



Turning the Tables on Che: The Training at La Esperanza

By Kenneth Finlayson

A hallmark of Army Special Forces is the ability to organize and conduct the training of indigenous military forces in less than ideal situations. When the main body of the 8th Special Forces Group Mobile Training Team (MTT) BL 404-67X arrived in La Esperanza, Bolivia on 29 April 1967 to begin a 179-day deployment, the men were struck by the primitive conditions of the tiny village. "It was pretty spartan," Sergeant First Class (SFC) Harold T. Carpenter recalled.¹ With a population of less than two hundred persons, La Esperanza had no electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing. Selected by the team leader Major (MAJ) Ralph W. "Pappy" Shelton for its access to suitable training areas, the town's remote location provided the operational security necessary to train the new Bolivian Ranger Battalion.

When guerrillas ambushed a unit of the Bolivian Army in March 1967, President René Barrientos Ortuño's response was to create a 650-man Ranger infantry battalion and ask the United States to assist in training the unit.² The task was given to the 8th Special Forces Group (8th SFG), who deployed MAJ Shelton's 16-man team.³ This article will describe the Ranger training program, the follow-on training requirement, and the experiences of the team members on this very successful mission.

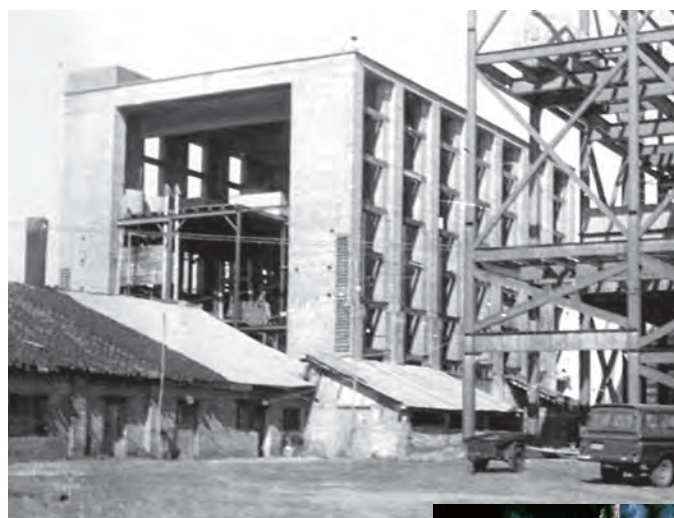
MAJ Shelton and his team developed a comprehensive 19-week training program with four phases. The training began with six weeks of basic individual training, a necessity for the untrained conscripts. Phase Two was three weeks of advanced individual training. Phase Three was three weeks of basic unit training starting with the rifle squad, progressing to the platoon (Bolivian section or *sección*), and company tactics. Phase Four lasted seven weeks and concentrated on advanced unit and counterinsurgency training, which culminated in a two-week field training exercise at the end.⁴ The team's mission was to turn brand-new draftees into Rangers. The Bolivian troops arrived in groups beginning in early May 1967. It was immediately apparent to the SF soldiers that they were starting at "Square One."

The Bolivian soldiers had the one uniform on their backs and a variety of weapons. They had no load-bearing equipment (LBE), canteens, or ponchos. The Bolivian Army did not have a packaged field ration. Food and water determined how far from La Esperanza they could train. Despite the best efforts of the SF team, the soldiers would not get these critical items until the training was nearly complete. The team worked through LTC Joseph Rice of the U.S. Military Group (MILGP) to obtain the equipment from war stocks in storage in the Canal Zone.⁵ Another hindrance was the quality of food provided by the Bolivian Army.

Sergeant (SGT) Alvin E. Graham, a radio operator recalled, "They would fold up a piece of bread and stuff it in their pocket for lunch. Their regular chow



The village of La Esperanza had no electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing. Many aspects of village life, such as grinding corn (insert), had changed little for generations.



The Rangers used an abandoned sugar mill at La Esperanza. The mill provided housing and a site for rappelling and a confidence course. Food for the Rangers, a mixture of rice, corn and some meat, was prepared in 55-gallon drums that served as communal feeding barrels. Observing the preparation is the Battalion S-4, a 1930s Chaco War veteran.



was just miserable. They took a 55-gallon drum, filled it with water, dumped in rice, potatoes, and maybe a small piglet, boiled it up, and everyone would eat out of the barrel.⁶ The poor diet did not provide enough calories to sustain troops undergoing rigorous training. The situation improved after the Bolivian Minister of Defense, General Suarez Guzman, and the Army Chief of Staff, General Alfredo Ovando Candia, visited on 31 May. They approved additional funds to buy specific, high calorie food, and the strength and stamina of the troops steadily improved.⁷ In spite of these problems, the SF team started training.



Phase I was designed to train the soldiers in basic skills. The assembly, disassembly and cleaning of the M-1 Garand was one of the tasks.

Sergeant First Class (SFC) Daniel V. Chapa, a light and heavy weapons sergeant said, "The troops had no previous military training. Their education level was just about zero. Most of them could speak some Spanish"⁸ SFC Hapka noted the difference between the soldiers and their officers. "The troops were untrained conscripts. The officers were of European descent. Most of them were pretty well-educated."⁹

The team made a special effort to incorporate the Bolivian officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) into the training. "We interacted a lot with the Bolivian officers and NCOs, particularly the company commanders and platoon leaders. We tried to get them involved as much as we could. It enhanced their credibility with their men," said SFC Harold T. Carpenter, the heavy weapons sergeant.¹⁰ "We used the Bolivian lieutenants, warrant



SGT Alvin E. Graham(r) training Bolivian infantrymen on the Browning M-1919A6 .30 caliber light machinegun. On Graham's right is a cameraman from a SOUTHCOM film crew. SGT Graham, SSG Wendell P. Thompson, and SGT Byron R. Sigg were all radio operators who served as assistant instructors on the firing ranges.

officers, and cadets as assistant instructors to foster a train-the-trainer philosophy. Then, they could work with those troops that required more training," said Staff Sergeant (SSG) Jerald L. Peterson, a medical specialist.¹¹ Forcing this interaction began in the initial basic training phase to build a bond between the officers and men that grew as the training progressed.

Phase I was designed to bring the soldiers to a basic level of proficiency in their individual soldier skills. "We used World War II-vintage training manuals from the School of the Americas at Fort Gulick [the Canal Zone, Panama] that had been translated into Spanish," said SFC Dan Chapa.¹² Physical training (PT), weapons training, land navigation, camouflage techniques, and basic patrolling were the primary topics.¹³ "We did about thirty minutes of calisthenics with the Bolivians and then went on runs to the range and back. They simply took off their fatigue shirts for PT," said Chapa.¹⁴ "We ran every morning," said SGT Alvin E. Graham. "Those guys would even run on patrols."¹⁵ Following PT, the troops would head out for the day's instruction, which in Phase I emphasized basic weapons training (assembly, disassembly, cleaning, and marksmanship).

The weapons specialist on the team, SFC Dan Chapa, was responsible for the weapons training. Other team members, notably SSG Wendell P. Thompson, SGT Byron R. Sigg, and SGT Alvin E. Graham, served as assistant instructors according to the daily training plan developed and monitored by the team sergeant, Master Sergeant (MSG) Oliverio Gomez. "We would have a meeting every morning to review the day's assignments," said SFC Carpenter. "Then each evening we would have a little debrief at the end of the training day."¹⁶ The eclectic mix of Bolivian weapons and the supply problems associated with getting the proper ammunition was a daily challenge for the "Weapons Committee."



SFC Harold T. Carpenter
 DOB: 4 May 1941
 POB: Martins Ferry, OH
 HS: GED
 Spanish: 8th SFG Courses

Army: Joined in 1956, BCT Ft Jackson, SC, AIT 101st Abn Div as infantryman, A Co, 506th Inf; 1957, Gyro to Mainz, Germany w/ A Co, 505th Inf, SGT FO Wpns PLT A/505; 1961, Fort Campbell, KY, 101st Abn Div, Inf Sqd Ldr C Co, 502nd Inf & A Co, 506th Inf; Mar 1963, Panama, 8th SFG "Q" Course, A Co 8th SFG, May 1965, MTT Honduras; Feb 1966, Vietnam, B-52, 5th SFG; Mar 1967, B Co, 8th SFG, Hvy Wpns SGT.¹



Ssg Wendell P. Thompson, a radio operator, trained the Rangers on the Browning .30 caliber M-1919A6 light machinegun. Cross-trained as a light weapons specialist, Thompson worked as an assistant instructor during weapons training.



MSG Roland J. Milliard said. "We did rappelling off a thirty-foot high wall at the sugar mill." Rappelling, obstacle and confidence courses were all run at the mill and were designed to toughen the Rangers physically and build their confidence.

"As the primary light weapons instructor, I was told to prepare a marksmanship POI [program of instruction] and to order everything and anything that was needed to support the training, get the repair parts for weapons, the targets and the ammunition based on the number of rounds per man per day," said SFC Chapa. "Most would be .30 cal ball ammo for the M-1 Garands and carbines. The M-1919A6 light machineguns had belted ammo with tracers. Since we started before all the M-1 rifles and machineguns arrived from the Canal Zone, I had to really squeeze the Bolivian supply officer for the ammunition for the [Czech] Mausers and [Argentine] FALs."¹⁷

The supply officer was a lieutenant colonel and a hoary veteran of the 1935 Chaco War who was loath to part with "his" ammunition. "He always gave me half of what I requested each time. It was a constant fight to get what was needed to train the soldiers properly," said Chapa. "We were in Phase II before all the Bolivian soldiers were equipped with U.S. weapons."¹⁸

The ranges, just outside of town, needed to be inspected daily before firing commenced. "We had to clear the area around the ranges and areas where we did live fire training every day because there were peasants wandering all around the place, collecting firewood and tending animals," said Chapa.¹⁹ General Ovando, the Bolivian

Army Chief of Staff visited training with an Argentine Army major. The major was critical of the range firing. Chapa inquired when the last time he or the Argentine Army had seen combat. That silenced the major.²⁰ The training week at La Esperanza ran Monday through Friday, with Saturday used for making up missed training events and for additional instruction. Training lasted until late afternoon because the soldiers had to return to the camp to eat dinner and clean weapons before dark. Inclement weather was hard on the poorly clothed troops and played havoc with the training schedule.

Until June, the soldiers only had one uniform, and no ponchos or field jackets. If it rained, time had to be allowed for them to dry their clothes.²¹ During Phase II in June (the start of the Bolivian winter), four training days were lost when the *surazos*, a cold, rain-laden south wind blowing out of sub-Antarctic Patagonia swept through the area.²² The troops huddled in their warehouse barracks. Lost training days were made up when the *surazos* ceased.

Advanced individual training was the focus of the second phase. Three weeks (19 June to 9 July) were devoted to the different military occupation specialties (MOS) requirements such as medical, communications, advanced marksmanship for snipers, and crew-served weapons gunners, and leadership and staff training for

Home on the range. It was a daily ritual to clear the range and training areas of livestock and people before the commencement of live fire training.





"The Rangers loved the Slide for Life," said MSG Roland J. Milliard. "It was like a carnival ride for them."



The SF team set up an obstacle course using storage tanks in the sugar mill. SSG Jerald L. Peterson noted, "The Indians didn't have much upper body strength. They struggled with the rope climbing."



SFC Dan Chapa directed firing from the makeshift range tower. Chapa had a daily battle with the battalion supply office, a Chaco War veteran, over the allocation of Mauser ammunition.

the officers and NCOs. "Ranger training" was introduced. It consisted of rappelling, Ranger operations (ambushes, raids, and patrols), and combat conditioning exercises with makeshift confidence tests and obstacle courses.²³ This phase was designed to bring the troops to a high level of individual soldier proficiency before the collective training in small unit operations began. The abandoned sugar mill structure provided the training platform.

"We did rappelling off the side of the mill, about thirty feet high," said MSG Roland J. Milliard, an intelligence specialist. "We set up a confidence course there with a rope climb and the "Slide for Life" into the [nearby village] pond."²⁴ "The rappelling was done from the flat roof of the sugar mill laboratory next to the sugar

cane truck weigh station," said SFC Chapa. "It was high enough to give them the feel of rappelling and having a flat wall emphasized the need to get your legs horizontal to the ground, lean back and walk down."²⁵ There was a one-rope bridge constructed to cross a water obstacle for training on the "Ranger Crawl."²⁶ The confidence course proved to be a daunting task for many.

"The Indians from the *altiplano* didn't have much upper body strength," said SSG Peterson. "They struggled with rope climbing and we had to put more upper body exercises into the PT program."²⁷ The obstacle course around the mill required the Rangers to jump off a large storage tank. The SF team placed mattresses at the base of the tank after a spate of twisted ankles.²⁸ The courses built up confidence and toughness. The Rangers particularly loved the Slide for Life. "It was a carnival ride for them," said MSG Milliard.²⁹

Phase II also focused on improving the soldier's individual proficiency and training on assigned specialties. CPT Margarito Cruz and MSG Milliard worked with the battalion reconnaissance section on intelligence collection. Cruz provided his "agents" with pistols and wristwatches and sent them out to gather information about the insurgents³⁰

SFC Dan Chapa developed a program for snipers. "I told SGTs [Alvin E.] Graham and [Byron R.] Sigg to identify three or four of the best riflemen in each company for advanced training as snipers. We had a few M-1D Garands, the sniper version. Their 7 mm Argentine Mausers were good sniper weapons, but the ammunition was too old and of poor quality," said Chapa. "So I used the M-1Ds with binoculars and spotting scopes. I had some .30 caliber match ammunition to teach them the basics: factoring for the effects of wind; and extended range shooting by elevating the sights. The M-1D had a heavier, harder barrel and the lands and grooves were well defined for accuracy."³¹ In addition to the mechanics of firing, Chapa explained proper employment of snipers. "I taught them counter-sniper techniques. The best



CPT Margarito Cruz and MSG Roland J. Milliard trained the Ranger Battalion Reconnaissance section in intelligence collection. These Ranger/agents were sent out to gather information about the insurgents. They were issued wristwatches to be able to accurately record the time when they collected the intelligence. Two men were captured by Che's foco, but released unharmed.



SFC Richard J. Kimmich demonstrates loading the M20A1 3.5-inch rocket launcher. The team used a pile of paper boxes to show the effects of the weapon's back blast. SSG James A.

Hapka (right), a medical specialist instructs on the M2 60 mm mortar. Along with the Browning M-1919A6 light machinegun, the M2 mortars were used in the heavy weapons section in each Ranger company. The "collar" on the Ranger is a carrying pad.



defense against a sniper is another sniper," he said. "The men assembled outside my 'hootch' after training, and I worked with them one-on-one with sniping skills, and tactics, and explained how they would be used to the best advantage in a rifle company. A sniper works on soldiers psychologically because he represents the unknown, the constant long-range threat to the infantrymen."³² While Chapa trained the individual snipers, other team members worked with the gunners of the crew-served weapons.

To demonstrate the effects of the M20A1 3.5-inch antitank rocket launcher, the SF troops stacked up three 55-gallon drums to form a pyramid. They put a pile of paper boxes behind the anti-tank team to show the danger of the weapon's back blast. "SGT Alvin Graham loaded the weapon, and SSG Wendell Thompson fired it. The Bolivian soldiers were impressed with the firepower of the weapon and could readily see the need to stay out of the zone of the back blast when the boxes caught fire," said SSG Peterson.³³ Graham and SFC Chapa trained the mortar crews on the U.S. 81 and 60 mm mortars and the older French 82 mm systems.

"We had about twenty guys for the mortar squads. We tried to take the smartest guys we could find," said Graham.³⁴ The crews learned the proper techniques for employing the system, fire direction procedures, and forward observer duties.³⁵ "We taught them how to use the mortars to cover dead space and support the riflemen," said MSG Milliard.³⁶ The completion of the advanced individual training was followed by small unit tactics in Phase III.

The basic collective training concentrated on squad and platoon-level movement techniques, fire and maneuver,

and patrolling.³⁷ From 10 July to 29 July, the training progressed from the squad-level up through platoon tactical operations.³⁸ Heavy emphasis was placed on directing movements with hand and arm signals, and to control the squads during fire and maneuver. This concluded with live-fire exercises. "Our pop-up targets for the live-fire immediate action drills were simple, but effective," said Dan Chapa. "Some were hinged to trees with rubber tire tubing and pulled around with commo wire. Others were mounted in a row on logs and we "daisy-chained" the targets together so that you could pull all of them up simultaneously."³⁹ The live fire events were very popular with the Rangers. "The Bolivian officers always wanted to do the immediate action lanes twice, especially if they missed a target. They were very competitive among themselves," said Chapa.⁴⁰ It was during the small-unit collective training that the number of officers became a problem.

During the first two phases, the officers had been "dual-hatted" to perform the battalion staff duties. During the collective training, the officers were needed to lead their companies and platoons. MAJ Shelton noted, "In the past, the company commanders doubled as the battalion staff, which was sufficient. However, with the battalion about to go operational, this problem became more apparent and severe."⁴¹ The situation was further exacerbated by the loss of three military academy cadets who were assigned as platoon leaders. They returned to La Paz to complete their coursework for graduation and did not return until December. Officers were not the only things in short supply.

The lack of individual equipment still had not been rectified in July. Canteens and LBE were not available for all troops. Gasoline for the trucks and jeep was in very short supply. SFC Del Toro from the MILGP's Cochabamba detachment came to La Esperanza twice to give driver's training and preventative maintenance, but the lack of fuel and spare parts prevented him from conducting any meaningful instruction.⁴² Still, as the third phase ended, morale in the battalion was high and the Rangers were eager to get into their final four weeks of training.

General René Barrientos Ortuño, the President of Bolivia, visited La Esperanza on 29 July to talk with the Rangers. "His address was a great morale booster to the Battalion," said MAJ Shelton. "It came at an opportune time and carried them through some of the more arduous training in Phase IV."⁴³ As part of the celebration of the Bolivian Army's birthday on 7 August, the troops donned green berets, the distinctive unit headgear chosen for the Ranger Battalion (an initiative of CPT Edmund Fricke).⁴⁴ It was a sign that the training was nearing completion.

Phase IV was advanced unit training, which included operations at the company and battalion level, and counterinsurgency training. It ended with a battalion Field Training Exercise (FTX). This phase lasted from 30 July to 17 September. The capstone FTX was conducted 15 miles southwest of the town of Santa Cruz (75 miles from La Esperanza) because it closely replicated the "Red Zone"

terrain where the Rangers would soon be operating.⁴⁵ The SF team worked to inject as much realism into the instruction as possible. "As part of the immediate action training, we set up a little mock village to teach the soldiers how to properly clear buildings without harassing the local people," said SFC Dan Chapa. "Some of the role players dressed up as women. That got a real 'hoot' from the troops, but they did learn."⁴⁶ This was their final evaluation before being committed to combat against Che Guevara and his guerrillas.

A formal graduation ceremony and parade was held at the headquarters of the 8th Division (the Rangers' parent headquarters) on 17 September in Santa Cruz. His Excellency, Adolfo Siles, the Vice President of Bolivia, officiated with Colonel Joaquín Zenteno Anaya, the 8th Division commander. A religious mass concluded with the blessing of the company guidons. Vice President Siles, Colonel Zenteno, and MAJ Shelton addressed the troops in turn, and it was broadcast on Bolivian National Radio.⁴⁷ Each member of the SF team was given a special certificate. "The Vice President gave each of us a *Diploma de Honor*," recalled SGT Alvin E. Graham.⁴⁸ During the graduation, the Rangers were awarded the coveted "Condor Badge," their distinctive qualification badge. MTT BL 404-67X returned to La Esperanza when the Rangers boarded trucks for the "Red Zone."



Ranger graduates proudly wear green berets, their distinctive unit headgear.



The Condor Wings, the distinctive qualification badge of the Bolivian Ranger Battalion. CPT Edmond L. Fricke was instrumental in obtaining the berets and badges for the Rangers.



The Rangers completed their 19-week training course on 17 September 1967. A parade was held at the 8th Division Headquarters in Santa Cruz. In less than two weeks, the Rangers were in combat with the insurgents. Captain Celso Torrelio leads Company A in a "pass in review."



SFC Harold T. Carpenter receives his *Diploma de Honor* from Bolivian Vice President Adolfo Siles. Each member of the team received a certificate to recognize his training efforts with the Rangers.

An arduous two-week field training exercise was the culminating event of the 19-week training program. The exercise was held 75 miles southwest of La Esperanza, 15 miles south of Santa Cruz in terrain similar to the "Red Zone."





The second phase of the SF team's mission was to give refresher training to nine Bolivian infantry companies at La Esperanza. The site became an official Bolivian Army training center when the Special Forces team left in December. (Left) CPT James Trimble and SFC Dan Chapa observe a field expedient method of cleaning a 60 mm mortar.

Beginning just twelve days after their graduation, the Rangers engaged and defeated the insurgents, ending Che's dream of inciting a revolution in Bolivia. For the SF team, they had a brief respite before starting their new mission, training nine Bolivian infantry companies. These companies would be ready to continue the fight against the insurgents if the Rangers did not destroy them.

"In early July [10 July] I was called back to Panama by GEN [Robert W.] Porter, the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) commander," said MAJ Shelton. "Before leaving La Paz, the [CIA] Station Chief and I had a long conversation. He felt that the U.S. needed to maintain a training presence in Bolivia after we finished with the 2nd Ranger Battalion. This became the genesis for our follow-on mission: to provide refresher tactical and COIN [counterinsurgency] training to nine Bolivian infantry companies."⁴⁹ Ten team members flew back to the Canal Zone to see their families. Shelton and four men remained at La Esperanza to secure the equipment. Eleven men and 4,000 pounds of ammunition, M-1 carbines, and equipment returned to Santa Cruz on 4 October to begin Phase II of their mission.⁵⁰ Several of the men were new replacements.

Three rotations of three infantry companies each trained at La Esperanza. Each rotation was four weeks long. The first iteration was Company A, 4th Division, Company B, 5th Division, and Company C, 3rd Division, for a total of 337 officers and men. The second cycle was Company B, 4th Division, Company C, 5th Division, and the *Esquadron* (Squadron) *Baum*, 8th Division, for 338 men in all. The final rotation included Companies A and C, 7th Division and Company E, 3rd Division, totaling 316 soldiers.⁵¹

The POI for the infantry tactics refresher was similar in many respects to the one used for the Ranger Battalion. It placed emphasis on weapons training, advanced individual skills, small unit tactics, and counter-guerrilla operations. Unlike the Ranger conscripts, the infantry

companies that came to La Esperanza were already organized. "The infantry rifle companies that came for refresher training had already received some rudimentary training and had assigned officers and some NCOs. They were already equipped," recalled SFC Dan Chapa. "They wore camouflage fatigues unlike the Rangers."⁵² The refresher training was conducted by Special Forces soldiers to help the Bolivian Army to train its own cadre. La Esperanza would become an official Bolivian Army training site.

In the second rotation, Colonel Constantino Valencia assumed command of the new *Centro de Instrucción Especial de Operaciones* (CIEOP). "The POI was changed to reflect his emphasis, which was on counter-guerrilla operations," said MAJ Shelton. "Courses in intelligence collection, target detection, and more practical work in patrolling and operations against irregular forces were added."⁵³ The Special Forces soldiers shifted to a "train-the-trainer" role. In the third rotation, they handed over the primary responsibility for



SSG Wendell P. Thompson, SGT Alvin E. Graham and SFC Daniel V. Chapa with a Bolivian officer prior to conducting an airborne proficiency jump near La Esperanza on 7 July. The jump was made from a Bolivian version of this USAF H-19B helicopter (L).

instruction to the Bolivian cadre. The Americans ended their active participation on 15 December, halfway into the third cycle. The team's advance party left Bolivia on 19 December for Fort Gulick and the main body returned to the Canal Zone on 22 December. All together the team trained 1600 Bolivian Army Rangers and infantrymen.⁵⁴

The experience of Mobile Training Team 404-67X was typical in most respects for SF teams deployed throughout Latin America during the 1960s. Long, arduous training days and primitive living conditions were commonplace. Mandatory jump proficiency training and a multitude of American and Bolivian VIP visits were all part of the package. During their deployment, the members of the team did airborne proficiency jumps to avoid pay interruptions. One was from an H-19 helicopter near La Esperanza, and the other from a Bolivian C-46 with the Bolivian Airborne School students at Cochabamba.⁵⁵ The

General Robert W. Porter, SOUTHCOM Commander with MAJ Ralph W. Shelton during a visit to La Esperanza. A staunch supporter of the mission, Porter provided gold and silver watches to the outstanding Ranger officers and soldiers.



team received a steady stream of visitors that included Bolivian President Barrientos, Major General William E. Depuy, the U.S. Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA), and GEN Robert W. Porter, the SOUTHCOM Commander.⁵⁶ Porter was the “Godfather” for the sensitive mission, and during a visit on 25 August, he presented gold wristwatches to the outstanding Bolivian officers and silver ones to the best Rangers from each company.⁵⁷ The team also hosted film crews from SOUTHCOM, the Department of the Army, and from Granada Television of England, who documented the last two weeks of training. For the team, the highpoint of the deployment came not at the end, but on 8 October 1967 when the news reached them that Che Guevara had been captured.

Their pride in the Rangers was immense. “We trained those guys like they were our own,” said SFC Dan Chapa.⁵⁸ “Pappy Shelton had built up a terrific relationship with the whole battalion,” said First Lieutenant Harvey Wallender. “The men worshipped him, followed him around. Down in the jungle, Che Guevara kept offering ‘Two, three, many Vietnams,’ but what these *soldaditos* wanted was lots more guys like Pappy.”⁵⁹ SGT Alvin E. Graham remembers, “Once we heard the Rangers got Che, we felt like we were coasting.”⁶⁰ Looking back, MSG Roland J. Milliard felt “It was one of the most successful SF missions ever. We have different people searching for Che Guevara in different countries. First in Latin America, in Southeast Asia and down that way. But here I guess his luck ran out. And those Rangers just ate him up.”⁶¹ The Team Leader, MAJ Ralph “Pappy” Shelton summed it up by saying “We turned the tables on Che. He wrote the book, but our guys did it.”⁶² ▲

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Several film crews visited the team at La Esperanza. While SFC Dan Chapa gives instruction to a Bolivian infantryman on the M-1919A6 light machinegun, a motion picture cameraman from the Department of the Army films the training. A still photographer from Granada Television in England takes photographs for use in their documentary. Crews from SOUTHCOM, ABC and CBS News also filmed the team.

Endnotes

- 1 Harold T. Carpenter, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 24 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 The Ranger battalion was formed on the U.S. Army’s World War II Infantry Company Table of Organization. It had three rifle companies, one heavy weapons company, and a very small headquarters section with communications and reconnaissance capability. Gary Prado Salmón, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1987), 245.
- 3 The MTT was composed of four officers and 12 enlisted men. It was a composite from both the 8th SFG companies. The team reflected the assessment that communications and the training of the battalion staff officers would be important. Hence the team had more officers and communications personnel than would normally be on a mission of this type.
- 4 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, “Program of Instruction: Infantry Unit Operations,” April 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 Listed in the MTT After Action report as the Ranger Battalion Project Officer, LTC Rice and MAJ Shelton were at odds about roles and responsibilities throughout the deployment. The soon-to-retire Shelton felt little need for diplomacy when dealing with Rice. 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 29 May 1967 through 29 June 1967, dated 29 June 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Ralph W. Shelton, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 April 2007, Sweetwater, TN, digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 Alvin E. Graham, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 7 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 29 May 1967 through 29 June 1967, dated 29 June 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 Daniel V. Chapa, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 19 November 2008, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 Hapka interview, 3 November 2008.
- 10 Harold T. Carpenter, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 29 October 2008, digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 Jerald L. Peterson, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, Fort Bragg, NC, 6 October 2007, digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 12 Chapa interview, 11 April 2007.
- 13 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, “Program of Instruction for Infantry Unit Operations,” April 1967, pages 3-7, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 14 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 15 Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 16 Carpenter interview, 24 October 2008.
- 17 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007. During the team’s deployment, over 362,000 rounds of .30 caliber ammunition were expended. The average Bolivian rifleman received 10 rounds annually for marksmanship training. M-1s and carbines with ammunition came on a regular basis as part of the resupply through the Canal Zone. It was August before all the Rangers were carrying U.S. rifles.



- 18 One night the camp was alerted to the possible presence of armed groups in the area. The old Bolivian S-4 was nowhere to be found. The team had to shoot the lock off the storage shed to get the ammunition for issue to the troops on the perimeter. Needless to say, the colonel was not pleased with the ruined lock. Chapa interview, 18 April 2007; Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "After Action Report," 22 December 1967, Logistics Annex, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 19 Daniel V. Chapa and Jerald L. Peterson, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 11 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 21 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 22 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 29 May 1967 through 29 June 1967, dated 29 June 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 23 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Program of Instruction for Infantry Unit Operations," April 1967, pages 8-11, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 24 The Slide for Life is a confidence building exercise in which an individual rides down a cable suspended at an angle over a body of water. Holding the handle of a rolling pulley on the cable, the rider slides down. The ride ends when the rider releases the handle and drops into the water. Roland J. Milliard, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 22 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 25 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 26 The Ranger Crawl is accomplished by lying horizontally on a single rope. By hooking one foot over the rope, the individual pulls himself along. Shelton interview, 12 April 2007.
- 27 Jerald L. Peterson, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 19 November 2008, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 28 Peterson interview, 19 November 2008.
- 29 Roland J. Milliard, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 22 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 30 CPT Margarito Cruz was attached to the MTT from the 801st Military Intelligence Detachment of the 8th SAF. He and MSG Milliard trained a team of seven agents to go out and collect information on the guerrillas. They were deployed into the area of operations when the Rangers went after the insurgents. The soldier/agents were rewarded with wristwatches and pistols.
- 31 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007. Lands are the raised portions between the grooves in the bore of the rifle that impart spin to the bullet. Frank A. Moyer, *Special Forces Foreign Weapons Handbook* (Boulder, CO: Panther Publications, 1970), 306.
- 32 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007.
- 33 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007.
- 34 Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 35 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Program of Instruction for Infantry Unit Operations," April 1967, page 9, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 36 Milliard interview, 22 October 2008.
- 37 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Program of Instruction for Infantry Unit Operations," April 1967, pages 12-14, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 38 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 245.
- 39 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 40 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 41 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 July 1967, dated 29 July 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 42 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 July 1967, dated 29 July 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 43 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 August 1967, dated 29 August 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 44 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 July 1967 through 29 September 1967, dated 30 September 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 45 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 29 August 1967 through 29 September 1967, dated 30 September 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 46 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 47 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 July 1967, dated 29 July 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 48 Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 49 Ralph W. Shelton, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 1 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 50 CPT Edmond L. Fricke, CPT James Trimble, CPT Margarito Cruz, SFC Richard A. Kimmich and SSG Jerald L. Peterson were replaced by CPT Leroy Mitchell, 1LT Harvey W. Wallender, SFC Harold T. Carpenter, SFC Johnnie E. Reynolds and SFC Robert L. Owens. 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 September 1967 through 29 October 1967, dated 1 November 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 51 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "After Action Report," 22 December 1967, page 3, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 52 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 53 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "After Action Report," 22 December 1967, page 3, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 54 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Report of Mobile Training Team to Bolivia (RCS CSGPO-125)," 10 December 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 55 On 7 July 1967, U.S. Air Force CPT "Hoss" McBride, 605th Air Commando Squadron of the 6th Special Operations Wing, flew a Bolivian H-19B helicopter from Cochabamba to La Esperanza to support a training jump of the MTT members. The parachute drop, at an 800' altitude, was made on 8 July near a Swiss-owned operational sugar mill. The mill was about 10 miles east of La Esperanza. Several airborne-qualified Bolivian officers jumped with the Americans. The Bolivian Airborne Battalion at Cochabamba furnished parachutes. The second jump operation was conducted at Cochabamba, located at an altitude of 10,000' from a C-46 on 19 October. Both jumps were for pay purposes. 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 July 1967, dated 29 July 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 September 1967 through 29 October 1967, dated 1 November 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 56 MG William E. Depuy was a noted author on military tactics and asked MAJ Shelton if he was familiar with the concept of the mobile defense. Shelton replied he had read about it in *Infantry Magazine*. "Well I'm the author," said Depuy. "No s**t, you wrote that," said the irrepressible Shelton.
- 57 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 July 1967 through 29 August 1967, dated 29 August 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. One of Bolivian NCOs, SGT Huanca of B Company would later distinguish himself during the fight against Che's guerrillas.
- 58 Chapa interview, 19 November 2008.
- 59 Andrew St. George, "How the U.S. Got Che," *True*, April 1968, 97.
- 60 Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 61 Milliard interview, 22 October 2008; Michèle Ray, "In Cold Blood: How the CIA Executed Che," *Ramparts*, March 1968, 29.
- 62 Shelton interview, 12 April 2007.