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CHARLESTON, S.C.
NEWS & COURIER

M-66,084

S-86,164

JUL 9 1967

Guevara Mystery Deepens

CPYRGHT

RIO DE JANEIRO (CNS) — Brazil's leftist press is scoffing at reports that "Che" Guevara is directing subversive guerrilla operations in neighboring Bolivia.

But the rest of the newspapers and military security agencies in Latin America's largest country are viewing the situation seriously.

Guevara, long - time sidekick to Premier Fidel Castro, disappeared from the Cuban scene more than two years ago. Castro has repeatedly stated that Guevara is working clandestinely on Communist guerrilla operations.

A number of Cuban refugees, on the other hand, have reported that Guevara was "eliminated" by Castro.

Brazil's left - wing daily, Ultima Hora, says that reports of Guevara's presence in Bolivia are akin to sightings of unidentified flying objects. The whole business is a plot by the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency's branch in Bolivia, says the newspaper.

But Brazil's military secret service, according to Jornal Do Brasil, has "been mobilized to stop Guevara from treading on Brazilian territory."

Guevara's presence in neighboring Bolivia has been affirmed by no less authorities than Bolivian President Rene Barrientos and Gen. Alfredo Ovando, chief of the armed forces.

Ovando has said that the Bolivian guerrilla movement is "of international character and does not have the simple purpose of a political change in Bolivia. The guerrillas have larger pretensions. They propose a political change in Latin America."

First reports on Guevara came from French journalist Regis Debray who was captured by the Bolivian military in the area where guerrillas were operating. Debray allegedly stated to Bolivian interrogators that he had seen Guevara and had spent several days with him last April.

"We know Guevara is not dead," said Barrientos.

Affirmations by Ovando and Barrientos cannot be dismissed lightly.

Ovando, in particular, is known for his candor and seriousness. Barrientos, former air force chief of staff, is also not given to flighty remarks. Both are dedicated anti - Communist military professionals.

Guevara, late last year and early in 1966, also was reported to have been in Uruguay, Southern Brazil, and Argentina, his home. Military and police officials in these countries made the disclosures, but they attracted little attention.

Probably no target in Latin America is as suitable for guerrilla activities as Bolivia. The landlocked, impoverished Andean nation has a history of political instability, leftist uprisings and peasant unrest.

Volatile student organizations, disgruntled politicians, well-armed tin miners and backward campesinos would all make easy prey for Guevara if he intends to enlist their support to overthrow Barrientos' shaky regime.

Ovando has stated Guevara will be caught soon. Only his capture would one of the most intriguing cloak-and-dagger mysteries of the decade.