

BOLIVIA SAYS GUEVARA DIED IN FIGHTING

Army Reports Former Castro Aide Trapped With Guerrillas

La Paz, Bolivia, Oct. 9 (AP) — Official Army dispatches claimed tonight that Ernesto Che Guevara, reputed mastermind of Latin America's Communist guerrillas, was killed in a clash in southeast Bolivia yesterday. But the high command declined immediate confirmation of the reports.

Guevara has been reported killed or captured before. Once Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro's right-hand man, his fate has been a mystery since he vanished from Cuba in April, 1965. A hunt was intensified for him in Bolivia recently and the Army said it believed he and a small band were trapped.

Col. Joaquin Zenteno Anaya, commander of the 8th Army, said earlier in the day that Guevara was one of the guerrillas killed in the clash at Higuera, about 400 miles southeast of La Paz.

Newsmen Invited

The Army's chief of staff, Col. Marcos Vasquez Sempertegui, said, "official reports from Vallegrande affirm Guevara was killed and that his body is now with the Bolivian Army."

But he emphasized that the high command did not want to confirm the reports for the present.

The Army nevertheless invited newsmen to fly tomorrow to Vallegrande, near Higuera. The invitation led to speculation that the high command wanted to display a body reputed to be Guevara's and was withholding any announcement of his death until then.

Proceeding Cautiously

It was believed that the high command was also proceeding cautiously because of problems in identifying the slain guerrilla's body as being positively that of Guevara.

At a meeting of the Organization of American States in Washington last month, Bolivian diplomats showed photographs which they claimed proved that Guevara was heading the guerrillas in Bolivia. The photographs showed a man resembling Guevara with Bolivian and Cuban guerrillas.

Report Denied

Reports earlier today said he was dead, wounded or captured. An Army communique issued in La Paz reported a fight between soldiers and guerrillas in the mountains and added: "The rebels put up desperate resistance and suffered five casualties, among them being presumably Ernesto Che Guevara." Some military sources said Guevara was mortally wounded and talked to his captors before he died.

Argentine-born, Guevara, 39, was said to have been killed in the leftist revolt in the Dominican Republic in 1965.

Later he was reported captured in Peru. Another report said he was hiding out in Argentina. After the Bolivian Army got what it was convinced was evidence he was leading a guerrilla movement in Bolivia, it had to deny a report September 26 that he had been killed.

The area of the clash yesterday

was near Vallegrande, about 300 miles southeast of La Paz. The communique put the scene at 4 miles northwest of the nearby town of Higuera.

The Army suffered four killed and four wounded in the fighting, said the communique, which reported that "operations continue in the Higuera zone."

Press reports from Vallegrande said the fighting had begun at about 1 P.M. and raged for about five or six hours. These accounts said that two of the guerrillas were wounded and if Guevara was not killed, he might be one of the wounded.

Two-Week Search

The Bolivian Army has been pressing a search for Guevara near Vallegrande for two weeks, convinced that if he were killed or captured the guerrilla movement would collapse. The guerrillas began active operations in Bolivia seven months ago.

Guevara was believed sighted in the Vallegrande area ten days ago. Depositions of two Bolivian guerrillas captured last week said Guevara was sick and was moving about on a mule.

Army sources said Guevara suffered from arthritis and asthma. They asserted Guevara and his people were feeling dispirited after suffering heavy casualties in a clash two weeks ago.