had undergone back surgery before joining Che, and that the procedure involved moving rib bones. Later, the family provided tooth X-rays and his identity was confirmed.

Arana and his two colleagues outlasted Che by five days. His remains were delivered to his sister in a wooden box at a ceremony at the Vallegrande town square in December. Before she caught the overnight bus out of town, she agreed to donate Arana's long-buried leather sandals to the new Che museum.

Such homage to dead Communists have army veterans seeing red. Putting the brakes on Che's revolution before it reached first gear was one of their greatest triumphs. But hardly anyone remembers the 56 soldiers killed in the conquest.

In La Paz the army is said to be pressuring the government to call off the search. The anthropologists suspect the army is feeding them false information in an effort to derail their investigation.

Somigliana wants to press on but some of his colleagues are losing their resolve. The search for Che is starting to feel frivolous, like going after a trophy, and there is talk of moving to another project where their work could actually make a difference in legal cases.

What's more, the longer the anthropologists stay in Vallegrande, the more convinced they become that the town really doesn't want them to succeed.

It's unclear what would happen to Che's bones if they are ever found. But many residents fear they would be delivered to Che's next-of-kin in Cuba. Should that happen, their town would lose the museum, the international attention and the tourism that Che has bestowed.

"A lot of people tell us 'You'll never find him.' Perhaps that's their hope — that he stays here. Maybe they are right," Bernardi said.

Maybe that is what Che Guevara himself would have wanted. He once declared: "Where a man falls is where a man should be buried."

## Exterior

Sábado 13 de enero de 1996

## La búsqueda de los restos del Che

## Vallegrande rescató la memoria de Chapaco

Por Eduardo Tarnassi  
(Enviado especial)

**Devolución:** la osamenta del guerrillero boliviano, compañero de Ernesto Guevara, fue la primera en ser entregada a sus familiares; su hermana se negó a que fuera enterrado en la zona.

**VALLEGRANDE.** La escena era casi felicitosa. Rodolfo Arena Campero, sobrino carnal del guerrillero conocido por el nombre de guerra de Chapaco, ascendía por una de las tantas tortuosas callecitas que le dan contorno a Vallegrande con un atadid de pequeñas dimensiones sobre su hombro derecho.

Había trabajado toda la noche junto a un carpintero desconocidos elementales para fabricar la rústica caja en la que pondrían a descansar para siempre lo que en vida fue Jaime Arana Campero, quien, a los 29 años y como integrante de las escuadillas de fuerzas de Ernesto "Che" Guevara, fue muerto en Los Cajones, el 13 de octubre

de 1967, es decir cinco días después que su comandante.

Rodolfo, con el atadid a cuestas, pasó frente a la iglesia Matriz. Las puertas del templo estaban cerradas y las campanas del reloj daban las 4.

Un desconocido se ofreció amablemente a ayudarlo. Juntos tomaron las manijas de ferreteria que se habían adosado a los costados de la caja y lentamente se dirigieron al modesto salón de actos de la Alcaldía.

Minutos antes, Martha Arana Campero, la hermana del guerrillero marxista, había hecho los sencillos arreglos finales con una de las integrantes del equipo de antropólogos forenses argentinos.

Patricia Bernardi escuchó con respeto el pedido: "Quiero que los huesos de mi hermano sean envueltos en esta mantita que le perteneció cuando era niño, sólo eso".

## Sueños infantiles

Y así fue. El funerario momento se desarrolló en un profundo silencio, quebrado únicamente por los disparos de las máquinas fotográficas, y observado por un Simón Bolívar inmortalizado en una tela en la que el artista lo imaginó adusto y reconstruido, como preparado para la ocasión que se estaba viviendo.

Una a una la antropóloga depositó las partes del esqueleto en esa urna con forma de féretro y los tapó piadosamente con la mantita blanca que seguramente dio calor a sueños infantiles.

Ese era el último acto protagonizado por Jaime Arana Campero, Chapaco, un joven que conoció fortuitamente al Che Guevara en un hospital de la provincia de Córdoba y a partir de allí decidió seguirlo.

En la macabra ceremonia no había ni dolor ni angustia, sólo recuerdos lejanos de una mujer que, según nos relató hace unos días, vagó casi 20 años junto a su madre para dar cristiana sepultura a su hermano en Tarija.

Sin embargo, aquí, en Vallegrande, no hubo siquiera un responso.

## Aparición tardía

Martha Arana Campero leyó un sencillo discurso, en el que no pudo dejar de mencionar que no se encontraba preparada para esta aparición, luego de 28 años de misterio, y señaló que esto era posible "gracias a que el país vive en democracia y realiza sus actos con transparencia".

Ocurrido esto, y una vez más, se le pidió que Chapaco descansara

en Vallegrande, como parte de un museo que la ciudad espera tener para recordar aquellos días en que el Che y sus hombres pensaban hacer la revolución en Bolivia.

Una vez más, la mujer se negó, aunque accedió a donar las sandalias de campesino que su hermano llevaba cuando le llegó la muerte.

Vallegrande está en silencio. Su cielo gris y amenazante hace aún más angustiosas este tipo de vivencias.

La gente ni siquiera observa con curiosidad lo que está ocurriendo a su alrededor.

## Primer acto

Entretanto, los huesos de Chapaco quedaron a solas con su hermana y su sobrino en la habitación de un hotel esperando regresar a Tarija.

Cayó así el telón del primer acto de esta historia de violencia, sangre y metralleta en la que su principal protagonista, el comandante Che Guevara, como se lo denomina aquí, se niega a aparecer.

Tal vez hoy sea realidad aquello que alguna vez escribió Dalmiro Sáenz: "Aquí yace Ernesto Guevara, lo enterraron en un cajón de tierra y miedo y lo taparon con la noche sin cielo de la selva".

RASTRILLAJE EN BOLIVIA

# Se intensifica con un georradar la búsqueda de la tumba del Che

El sofisticado equipo comienza a operar hoy • Lo hará en un área junto al aeródromo de Vallegrande • Y en otra frente al cementerio • La misión la dirige un equipo argentino-cubano

## Clarín EN BOLIVIA

**VALLEGRANDE, Bolivia** (Enviado especial). - Los expertos dedicados a la búsqueda de los restos de Ernesto "Che" Guevara comenzarán hoy los rastreos con georradar, en las dos zonas ya demarcadas del aeródromo de Vallegrande: una, junto a la pista vieja y otra, cerca de la derruida pared de barro del cementerio.

Ayer, el antropólogo argentino Carlos Somigliana, ayudado por dos lugareños, comenzaron a desmalezar, a punta de machete, una zona aún inexplorada que se encuentra en los fondos del Rotary Club y del predio vecino, un terreno donde el Servicio de Caminos local guarda sus antiguas maquinarias.

La expectativa de Somigliana es terminar de desmalezar cuanto antes para comenzar allí también los trabajos con el georradar. Los expertos tienen esperanzas ciertas de encontrar restos de guerrilleros, aunque están lejos de asegurar que ahí se encuentren los del Che, a pesar de que así lo aseguran los vallegrandinos.

### Presiones

A última hora del jueves, tras la llegada a Vallegrande de Loyola Guzmán, presidente de la Asociación de Familias



ARCHIVO CLARIN

por datos médicos aportados por su hermana. Sus restos fueron descubiertos a 5 kilómetros de Vallegrande, en un lugar de difícil acceso: la Cañada del Arroyo. En el combate de Los Cajones fue acrobilado por el ejército boliviano el 14 de octubre de 1967.

"Mi corazón está muy sensibilizado", dijo emocionada la señora Campero. "Mi hermano conoció al Che cuando fue a hacerse operar desde Tarija a un hospital de Córdoba en el que trabajaba Guevara", relató a Clarín esta mujer de piel clara y 59 años de edad.

Poco después, en 1963, el "Chapaco" se fue a Cuba. Martha no volvió a saber de él hasta que, a través de Radio Habana, se enteró de que Jaime trabajaba en una fábrica de azúcar en la capital cubana.

"Las siguientes noticias que tuve fueron las que publicaban los diarios bolivianos, que decían que estaba junto al Che en el monte. Fue como si a toda mi familia nos hubiera dado un infarto. Mi madre le rezaba a todos los santos para que no lo mataran", contó Martha bajo un arbusto cercano a la fosa.

A pesar de las plegarias el guerrillero cayó. Ayer por la tarde, en un acto presidido por el subprefecto de Vallegrande, coronel Jorge Cortez, en la Casa de la Cultura, se realizó la entrega formal de los restos de "Chapaco" a su hermana

**A pico y pala.** El terreno después de ser desmalezado y rastreado electrónicamente, comienza a ser cavado. Los especialistas ubicaron dos áreas para la búsqueda.

Hasta ese día, la burocracia boliviana le impedía llevarse los restos de su hermano, conocido como el "Chapaco", hasta su ciudad, Tarija, en el sur del país, para cumplir con el deseo de su madre muerta: que descansara con ella en la bó-

viano en 1967, el gobierno autorizó la entrega de los huesos del guerrillero Jaime Arana Campero a su hermana.

Llevada por Clarín, Martha Arana Campero visitó ayer por primera vez la fosa donde fueron encontrados los restos

Tras los huesos del "Che":

# Exhumaron restos del cubano Carlos Coello Coello (Tuma)

-Hoy realizan peritaje forense en la morgue del hospital Japonés-



Antropólogos forenses argentinos exhumaron los restos desarticulados del guerrillero Tuma.

En presencia del fiscal Juan Ribera Alvarez, la comisión que viajó ayer a La Florida, integrarla por dos antropólogos forenses argentinos y una historiadora y socióloga cubana, exhumaron los restos de Carlos Coello Coello, más conocido como "Tuma", guerrillero que peleó junto a Ernesto "Che" Guevara en las acciones de 1967.

La Comisión llegó al lugar señalado, que había sido ubicado tras cuatro meses de búsqueda por referencias que proporcionaron los pobladores de La Florida, población ubicada a 35 kilómetros de la carretera a Camiri, pasando Río Seco.

Los antropólogos Patricia Bernardi y Darío Olmo, luego de la excavación, seleccionaron las piezas encontradas a tan sólo 80 centímetros de la superficie. "Esta es una deposición secundaria, dado que algunos huesos no estaban articulados, pero las estimaciones de sexo, edad e identidad se harán en laboratorio", expresó Bernardi, indicando que se observan improntas verdes en la pelvis y el omóplico, pero se determinará en laboratorio a qué tipo de proyectil corresponden.

Olmo explicó que encontraron el cuerpo en posición de cubito lateral a una profundidad entre

70 y 80 centímetros de la superficie, agregando que en la morgue del hospital Japonés se realizará el peritaje correspondiente.

El cubano Jorge González Pérez, director del Instituto de Medicina Legal de su país, a nombre de los familiares cubanos muertos en las guerrillas del Che en Bolivia, prosigue la búsqueda de sus restos y los del "Ché".

Dijo que desde diciembre del año pasado están facilitando información histórica a los antropólogos forenses argentinos y que con éste ya son cinco los guerrilleros que han encontrado. "En breve tiempo más

está previsto continuar con las exhumaciones en Vallegrande", expresó.

María del Carmen Arié, historiadora y socióloga cubana, acompaña al equipo técnico, proporcionando datos históricos de los sucesos y lugares donde cayeron los guerrilleros e informó que en la Habana está coordinando la implementación del Archivo del Che.

#### HERMANO

Humberto Vasquez Viala, hermano de uno de los guerrilleros que acompañaron al Che en su lucha, dijo que éste cayó herido cerca a Muyupampa y después fue curado en el hospital de Yacimientos en Camiri.



Comisión que participó en la exhumación.

"Fue fusilado en Choreli y tirado desde un avión. Hace ocho años estuve buscándolo con ayuda de los campesinos de la zona y logré encontrar el lugar cerca de Lagunillas en una comunidad chiriguana", reveló; pero que es decisión de su familia que se quede entre la gente por la cual luchó.

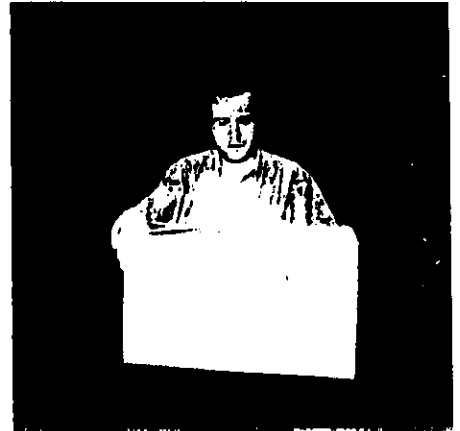
#### POBLADOR

Augusto Coca, un poblador del lugar desde tiempos de la guerrilla, dijo que en 1967 los guerrilleros llegaron a Pirai donde acamparon una noche. "Al siguiente día tuvieron el choque con el soldado del Ejército de Bolivia. Los compañeros de Tuma lo trajeron sobre las ancas de un caballo con un balazo en el estómago y a unos tres kilómetros y medio lo enterraron", contó.

Sostuvo que como estaba muy cerca de la superficie los perros y los cuervos lo sacaron, entonces unos campesinos que lo vieron dieron parte al Ejército, quienes lo enterraron a mayor profundidad.

Refirió que, aunque al principio los guerrilleros inspiraban miedo, después se hicieron querer porque ayudaban a los pobladores. "Eran hombres muy buenos, era mentira la fama que le hicieron de que mataban a los campesinos. El Ejército obligaba a los pobladores del lugar que sirvan de guías para seguir a los guerrilleros", manifestó.

Coca indicó que tuvo la suerte de alojarlos en su casa una noche y un día, pero no supo distinguir cuál del grupo era el Che, porque varios usaban barba. Señaló que el pueblo de La Florida fue fundado en 1712 y que aproximadamente tiene 400 habitantes.



Caja en la que trajeron los huesos para ser examinados en la morgue del hospital Japonés de esta ciudad.

## Los restos serán llevados a Cuba

Los restos del guerrillero cubano Carlos "Tuma" Coello Coello podrán ser trasladados a La Habana el domingo tras haberse completado hoy la exhumación de su cadáver y luego del peritaje forense que practicarán este sábado los expertos requeridos por el Gobierno boliviano.

El esqueleto fue encontrado el 16 de este mes en base a un primer indicio constatado el 9 de junio en la zona de Laguna Seca, ubicada entre las pequeñas poblaciones de Florida y Tejería, a 133 kilómetros al suroeste de la capital.

El esqueleto fue finalmente desenterrado hoy tras una meticulosa tarea de cuatro horas cumplida en el lugar por Patricia Bernardi y Darío Olmo del Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense.

El cráneo fue el primero en descubrirse a solo 56 centímetros de la superficie de la tierra, mientras que el sacro estaba a 83,5 centímetros y los pies a 82 centímetros.

EFE constató en el lugar el malogrado estado del esqueleto, con huesos sueltos sobre todo en el tórax y la parte anterior del cráneo destruido.

Cada una de las piezas óseas fueron clasificadas por los antropólogos forenses al completar el descubrimiento de los restos.

Aunque todas las evidencias apuntan a "Tuma", los antropólogos forenses deberán cumplir con el peritaje legal y certificar la identificación de los restos, con el apoyo del médico Jorge González, director del Instituto de Medicina Legal de Cuba.

Para ello cuentan con datos de la ficha personal de Coello tomada por la República de Cuba, en los que detalla fecha de nacimiento, estatura, peso, tamaño de los pies, biotipo, color de pie y cabello, detalle de lesiones en los huesos y otras anomalías en el cuerpo.

La tarea se realizará este sábado en el Hospital Japonés, previa autorización solicitada por el secretario de Régimen Interior del Ministerio de Gobierno, Hugo San Martín, que preside la comisión oficial.

Jorge González, que participa de la búsqueda en representación de los familiares de guerrilleros cubanos caídos en Narcahuazú junto al "Che", confirmó a EFE que los restos de "Tuma" serán trasladados a la brevedad a La Habana, donde viven su hijo y allegados.

"Tuma" murió el 26 de junio de 1968 al intentar responder a una emboscada del Ejército boliviano en La Poza, próxima a Florida. Fue enterrado inicialmente por los guerrilleros, pero trasladado de fosa a los pocos días por el Ejército que supo por los pobladores que el cadáver había sido desenterrado por los perros. (EFE)