

## “Che” Guevara



**Ernesto Rafael Guevara de la Serna** (1928-1967) was an Argentine physician and revolutionary who played a key role in the Cuban Revolution. He also served in the government of Cuba after the communist takeover before leaving Cuba to try and stir up rebellions in Africa and South America. He was captured and executed by Bolivian security forces in 1967. Today, he is considered by many to be a symbol of rebellion and idealism, while others see him as a murderer.

### Early Life

Ernesto was born into a middle class family in Rosario, Argentina. His family was somewhat aristocratic and could trace their lineage to the early days of Argentine settlement. The family moved around a great deal while Ernesto was young. He developed severe asthma early in life: the attacks were so bad that witnesses were occasionally scared for his life. He was determined to overcome his ailment, however, and was very active in his youth, playing rugby, swimming and doing other physical activities. He also received an excellent education.

### Medicine

In 1947 Ernesto moved to Buenos Aires to care for his elderly grandmother. She died shortly thereafter and he began medical school: some believe that he was driven to study medicine because of his inability to save his grandmother. He was a believer in the human side of medicine: that a patient's state of mind is as important as the medicine he or she is given. He remained very close to his mother and stayed fit through exercise, although his asthma continued to plague him. He decided to take a vacation and put his studies on hold.

### The Motorcycle Diaries

At the end of 1951, Ernesto set off with his good friend **Alberto Granado** on a trip north through South America. For the first part of the trip, they had a Norton motorcycle, but it was in poor repair and had to be abandoned in Santiago. They traveled through Chile, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela, where they parted ways. Ernesto continued to Miami and returned to Argentina from there. Ernesto kept notes during his trip, which he subsequently made into a book named **The Motorcycle Diaries**. It was made into an award-winning movie in 2004. The trip showed him the poverty and misery all throughout Latin America and he wanted to do something about it, even if he did not know what.

## Legacy

**Che** Guevara had a huge impact on his world, not only as a major player in the Cuban Revolution, but also afterwards, when he tried to export the revolution to other nations. He achieved the martyrdom that he so desired, and in doing so became a larger-than-life figure.

**Che** is one of the most controversial figures of the 20th century. Many revere him, especially in Cuba, where his face is on the 3-peso note and every day schoolchildren vow to "*be like Che*" as part of a daily chant. Around the world, people wear t-shirts with his image on them, usually a famous photo taken of **Che** in Cuba by photographer *Alberto Korda* (more than one person has noted the irony of hundreds of capitalists making money selling a famous image of a communist). His fans believe that he stood for freedom from imperialism, idealism and a love for the common man, and that he died for his beliefs.

Many despise **Che**, however. They see him as a murderer for his time presiding over the execution of Batista supporters, criticize him as the representative of a failed communist ideology and deplore his handling of the Cuban economy.

There is some truth to both sides of this argument. **Che** did care deeply about the oppressed people of Latin America and he did give his life fighting for them. He was a pure idealist, and he acted on his beliefs, fighting in the field even when his asthma tortured him.

But **Che's** idealism was of the unbending variety. He believed that the way out of oppression for the starving masses of the world was to embrace a communist revolution just as Cuba had done. **Che** thought nothing of killing those who did not agree with him, and he thought nothing of spending the lives of his friends if it advanced the cause of the revolution.

His fervent idealism became a liability. In Bolivia, he was eventually betrayed by the peasants: the very people he had come to "rescue" from the evils of capitalism. They betrayed him because he never really connected with them. Had he tried harder, he would have realized that a Cuban-style revolution would never work in 1967 Bolivia, where conditions were fundamentally different than they had been in 1958 Cuba. He believed that he knew what was right for everyone, but never really bothered to ask if the people agreed with him. He believed in the inevitability of a communist world and was willing to ruthlessly eliminate anyone who did not.

Around the world, people love or hate **Che Guevara**: either way, they will not soon forget him.



**Che Guevara** – Su nombre verdadero es Ernesto Rafael Guevara de la Serna.

- 14, junio 1928 Nace en la ciudad de Rosario, fue el primer hijo de Ernesto Guevara Lynch y Celia de la Serna.
- 1946 – 1953 Estudiante de medicina en la Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires.
- 1950 Viaja en barco como parte de la tripulación. Viaja a Trinidad y Guiana.
- \* 1951 – 1952 Viaja por Latinoamérica con Alberto Granado. Visitan Chile, Perú, Colombia y Venezuela. Regresa de Venezuela a la Argentina en avión.
- 1953 Termina sus estudios en la universidad y se recibe.
- 1953 – 1954 Hace un segundo viaje por Latinoamérica. Visita Bolivia, Perú, Ecuador, Colombia, Panamá, Costa Rica y El Salvador. En Guatemala participa en la defensa del gobierno del presidente Arbenz. Después va a vivir en México.
- 1954 – 1956 Trabaja en México como doctor.
- 1955 Conoce a Fidel Castro, se hace miembro de su ejército, y participa en los preparativos de la expedición Granma.
- junio – agosto, 1956 Es encarcelado por ser miembro del ejército de Fidel. El 25 de noviembre, parte con Fidel del puerto de Tuxpan con 81 otros rebeldes encabezados por Fidel. Llegan a Cuba el 2 de diciembre.
- 1956 – 1959 Participa en la revolución de Cuba. Es herido dos veces.
- 9, febrero, 1959 Fidel Castro hace a Che un ciudadano de Cuba.
- mayo, 1960 Publica su libro sobre Guerrilla
- 1960 – 1965 Tiene unos puestos bastantes importantes en Cuba.
- 1966 - 1967 Va a Bolivia para participar en operaciones militares para ayudar a derrocar el gobierno.
- 9, octubre, 1967 Es asesinado en Bolivia.
- junio, 1968 Se publica la primera edición del diario.

