

Guerrilla Warfare Study Guide

Guerrilla Warfare by Che Guevara

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Contents

[Guerrilla Warfare Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....3](#)

[Chapter 1 General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare \(1. Essence of Guerilla Warfare, 2. Guerilla Strategy, 3. Guerilla Tactics\).....4](#)

[Chapter 1 General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare \(4. Warfare on Favorable Ground, 5. Warfare on Unfavorable Ground, 6. Suburban Warfare\).....5](#)

[Chapter 2 The Guerilla Band \(1. The guerilla fighter as social reformer, 2. The Guerilla fighter as combatant\).....7](#)

[Chapter 2 The Guerilla Band \(3 Organization of a Guerilla Band, 4 The Combat, 5 Beginning, Development, and end of a Guerilla War\).....8](#)

[Chapter 3 Organization of the Guerilla Front \(1 Supply, 2 Civil Organization, 3 The Role of Women, 4 Medical Problem, 5 Sabotage\).....10](#)

[Chapter 3 Organization of the Guerilla Front \(6 War Industry, 7 Propaganda, 8 Intelligence, 9 Training and Indoctrination, 10 the Organizational Structure of the Army of a Revolutionary Movement\).....12](#)

[Appendices \(1 Organization in Secret of the First Guerilla Band, 2 the defense of power that has been won\).....14](#)

[Epilogue \(Analysis of the Cuban Situation, its present and future\).....15](#)

[Characters.....16](#)

[Objects/Places.....19](#)

[Themes.....21](#)

[Style.....23](#)

[Quotes.....25](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....26](#)



Plot Summary

Guerilla Warfare is a manual written by Ernesto "Che" Guevara to instruct the reader in the proper method to wage a guerilla war against a non-communist regime. Che discusses all of the main aspects of guerilla warfare in this text and tries to take his experience in Cuba and then to generalize from that experience to gather general principles that he can impart to the would-be revolutionary.

The book is divided into three chapters each with several sub-sections. The first chapter focuses on the general principles of guerilla warfare including an abstract discussion of the social role of the guerilla fighter and the role he plays in the global communist revolution. In this chapter Che discusses the general strategies and tactics that the guerilla will employ as well as a discussion of the types of territory that will be more or less favorable to conduct guerilla war.

Chapter 2 focuses on the organization and structure of the guerilla band itself. An important idea in this chapter and throughout the entire book is the idea of the guerilla as a social reformer who takes the subjective conditions of revolution and then objectifies them through his action. The proper role of doctors, women, and training is discussed in this chapter. Also discussed are some technical details about how to make guerilla camps and how to convert shotguns in to Molotov Cocktail launchers.

Chapter 3 deals with the organization of the guerilla war along its primary front against the enemy. The basic guerilla strategy is to progressively move further and further out from the guerilla's natural base, converting captured zones into new home bases. To this end, the guerilla must concentrate on indoctrinating the peasant population in the right way to gain support for the revolutionary cause. Other important topics discussed in this chapter include the proper techniques and goals of sabotage and the use and importance of propaganda. Towards the end of the chapter, the organization of the guerilla army itself is also discussed.

In the appendices, Che deals with the problem of organizing a guerilla band at the beginning of the revolution and the opposite problem of defending the revolutionary government once power has been achieved by the guerilla war. The first problem requires absolute secrecy and the organization of a small nucleus or cell of men that can then transition into a guerilla army. The second problem involves the consolidation of power and the defense of revolutionary institutions against counter-revolutionary forces. The key at the outset of the defense of the revolution is to eliminate and overhaul all of the old institutions of the previous regime, most importantly the old army. In the Epilogue, Che describes how the Cuban revolutionary forces did seize power and how they began to reform the institutions of Cuban society. The book ends with a kind of call to arms to other Latin American revolutionaries asking them to join the revolutionary struggle.



Chapter 1 General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare (1. Essence of Guerilla Warfare, 2. Guerilla Strategy, 3. Guerilla Tactics)

Chapter 1 General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare (1. Essence of Guerilla Warfare, 2. Guerilla Strategy, 3. Guerilla Tactics) Summary and Analysis

Che begins Guerilla Warfare by claiming that the principles that he will describe in the book are the same principles that allowed the Cuban revolutionaries that he led defeat the Batista regime in Cuba. He gives three lessons of Guerilla warfare: 1) partisans supported by the people can defeat the regular army 2) Guerilla warfare can create the conditions of the revolution and 3) In Latin American, the revolution should occur in the countryside. The first two lessons are meant to be a challenge to what Che calls the "pseudo-revolutionary" parties that wait for the conditions of revolution to arise rather than creating the revolution themselves. In this way, Che believes that the once the civil government has lost its legitimacy, a guerilla force can take the subjective conditions of the revolution and make them objective in actual revolutionary struggle. The guerilla fighter is a kind of reformer who directly fights the agents of unjust institutions. But, as Che shows, the guerilla must always be on the side of the people. Otherwise he will be no better than a common bandit. To maintain the support of the people in the countryside, the guerilla will advocate for agrarian reform, toward giving ownership of the land to those that farm it. The guerilla, for Che takes theory and turns it into reality.

The strategy of a guerilla fighter is to keep himself and his men from being destroyed while harassing and ultimately overwhelming the enemy forces. Over time, the guerilla will reduce the enemies' will and numbers while drawing more and more support from the people in the countryside until the guerilla can form an army large enough to deliver the final blow to the enemy. Sabotage, indoctrination of the people of the countryside, and constant movement are the strategic tools of the Guerilla army, ultimately the final goal is victory of the enemy army.

The tactics of a guerilla force are the practical methods of achieving the overall strategy. The main advantage of a guerilla force over a conventional force is its mobility and flexibility. The guerilla uses this advantage to encircle the enemy force while constantly retreating to avoid encirclement itself. In this way, the guerilla force can conserve on ammunition and casualties while inflicting losses on the enemy and reducing overall enemy morale. The guerilla should also, whenever possible, disrupt enemy transportation and use the technique of sabotage to disrupt and destroy enemy supplies and headquarters. The guerilla should also, since they have no way of taking prisoners either set free any whom they capture or inflict revolutionary justice on them, though their justice should not be so harsh as to turn the population against them.



Chapter 1 General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare (4. Warfare on Favorable Ground, 5. Warfare on Unfavorable Ground, 6. Suburban Warfare)

Chapter 1 General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare (4. Warfare on Favorable Ground, 5. Warfare on Unfavorable Ground, 6. Suburban Warfare) Summary and Analysis

Section 4 of Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the favorable territory that the guerilla may be forced to fight on, including deserts, mountains, or in swamps. Whatever the type of terrain, though, Guevara maintains that the tactics of the guerilla should never change, only adapt to the particular type of terrain. In some types of especially harsh terrain, the guerilla will be able to engage the enemy longer because the terrain can enhance the natural mobility of the guerilla while making it harder for the enemy to maneuver. As always, ammunition is a concern and the guerilla must be careful not to put him in the position where, in defending his position, he will expend too much ammunition. Despite the advantages that a guerilla may find in rough terrain, he must always be careful to maintain good communication so that he can supply himself with food and ammunition. Guevara advises that the guerilla also set up the capability to repair their own clothing and shoes as well as the ability to make their own gunpowder.

Section 5 of Chapter 1 deals with warfare on unfavorable ground. On land that is not favorable to guerilla warfare, namely land that lacks hills and forests, guerrilla operations will need to be reduced in number. Most guerilla strikes will need to occur at night and must be made quickly so that the enemy does not have time to effectively retaliate. The type and times of operations needs to vary so as to confuse the enemy. As always, ammunition is a problem and operations should never be undertaken unless there is a high probability that the guerilla can capture enough ammunition from the enemy to replace the stores lost in combat. In many areas, the guerilla cannot rely on the help of the peasants because reprisal from the state are often so violent that their loyalty cannot be assured. The guerilla can only settle in land that most men would not settle in and hence the best areas of the countryside are often off limits to the guerilla. Wherever the guerilla band does operate, however, one of its goal should be constant indoctrination and loyalty of the population around it.

Section 6 of Chapter 1 deals with Suburban warfare. Suburban guerillas will never arise on their own but need to be cultivated and commanded by guerilla bands in the countryside. The suburban band is effectively operating in extremely unfavorable



ground and should not be larger than a couple of men. These groups should only carry out limited operations lest the larger army be able to ferret them out for reprisals. The suburban guerilla should concentrate on nocturnal sabotage and avoid outright combat whenever possible. The suburban guerilla, although limited in number, is extremely important and as early as possible, suburban guerillas bands should be set up.



Chapter 2 The Guerilla Band (1. The guerilla fighter as social reformer, 2. The Guerilla fighter as combatant)

Chapter 2 The Guerilla Band (1. The guerilla fighter as social reformer, 2. The Guerilla fighter as combatant) Summary and Analysis

Section 1 of chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the guerilla fighter as a kind of social reformer. He admits that even in many underdeveloped countries, the city dwellers tend to be fairly content with their lot. It is in the countryside, where peasants claw out a subsistence living from land that they, for the most part, do not own, where the guerilla will find his most enthusiastic recruits. The guerilla carries the banner of agrarian reform to the countryside where he will, most likely find a welcome audience. The guerilla must be completely dedicated to his cause and realize that the support of the peasants is always questionable. Therefore, the guerilla should seek to maintain absolute discipline at every time and not to act in any way that would upset the peasants. As the war progresses the guerilla must aid the poor and abuse the rich as much as possible, seeking to help the peasant in any way that is possible. The revolutionary forces should, whenever possible seize the lands and property of those opposed to the revolution and distribute the goods from that property to the guerilla forces and the peasants. The guerilla fighter must always be conscious of his role as a social reformer and as a defender of the people and agent of the revolution. Without this revolutionary and ideological role, the guerilla becomes nothing more than a bandit and will lose the support of the people.

Section 2 of Chapter 2 deals with the guerilla fighter as a combatant. Ideally the guerilla fighter will be an inhabitant of the area where he fights. This will allow him to use his local knowledge of the area and utilize any friendships that he may have in the area. He primarily operates at night and because of this, the guerilla must be able to move through the countryside at night quickly without being noticed. Captured or wounded enemies should be treated with respect unless they are dedicated counterrevolutionaries in which case they must be killed. The guerilla must always act in the spirit of adaptability. In war, situations change dramatically from moment to moment and the guerilla must always be prepared to change with the circumstances. Because of the physical and mental demands of the guerilla, he must be rugged and preferably of young, peasant stock. The guerilla must take everything he needs with him from place to place and hence will need to be strong and possess great endurance. Even if the guerilla possesses the requisite skills and physical qualities, he will need an ideal to keep him motivated and to endure the hardships that await him. The ideal will vary depending on who the combatant is, but in every case the revolutionary ideals should be clear in the guerilla's mind.



Chapter 2 The Guerilla Band (3 Organization of a Guerilla Band, 4 The Combat, 5 Beginning, Development, and end of a Guerilla War)

Chapter 2 The Guerilla Band (3 Organization of a Guerilla Band, 4 The Combat, 5 Beginning, Development, and end of a Guerilla War) Summary and Analysis

Section 3 discusses the organization of a guerilla band. A guerilla army is organized into units of columns. A column is an organization of no more than 150 men, but not less than 100. The column is commanded by a commandante, while a captain will command smaller groups of about 40 or 50 men. The Captain commands a platoon that is further subdivided into squads of 10-12 men. The squad is led by a lieutenant and is the primary organizational unit of the guerilla band. Food and tobacco, as well as other supplies should be distributed so as to maintain the cohesiveness of the squad and so as not to create any divisions. Each squad and the members of each squad carry all of their equipment with them. Their primary equipment, aside from their weapon is a hammock and a nylon roof as well as some basic cooking utensils and a change of pants. Each unit, be it a column, platoon, or squad needs to set up guards whenever it is encamped, when moving, the squads and platoons should be aware of the position of each other and avoid getting into a position where they will be forced to fire on their compatriots. Promotion within the band should reward discipline and bravery and the band should always be aware that their behavior is being watched and judged by the peasants; hence they should observe strict discipline in their dealings with the peasants.

Section 4 of Chapter 2 deals with Combat. Although the actual time spend in combat is much less than the time spent marching or camping, combat is the focus of the guerilla's life. Combat should only be engaged when the possibility of success is ensured. The main tactic of the guerilla is encirclement. He should always make the enemy feel as if he is encircled and this technique will be more effective at night. The guerilla can attack from all sides sending the enemy column into disorder and confusion. This technique economizes on ammunition and men. The guerilla must be careful to defend roads and other avenues of reinforcement so that his band will not be encircled. Trenches can be dug to strand tanks and other vehicles and, whenever possible, mines should be laid in the road. The guerilla is always in need of ammunition and care should be taken to always conserve ammunition whenever possible.



Section 5 of Chapter 2 deals with the progression of the guerilla war from beginning to eventual end. The guerilla war begins with a small group of men, intellectuals dedicated to the revolution and dispossessed peasants who, with little contact with locals, begins to lead high profile attacks on the regime. Once the group's fame grows, they are able to recruit and receive support from local peasants. As the band grows, they must seek out more and more supplies and attempt to create suburban groups that can capture supplies and increase disruption of the regime through sabotage. The war should proceed zone by zone. As each zone is captured, the band should grow and proceed into neighboring zones, making it more and more difficult for the enemy to operate in the countryside. Once the guerilla band grows large enough, open battle with the enemy regime must be sought so that final victory can be achieved.



Chapter 3 Organization of the Guerilla Front (1 Supply, 2 Civil Organization, 3 The Role of Women, 4 Medical Problem, 5 Sabotage)

Chapter 3 Organization of the Guerilla Front (1 Supply, 2 Civil Organization, 3 The Role of Women, 4 Medical Problem, 5 Sabotage) Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3 Section 1 begins with a discussion of the creation and maintenance of a good supply system. The lines of supply will become more developed and complicated as the zone of operation increases. Supplies should always be taken from counterrevolutionaries, but with friends of the revolution, supplies should always be paid for either in currency or in bonds that will be paid back at the end of the war. If there are a large number of volunteers, more than is needed for fighting, some can begin to grow food and procure clothing in occupied zones. Supply lines are essential to the operation of a guerilla band and as the occupied zone increases, so to should the complexity of the supply line increase.

Section 2 of Chapter 3 discusses the organization of the external and internal organization of the civil wing of the guerilla movement. The internal civil organization is responsible for raising supplies and taxes as well as running propaganda operations. The army ultimately controls both of these duties, but their operation may need to be carried out by the civil wing. When the army has developed extensive zones of operation, a council of justice to carry out revolutionary law becomes important. It is also necessary to make sure that the health of the controlled zones remains good. Clean water and some medical personal are essential. The external branch of the revolution must function in secret but carries out many of the same functions, the most important being propaganda and sabotage.

Section 3 of Chapter 3 deals with the role of women in guerilla warfare. Guerilla bands have in the past underutilized women and Che makes it clear the important role that women can play. Besides serving as combatants, women are indispensable for cooking good meals and for transporting messages and supplies in areas where men would arouse suspicion. Women are also instrumental in organizing schools to teach soldiers and peasants how to read and to convey the revolutionary doctrine.

Section 4 of Chapter 3 deals explicitly with the medical problems that the guerilla band is likely to face. In the early phases of the revolution the best that the guerilla can hope for is a doctor to accompany them with medicine to deal with serious wounds. Later, actual encampments with more supplies and facilities can be established and,



eventually actual hospitals. Wherever possible, due care should be given to train and maintain doctors and nurses. Medicine should be stolen from the enemy and procured from the Red Cross whenever possible.

Section 5 of Chapter 3 involves the use of sabotage. Sabotage is the direct, targeted attack on key resources meant to disable and disorient the enemy. This is different from the indiscriminate use of violence against the population, which is known as terrorism. Terrorism is, according to Che, counterproductive and should be avoided. Strategic sabotage is used to disrupt and disable the communication systems of the enemy as well as to disable key industries. Tactical sabotage is used to disable targets in the direct zone of combat including bridges and roads.



Chapter 3 Organization of the Guerilla Front (6 War Industry, 7 Propaganda, 8 Intelligence, 9 Training and Indoctrination, 10 the Organizational Structure of the Army of a Revolutionary Movement)

Chapter 3 Organization of the Guerilla Front (6 War Industry, 7 Propaganda, 8 Intelligence, 9 Training and Indoctrination, 10 the Organizational Structure of the Army of a Revolutionary Movement) Summary and Analysis

Section 6 of Chapter 3 deals with the development and support of industries within the guerilla zone that can supply the guerilla army with necessary material. The two fundamental industries that are needed are shoe manufacturers and repairs and arms making. Shoes are absolutely essential to the guerilla as are proper weapons and ammunition. Other industries that are needed include iron and steel plants as well as mine manufacturers. These are hard to maintain, however, and are easily destroyed by the enemy unless they are well hidden.

Section 7 of Chapter 3 deals with a subject already hinted at in another section, propaganda. There are two kinds of propaganda that should be controlled by one administrator: propaganda from inside the army and propaganda from the larger society. External propaganda involves the use newspapers, pamphlets, and other outlets of mass communication. Revolutionary ideals and plans must be communicated through this device. The army itself for consumption inside the guerilla-controlled zone prepares internal propaganda. This propaganda provides useful information for the peasant population and stories to harden it against the enemy.

Section 8 of Chapter 3 deals with Intelligence. Intelligence is absolutely essential to the successful operation of a guerilla campaign. It is important for the guerilla leader to gather intelligence from the peasants and also from women who can infiltrate the enemy base or organization. The peasants are apt to exaggerate the size of the enemy however, so it is often important and prudent to check up on their accounts.

Section 9 of Chapter 3 deals with training and indoctrination. At the early stages of the guerilla war, training will primarily consist in direct learning from other soldiers while



living in the guerilla camp. Later, after substantial territories have been cleared, proper schools for recruits should be formed to train larger numbers of soldiers. Training must begin with marksmanship. Ammunition is always at a premium so the ability to hit a target without expending more ammunition than necessary is an important skill. Aside from training in the basic skills of soldiering, the maximum amount of time should be spent on indoctrination in revolutionary thought. Those recruits that are illiterate must be taught to read so that they can read and understand revolutionary material.

Section 10 of Chapter 3 deals with the organizational structure of the revolutionary army. As we have already seen, the revolutionary guerilla army is not merely a fighting force but an agent of the world to come after the revolution. The revolutionary army within its zone performs all medical, educational, and political services. The army is led by a commandante who names the commanders of each zone and who in turn manage the commanders of the columns in their zone. Within each column, captains head up squads and, under them, lieutenants lead platoons. Within the army, violations of discipline must be punished fairly but harshly. Revolutionary morale and discipline are often strong, but they will not remain so if care is not taken to preserve discipline through punishment.



Appendices (1 Organization in Secret of the First Guerilla Band, 2 the defense of power that has been won)

Appendices (1 Organization in Secret of the First Guerilla Band, 2 the defense of power that has been won) Summary and Analysis

The first appendix deals with the initial organization of the secret guerilla army. The key to the beginning of a successful revolutionary movement involves the use of secrecy and planning at the initial stages. Some person of prestige who can generate interest and dedication from new recruits should lead the revolution. Early on, it may be difficult to screen new recruits, though all efforts should be made to, eventually, determine their background to make sure they are not agents of the enemy. Information should be jealously guarded within the organization and no one should be given more information than is absolutely essential for him or her to do their job. While the number of men in the struggle will vary from place to place, it is possible to start an active movement with as little as 30 or 50 men. Headquarters should shift locations and the leader should only appear at random times. Arms should be stored in dispersed locations in case one cache is captured others will remain. Training will consist in going on long, hard marches and eventually becoming more and more fit. Another important part of the training at this stage as at later stages is the training of teachers who will train later troops. The key is to economize on the time necessary to train a new recruit. Having a dedicated group that is specialized in training new recruits will become more and more effective at training over time.

Section 2 of the Appendix deals with defending power once it has been won by the revolutionary army. Victory will be declared once the old government has been completely eliminated along with the institutions that supported it. First the entire military of the old regime must be dismantled. The revolutionary army is fundamentally different from the army of the old regime and the revolution will, never be secure so long as the old army is still intact. The revolutionary army should, however, begin to grow and to train and indoctrinate new members to prepare for a defensive war against counter-revolutionary forces from inside of the country or from abroad. Over time, the new army can be diversified and can grow in complexity but the emphasis should always be on revolutionary indoctrination and discipline.



Epilogue (Analysis of the Cuban Situation, its present and future)

Epilogue (Analysis of the Cuban Situation, its present and future) Summary and Analysis

The epilogue begins with a recounting of the last year of the Cuban revolution and its aftermath. Once in control, Fidel and his government reformed rent laws and the ownership of telephone services, this created anger among those who had benefited from the previous regime and began to create a newly formed group of anticommunist's within the society. It was the agrarian reform act, however that really created unrest among the remnants of the old regime. The agrarian reform dispossessed the old landowners and eliminated the rent system that was so common under the old regime. In addition to reforming land ownership, the Cuban communist regime set up state run stores to buy produce at a just price. The reform respected no previous laws or claims of rights and was dedicated only to the rectification of the system of land ownership in Cuba. The agrarian reform, though, was only one among many different reforms that the revolution ushered in. Much of the reform was focused on attacking and removing foreign monopolies from operating on Cuban soil. The role of foreign monopolies in Cuba is compared to the old colonial governments of European states. In the future, according to Che, underdeveloped people will rely on the solidarity they gain from their economic and social circumstances to overthrow the last vestiges of colonialism and monopoly capitalism. Despite the danger and the wrath that the Cuban revolution faces from the forces of monopoly capitalism primarily centered in America, the Cuban people and the revolutionary army will be able to defend Cuba against any aggressors. Above all dedication must be preserved to the collective ends of the revolution and the revolutionary law. So long as the people remain dedicated to the ideals of the revolution, so Che argues, no outside force can threaten the revolution.



Characters

Che Guevara

Ernesto "Che" Guevara was an Argentine medical student who, after traveling through Latin America and seeing the poverty and oppression everywhere around him, became a communist revolutionary. In Mexico, he met Fidel and Raul Castro whom he joined in an attempt to overthrow the Cuban government led by Batista. Che was Fidel Castro's chief lieutenant and was in charge of the guerilla operations during the Cuban revolution. After Che and his forces successfully defeated Batista and his American supported regime, Che became the head of the department of agriculture, leading vast agricultural and land reforms in Cuba. Che also took over the economy in general and instituted several reforms intending to move away from capitalist modes of production. Instead of working for material incentives, Che would create the "new man" who would derive satisfaction directly from working for the society. Che led by example working tirelessly, but at the same time economic output began to drop. The "new man" Che hoped to create was not materializing. During this time, Che was made an honorary Cuban citizen and Che worked to gain support and solidarity from other communist regimes such as the Soviet Union and Mao's China.

Che eventually went to Congo to lead a group of Cuban guerillas to back a communist faction in that country's civil war. After the failure of this war, Che took his insurgency to Bolivia where he was eventually captured by counter-revolutionaries and killed. Che wrote several books, including the Motorcycle Diaries and Guerilla Warfare often advocating a new form of Marxism aimed at the concerns and struggles of the peasant farmer so common in the undeveloped world.

Fidel Castro

Fidel Castro is the leader of Communist Cuba and along with his brother Raul and Che Guevara, he led the successful communist revolution that overthrew the Batista regime. His revolutionary activities began while he was a student in Havana and culminated in a failed act of sabotage that led to this arrest. He was then deported to Mexico where he met with other revolutionaries sympathetic to his cause. In Mexico he met Che and began to train forces that would later invade Cuba and begin a guerilla war in the hills. This movement became known as the 26th of July movement and though Castro's movement had a definite Cuban nationalist component, key members of the movement, including Che Guevara, were not Cuban. In 1956, the armed group landed in Cuba and made an encampment in the Sierra Maestra mountains, which would serve as their home base for the next several years while they waged war against the Batista regime. The guerilla movement led by Che continued to gain ground until 1958 when the movement was strong enough to engage the armies of Batista in a decisive battle. The battle of Yaguajay would be the decisive battle that would completely destroy the Batista



army. In 1959, Castro took power in Havana after having completely destroyed the Batista regime.

After Castro took power, he began to alienate the non-communist elements of the government while he also seized industry and land from what he perceived to be enemies of the revolution. He suspended elections and allowed the communist party to take complete control of the government. Castro ruled as dictator of Cuba until 2006 when ailing health led him to give power over to his brother Raul.

Batista Fulgencio

Batista was the president and military leader of Cuba on and off from 1933-1959. His regime was closely allied with the United States who, in an abortive attempt at the Bay of Pigs, attempted to support the Bastitan regime against Castro and his forces. His regime was eventually overthrown, largely due to the guerilla war waged by Che and Castro, and replaced by a communist regime led by Castro.

The Guerilla

The guerilla is the revolutionary fighter who lives in the guerilla camps and fights the revolutionary war against the old regime. The guerilla must live in the countryside, constantly under threat from the agents of the old regime. He must learn to deal with hardships of the land and be an effective combatant when battle commences.

The suburban Guerilla

The suburban guerilla is different from the typical guerilla in that they live in or near the city and must, therefore operate in complete secrecy. Their main goals involve the dissemination of propaganda as well as committing various acts of sabotage.

The peasants

The peasants and other inhabitants of the countryside must be won over to the revolutionary cause before there can be any hope of victory for the revolutionary forces. The best way to win over the peasants is to advocate for land reform and to maintain absolute discipline.

The vanguard

The vanguard can either refer to the leaders of the revolution generally or the specific units that lead an attack. In either case, the vanguard is responsible leading and directing the attack.



Commandante

The comandante is the head commander of a guerilla column and will have up to 150 men under his command as well as several captains and lieutenants under him.

The enemy

For Che, the enemy includes the forces of all non-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary forces. In the Cuban case, this was the Batista regime, but in principle, it can refer to any opponent of the revolution.

Raul Castro

Raul Castro is Fidel Castro's brother. He was instrumental in the early revolution and has maintained an active role in the Cuban government ever since. In 2006, citing health problems, Fidel handed over direct control of the Cuban state to Raul.



Objects/Places

Armaments

Armaments are the tools that the guerilla uses in fighting. In most cases this involves guns and knives.

Strategy

Strategy is composed of the global goals of armed conflict. For the guerilla, the end goal of strategy is complete victory and the overthrow of the current regime.

Tactics

Tactics are the means of achieving the goals of strategy. Tactics involve actual battlefield techniques rather than the more general goals and guidelines of strategy.

M-1 Garand

The Garand is an American rifle that was popular in WWII and Korea and because of its simple components and reliable construction, popular among guerilla bands.

Bazooka

The Bazooka is a shoulder mounted rocket launcher, extremely effective as an anti-tank weapon.

Sentinel

A Sentinel is a guard often posted around the guerilla camp to notify sleeping troops of any kind of breach in the camp's perimeter.

Hammock

A hammock is a simple sleeping device that is strung between two trees with a man sleeping in the middle. Useful in the jungle because it keeps the guerilla off the wet jungle floor.



Parapet

This is a kind of wall or roof that can shelter men in a defensive position during a firefight.

Suicide Platoon

A platoon in the guerilla column is made up of volunteers of the highest valor and dedication. Its purpose is to reinforce the vanguard unit at the head of the attack if it should lose ground.

Molotov Cocktail

This is a weapon made from a sealed container with three parts of kerosene to one part of motor oil ignited with a cloth soaked in kerosene. The weapon is thrown and spreads fire where it lands.

Column

A guerilla band is made up of columns of between 100-150 men led by a commandante.

Platoon

Guerilla Columns are composed of platoons of around 50 men led by a captain.

Squad

Guerilla Platoons are made up of squads of no more than 12 men led by lieutenants.



Themes

Guerilla as social reformer

One of the key themes that run through all of Che's work on guerilla warfare is the need for the guerilla fighter to be both a combatant and a social reformer. This idea is bound up with the realities of actual guerilla warfare as well as with Che's unique ideas about communist revolution. According to traditional Marxists-Leninist theory, communist revolution can only occur in societies that have developed a substantial market economy, enough to generate a large urban working class. This large urban working class will, because of certain necessities of history will eventually become so oppressed that they will instigate a revolution. Of course, underdeveloped societies like Cuba do not have large working class populations so the revolution must be led by a vanguard of dedicated revolutionaries and guerilla warriors who will create the conditions for revolution. To this end, Che advocates training the peasantry and other workers in revolutionary ideology and, crucially, to teach reading so that the peasantry can ingest revolutionary propaganda. The people may not immediately take to the revolution, but the guerilla warrior, in the zones where he operates, will provide necessary educational, medical, and other services that will eventually help to get the peasantry on their side. In some sense, Che's ideal here is to have the guerilla army create a socialist state in the areas that they control to emphasize the benefits and help indoctrinate the population in the goals of communist revolution. Rather than just teaching the people, the guerilla as social reformer will do part of the positive good that the revolution is meant to eventually accomplish.

The objective and subjective circumstances

In traditional Marxist theory, revolution is the end result of a historical process that begins with feudal land ownership and moves through stages of capitalism until the condition of the urban working class have become so bad that they will overthrow the capitalist system in favor of communism. The conditions of the working class and the stage of development of the capitalist economy are considered the objective conditions that will lead to the revolution. Che, however, noticed a problem with this theory. In a country like Cuba, capitalism had not advanced very far and had yet to develop a large working class. Due to this, it looked like the objective conditions for revolution were rather weak and hence revolution would be premature. One of Che's key insights, an insight that he communicates in *Guerilla Warfare*, is that the subjective conditions of the revolution, that is, the beliefs and desires of actual revolutionaries can be transformed into objective conditions. One way this can be accomplished is by championing agrarian reform. Che's guerilla army is not only fighting the Batista regime it is also an actual agent of social change in the sense that in the zones it controls it actually creates the objective conditions for the revolution by way of the desire for agrarian reform. This innovation of Che's allowed him to create a communist doctrine that could be exported to the underdeveloped world. Advanced capitalism was no longer considered a



precondition of the Marxist revolution. This allowed the underdeveloped world to combine anti-colonial struggles with communist revolution.

The role of propaganda

As Che makes clear throughout *Guerilla Warfare*, propaganda is a key tool and objective of the guerilla war. The guerilla war against the old regime is not only or even primarily a war against the military forces of the old regime but rather a war for minds. No matter how successful the guerilla army is on the battlefield, if they do not win the hearts and minds of the people, they will never be able to find a safe place to hide or adequate supplies. Furthermore, if the enemy really is a corrupt regime, they may be able to turn soldiers in the enemy military and government over to the revolutionary cause. Central to the goal of winning the minds of the population through propaganda is the need for literacy. The revolutionary army must teach the peasants and other members of the country to read whenever possible so that they can absorb the revolutionary message through propaganda. This matches up with Che's notion of the Guerilla as a social reformer and the need to transform the subjective conditions of revolution into objective conditions. If the people do not believe in the revolutionary message, they will not support the troops and all will be lost, the first goal of the revolutionary army, then, aside from direct defense should be to develop effective means of disseminating propaganda. This can be done within and outside of the revolutionary zone and while the old regime will often fight to defend the privilege of one or two men, the revolution with its weapon of propaganda can gain legitimacy from its revolutionary ideals.



Style

Perspective

Guerilla Warfare is primarily written as a manual for starting and conducting a guerilla war. Hence its perspective is from the point of view of Che trying to communicate key ideas to a student who wants to learn the art of guerilla war. Che uses examples from the Cuban situation, with which he is most familiar, but whenever possible, Che attempts to generalize his lesson. Che writes with the assumption that the communist revolution is the sensible and moral path for the underdeveloped world so there is little actual discussion of the ideals or the rightness of the revolution aside from his argument that agrarian reform is a key goal of the revolution. The perspective often tends to be somewhat technical and he describes such tasks as the construction of a hammock or the training of troops for marksmanship in great detail. Che writes from the point of view of one who has completed a successful revolution and in the epilogue and appendices he even goes so far as to explain how to successfully defend the revolution against counterrevolutionary forces once the guerilla army has overthrown the forces of the old regime. Che is matter of fact and he does not dwell on moral or ethical concerns except insofar as they promote or hinder the revolutionary cause. This is not uncommon. However, Che's perspective in this work is absolutely determined and unquestioning to the goals and inevitability of the revolution. His writing, although lacking in much style, is extremely powerful nonetheless.

Tone

As was already mentioned, Guerilla Warfare is a work that is short on any kind of literary flare. This work is essentially both a manual for guerilla warfare and a kind of analytical memoir of Che's time as a guerilla. Though the work is not exactly personal, one can gather a lot from the stories that Che tells and the particular points that he seeks to highlight. His tone is to the point and technical. He never dwells, except in the epilogue, on rhetoric or defenses of the revolutionary aims. Instead, his main goal is to impart the lessons he learned from his war against the Batista regime. He constantly cautions the reader that his knowledge is about the Cuban situation, but suggests that what worked in Cuba will likely work in other Latin American countries as well. Che is a committed revolutionary and his dedication to the revolutionary cause and to the cause of Cuban communism comes out clearly throughout the text. He never seems to waver or question his devotion to this ideal and his discussions of sabotage, propaganda, and revolutionary justice gain power from his tone in this regard. Still, Che seems like a more idealistic proponent of revolution than some of his contemporaries might have been. He seems open to committing all kinds of acts in the name of the revolution and while, not reveling in them, he also doesn't seem to question their efficacy. Che's tone as a committed revolutionary adds a great deal of power and excitement to what would otherwise be a dry military manual.

Structure

Guerilla Warfare has an extremely simple and straightforward structure. The book is composed of three chapters. The first chapter deals with the general principles of guerilla warfare dealing with issues of guerilla strategy, tactics and how to decide on where to fight the guerilla war. Chapter 2 deals with the composition of the guerilla band and a general theme of this chapter involves the role of the guerilla fighter as a social reformer. The third chapter involves the organization of the guerilla front, basically, how to organize the guerilla war territorially. This last section also involves the administration of the land under guerilla control. The book also includes two appendices and an epilogue. The first appendix deals with the original creation and organization of the guerilla band. This is an essential component of any guerilla war and Che gives suggestions on how to form the revolutionary army. The second appendix deals with the opposite concern, namely how to defend revolutionary power once it is established. This section is also crucial because, though the guerilla army may have won the initial war against the old regime there may still be counterrevolutionary forces, either at home or abroad that seek to defeat the revolution. The epilogue is a long and involved analysis of the current situation in Cuba when Che was writing in the mid-sixties. Che describes many of the reforms that he and Castro implemented and the hard time they have had defending the revolution against counterrevolutionary forces from America and within Cuba.

Quotes

"The guerilla fighter is above all an agrarian revolutionary." (Chapter 1, pg. 51.)

"The guerilla fighter is the Jesuit of warfare" (Chapter 1, pg. 52.)

"The essential task of the guerilla fighter is to keep himself from being destroyed" (Chapter 1, pg. 55.)

"The guerilla fighter should be an ascetic" (Chapter 2, pg. 79.)

"Combat is the most important drama in the guerilla life" (Chapter 2, pg. 103.)

"Ammunition is the great problem of the guerilla fighter" (Chapter 2, pg. 110.)

"We offer and outline, not a bible" (Chapter 3, pg. 132.)

"Sabotage is one of the invaluable arms of a people that fights in guerilla form" (Chapter 3, pg. 139.)

"Sabotage has nothing to do with terrorism, terrorism and personal assaults are entirely different tactics" (Chapter 3, pg. 139.)

"Indoctrination should be carried out with a maximum dedication and for the maximum amount of time possible" (Chapter 3, pg. 151.)

"To the guerilla fighter, economy and utilization of ammunition down to the last bullet should be almost like religious tenets" (Appendix, pg. 159.)

"The claw of the imperial eagle is trimmed. Colonialism is dead or dying a natural death in all these places" (Epilogue, pg. 169.)



Topics for Discussion

Explain how the guerilla fighter is a social reformer.

Will Che's techniques only work for communist revolutionaries or are they generally applicable to any guerilla war? Why or why not?

Explain the difference between the subjective and objective conditions of the revolution.

In what way is Che's doctrine in line with orthodox Marxist-Leninism? In what ways is it different?

Che is often thought of as a romantic hero of the Cuban revolution. Does he come across as heroic in this work? Why or why not?

Explain Che's understanding of propaganda and its use in revolutionary guerilla war.

Explain the main strengths and weaknesses of a guerilla army as compared to a traditional army.