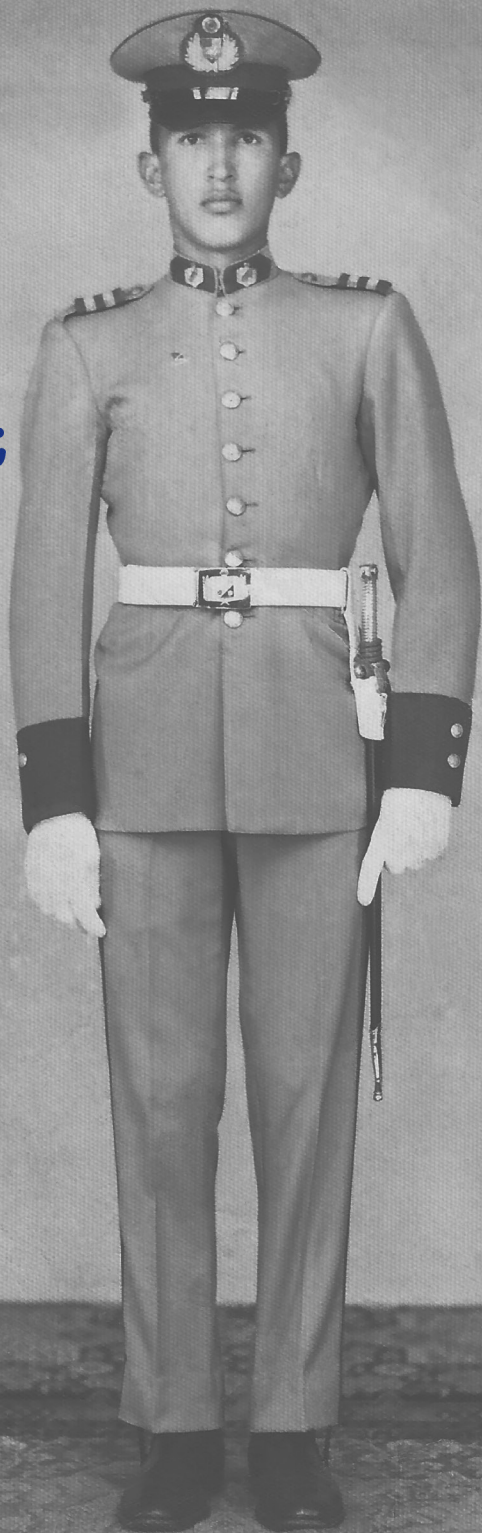


Hugo
Chavez
The
Journal
of a Cadet





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Eternal Commander Hugo Chavez Foundation

Hugo Chavez. The Journal of a Cadet

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Hugo Chavez

The Journal of a Cadet

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Introduction

The Eternal Commander Hugo Chavez Foundation, established in 2013, has the beautiful and important mission of preserving and promoting the historical memory and legacy of the Giant in order to instill in the hearts of future generations the values and principles that moved his authentic and humanist leadership premised on solidarity.

To get closer to our Commander and comprehend the roots of the Bolivarian Revolution, we put in the hands of the peoples of the world the first publication of the Foundation: Hugo Chavez, the Journal of a Cadet. This edition is the result of a transcript from the notes taken by our Barinas young man from March to September 1974. While part of this material had been read out and commented by the Commander many a time, the whole corpus had been never published.

This is an invitation to plunge in the heart and mind of a 19-year-old cadet; see ourselves reflected in the simplicity of this boy in the seventies and prefigure in his dreams, values and actions the leader who, some years later, would leave an indelible mark on the path of history.

Caracas, 2018

Foreword

I saw the kids with immense sadness, their big bellies, surely full of earthworms, tired of eating dirt, barefoot, naked... In such scene, I can feel the blood boiling in my veins, and I get convinced of the need to do something, whatever, for those folks.

SECOND LIEUTENANT HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS, JUNE 13, 1974

On August 8, 1971, few days after his 17th birthday, Hugo Chavez joined the Army Military Academy. There he remained until July 5, 1975, when he received the graduate's saber..

This journal, where Hugo speaks with himself; where he writes down his ideas, his experiences, his innermost feelings, refers to his experiences during his stay at the House of Blue Dreams. There, as it were, "everything started out" as Chavez used to say. There emerged and took form a substantial part of someone who turned out to be, two decades later, the historical leader of the Bolivarian Revolution.

In 1975, when Hugo accomplished his dream of graduating from the Military Academy, he finished seventh from among seventy-seven graduates, out of three hundred fifty boys who had enrolled in August 1971. He was awarded a Bachelor's Degree in Military Sciences and Arts, with a major in Land Engineering and field of expertise in Communication and Transmission Service.

It is worth noting that Hugo entered the Military Academy at the time when a new era began in the military studies in Venezuela. Up to 1971, students who had completed only three years of secondary education were conferred both a high school and military officer diploma following an anti-guerrilla training for two years. President of Venezuela Rafael Caldera undertook the implementation of the Venezuelan Military Comprehensive Educational Plan within the National Armed Forces starting in 1969-1970. As for the Army, the plan began in 1971. It was the second major reform of military studies in the 20th century. The first reform had been conducted by President Cipriano Castro in 1904.

The Andres Bello Study Program that resulted from this plan to train officers at a higher academic and cultural level, upended the entire military institution. Chavez formed part of the first class of such military university for high school graduates pursuing the Bachelor's Degree in Military Sciences and Arts. It marked a milestone between the old school and the new academy, certainly a major influence on the comprehensive education of Hugo and other members of his generation.

Lieutenant Colonel Jacinto Pérez Arcay, faculty member in the new Military Academy, had a major influence on Hugo throughout his life. Pérez Arcay and some other educators constantly preached students about moral and ethics, the code of honor of the Military Academy and democracy.

This journal, written by Hugo in 1974 as a third-year student at the Military Academy, remained unknown even for people like me who were very close to him and used to engage in discussions about a wide variety of topics and there were virtually no secrets among us. It was a pleasant

surprise to learn about its existence some years later, when Chavez himself commented on some passages, and be able to revisit each of the ideas, concerns and certainties expressed by our young brother at that time. I am deeply moved by them for I can feel, and the reader will agree with me, the expression of incredibly consistency in the thinking and commitment of our future Eternal Commander.

Second Lieutenant Hugo Chavez relates in these pages four significant times in his life as a student at the Military Academy in 1974: his participation in the XV Military Inter-Institute Games in March; a patrolling exercise in the states of Portuguesa and Lara, in June; a parachuting training course also in June, and the patrolling field time with would-be cadets at Guaicaipuro-Charavalle Fort in September. On the first three occasions our Eternal Commander had not turned 20 years old.

As I read through these pages, it is amazing to see that Hugo's values already formed part of his character back in his early life. It is important from the current vantage point to observe how since then Chavez was taking shape as the indisputable, emerging leader with all the traits that will later characterize him from February 4, 1992.

That exceptional human being would grow up and cement such a personality and leadership. Some stories narrated in the journal reveal the singular features of a humble boy from the Barinas plains standing out among his classmates. He was renowned as a good guy, a good student, a good cadet, described by his classmate in the Yearbook of the Simón Bolívar Class II as an example of innate camaraderie, self-demanding, loyal and self-confident.

Sure enough, at that young age he also was notable for his attributes of singer of joropo, Mexican corridos and

musical passages of the plains. He hanged out with his friends; visited discos; dated girlfriends; recited poems; listened to The Bee Gees, The Rolling Stones and The Beatles; did some painting and drawing; enjoyed new release movies. And what about his passion for baseball vividly described in his journal when he refers to the XV Military Inter-Institute Games where he stood out as one of the top players? The “left-handed Fury” became one of the best pitchers in his team, a superb first baseman and excellent slugger.

As I recall those years, I can affirm that that was the way he was. I see my dear brother, my good friend, as a caring person, looking after everything, particularly his family, sending and receiving letters wherever he was. He himself narrates how, even in the middle of the night under torrential rain and in charge of his fellow soldiers, he would always keep the memories of his family in mind.

In this journal we discover that Chavez was nurtured by all of us, our parents and teachers, our darling Mamá Rosa, his friends and political contact persons (although they were not ready to take on such role), and the Military Academy transformed after the Andrés Bello Plan.

From his early childhood, Hugo had an insatiable thirst for knowledge. The hours spent by our Mamá Rosa instilling in us the importance of reading, studying, came to fruition. In the Military Academy Hugo wanted to learn and read everything, often without a method but convinced that the most he read, the most he would learn.

I recall that he devoured every book falling into his hands, any written materials. I lent him some; we engaged in debates. For instance, at the time of the bloody coup d'état against Salvador Allende staged in September in Chile I was a member of the Left Revolutionary Movement

(MIR). We were in touch with the Chilean MIR and discussed the experience of the Chilean People's Unity, the path they chose to get to the presidency with Allende. Whenever I met with Hugo we discussed all that, our readings within the party, the content of the debates and then I lent him MIR papers, the releases for our in-house deliberations. I am almost sure that I lent him a book that arrived at that time entitled *La Unidad Popular* where our Chilean friends described that progressive project.

I dare say that three Latin American experiences exerted a profound influence on him those years. The first was the defeat of Allende; the other two were the revolutionary nationalist processes of Panama and Peru, led by Omar Torrijos and Juan Velasco and the respective armed forces of those countries. Without a shadow of doubt, those episodes strongly influenced Chavez back in his formative years.

The Cuban Revolution was also a reference for us; we listened to Havana Cuba radio, somewhat underground; we received papers authored by Fidel Castro; we read Che Guevara's journal from Bolivia, whose heroic behavior was a source of great admiration. The combination of all that significantly excited a young man's mind, eager to process everything. Here come to mind one of the passages where Hugo quotes Che Guevara: "The present is a time for struggle, the future is ours."

The need for social and political changes in Venezuela was already identifiable in Hugo's scripts. He realized that it implied, first and foremost, social justice and a world humane and of solidarity, values inculcated in us from childhood and fully assimilated by him at the Military Academy when delving into the history of the homeland.

As young people, we were mindful of the dire country situation and long for changes and transformation. In spite

of our young age, our generation had many concerns and some political maturity. And we thought we needed to take action under a concrete, sound and strategic plan. We were in a continued quest for an answer to the legendary question, "What Is To Be Done?"

Because of all that we had to mature earlier. We were keenly aware of our historical commitment to the homeland and Chavez too was one of that bunch of young fellows that shared the same reasoning, although for us and even for him that was not yet clear. Chavez formed part of that youth, but I dare say that he was forging himself as the leader he was, he is and he remains. This journal shows that in part.

For this reason, it seemed appropriate to begin this foreword citing the feelings of the author of this journal when looking at two barefoot, malnourished children. It was the reality in our countryside. The hardships of our peasants forsaken and hungry, and children suffering the most. With that statement, written down in his journal on June 13, 1974, Hugo described what he felt and thought as he saw those kids. His words mirrored human sensibility, revolutionary feelings, grief over such situation. It was like a cry of anguish, of despair, but also a conscious cry, the consciousness of the need to organize and act. And so he did, with a great deal of conviction, strength, commitment, as soon as he was inaugurated as President-People in January 1999.

In reading that statement we can easily imagine that sights like those signaled forever Hugo's irrevocable decision to devote himself to the people; to fully engage in the struggle to build a better, fair, independent and sovereign nation; to pave the way that would lead us to get rid of all the social evils that tormented us.

Undoubtedly, he accomplished his mission. Now, those of us who remained in this physical and permanent struggle have a responsibility to preserve his legacy and consolidate the Bolivarian Revolution.

This journal makes not only a very pleasant reading, it enables us to get to know Chavez better. It reveals a steady line of thinking, consistent with Chavez as we knew him later; Chavez of February 4; Chavez of the prison of dignity; Chavez campaigning; Chavez, the President-People; Chavez taking part in multiple elections; Chavez spearheading an authentic revolutionary process; Chavez the builder of socialism.

We can see total consistency throughout his life, as shown by the part we know, but this journal allows us to get to know him in his early life, before entering the political arena. As we go along these pages, we are able to make a comparison, to draw a line of Chavez's way of thinking and behavior. And that truly is a wonderful and revealing experience.

Therefore, during that stage in the Military Academy we find that Hugo Chavez had deeply-rooted social concerns and a political path in his mind, albeit with no concrete plans. Guided by his mentor Pérez Arcay and some other peers, he discovered the greatness of Father Simón Bolívar, The Liberator, and delved into the political-philosophical thinking of Simón Rodríguez and Ezequiel Zamora – the three-root tree of our history.

Besides his personal qualities, inherited from our beloved plains, inculcated by Mamá Rosa and our parents, including humanism, the art of speaking, a love for reading, baseball playing, painting, singing, he gained some other assets that made a difference in his life: the art of communication, leadership and his political, historical and cultural

education. Add to this his integrity, fortitude, self-reliance and self-confidence, optimism and passion for the homeland.

If I were to list some of the main values that characterized a leader in the making at that time, I would highlight perseverance, solidarity, humanism, deep attachment to the land and family, and high social sensibility. From the outset, we could sense that Chavez, prompted by a profound love, continues urging us to go alongside the people, to feel their suffering, anguish, woes, struggles and victories. He continues encouraging us to devote our entire life to attain the greatest possible sum of happiness for every fellow citizen.

I would like to finish by recalling an anecdote. In those years we mostly met on holidays. The only time I visited him in the Military Academy was in 1973. I had come to Caracas from Mérida, where I was studying at Andes University (ULA), to attend a meeting of the MIR youth at Central University of Venezuela (UCV), for two or three days of talks. It occurred to me to pay a visit to Hugo at the Military Academy. He did not know I was in Caracas. However, I was afraid of not being let in because of my hippie look at that time. As I was not familiar with Caracas, my friends drew a sketch map for me to arrive, and so I did. I was let in and treated better than expected.

Hugo and I chatted for about 20 minutes in a tiny waiting room. I told him about my activities and showed him the books and papers brought with me and discussed in the MIR meetings. It was a beautiful reunion. Afterwards, Hugo wrote a letter to our mother stating that my visit had been a pleasant surprise for him and depicting me, in highly poetic terms, walking away, with my long hair, my bell-shaped trou-

sers, and the books and papers “of his (my) ideology” under my arm...

The truth of the matter is that I never walked away, neither that day nor ever more. We are still, and continue being together, making true a dream forged in the young ages described in this journal.

At this point in time, same as on that faraway day of March 5, 2013, when our Eternal Commander, comrade and brother became planted forever in the soul of the people, allow me to share with you, this time in full, the words written down by Hugo on December 24, 1981, when he gave me as present *Portable Country*, a novel by Venezuelan writer and poet Adriano González León:

Adán, we carry on our backs an invisible rucksack... Inside it we have our portable country. The good news is that our rucksack is unmeasurable.

You and I started to fill it with multiple things many years ago. It contains our dreams and illusions. We also have in there our people's hope.

There it goes the love of our beloved ones, the great and unforgettable love of Mamá Rosa, who is leaving this world; to sum up, the rucksack is being filled. In it, we need to carry lot of strength and resolve by way of stock for the long and difficult road ahead of us.

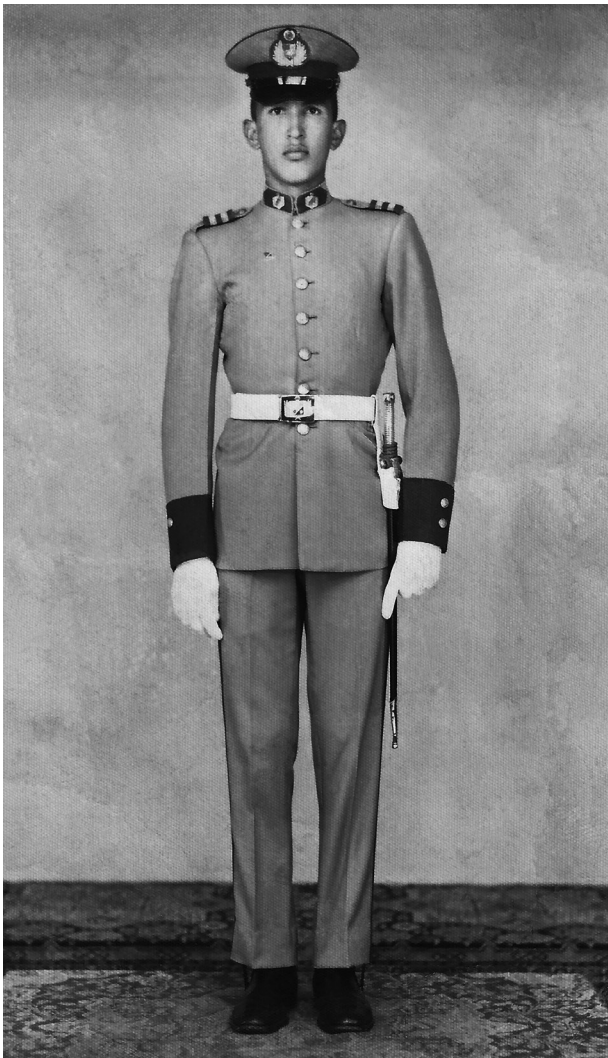
Then, in case our strength falters, we will need to stop to the side of the arduous route, put the rucksack down on the floor and start removing so many things we have kept throughout the years. Many encouraging voices will go out from it.

And if, by some misfortune, one of the two of us falls down and cannot stand up again, the other one has a duty to approach, filled with rage, and pick up the fallen body and put it on his back, together with the rucksack, bloody or not, regain strength and keep on walking all over the long way.

At the end - if there is any- the pregnant rucksack will surely deliver a better country, worth of being showcase, to put down roots, to stop being a portable country.

Here we keep on walking, Hugo, with the rucksack stuffed with our people's dreams and hopes; working to build a better country, until the point of no return of our Bolivarian socialism. We will not let you down brother!

ADAN CHAVEZ FRIAS
CARACAS, JUNE 2018



HUGO CHAVEZ, SECOND-YEAR CADET

**XV MILITARY
INTER-INSTITUTE
GAMES**

Caracas, 1974

Caracas, March 11, 1974

Today, regular teams started to gather. Our Olympic Village, as it were, is located in the last accommodation block, on the upper floor, on the block of the First Company.

Today, I received the guard inspection from the Second Company. I handed it over to Second Lieutenant¹ Infante Rivas, at 18:00 hours.

When I arrived from the courses, at 12:00 hours, I found the chest lying on the floor. I think it was Camejo.² Luckily, I needed to move to the Olympic Village.

In the afternoon, I went to sports. I did well with the bat. Then, I pitched for about eight batters. I had not pitched for a while. I did it well, though. I am throwing harder than before, although somewhat out of hand.

Today, I decided to start this short journal, until the end of the games. I hope it will be a great experience. Likewise, I

¹ Rank of cadets at the Military Academy; senior students in the military course, immediately below the rank of Sub-Lieutenant (nowadays a Lieutenant).

² Helly Camejo Schwarzenberg.

**believe I will play regularly in the base-
ball team.**

Caracas, March 11, 1974

Today, we hoisted the flag on the occasion of the National Day of our banner. I remember that I used to deliver speeches apropos this day at my town square. Captain Nery Guevara³ was relieved of the guard by Captain Jesús Serrano.

In the morning, I manufactured a poster of the games and slept for a while. In the afternoon, non-regular students were allowed to leave. I also slept in the afternoon and finished the poster. Then, we were ordered to pull down the flag, as opposed to what had been said.

After dinner, I, together with all of the third-year students, stood fast in the laundry yard (Second Lieutenant Ibarra Castillo).⁴

In the evening, I cleaned the implements for tomorrow parade.

³ Nery Jesús Guevara Lovera.

⁴ Gonzalo José Ibarra Castillo.

Today the inauguration of the President of the Republic took place.⁵ A group of cadets headed for the parade to the Congress.⁶

5 Carlos Andrés Pérez (1922-2010). Leader of political Acción Democrática (Democratic Action) party. Pérez was the president of Venezuela on two occasions: 1974-1979 and 1989-1993.

6 National Congress, nowadays National Assembly.

Caracas March 13, 1974

We got up at 05:30 hours. At 10:00 hours, we were in the honor courtyard,⁷ prepared for the parade. Earlier, I had received the round guard.

After a lengthy wait, the new President arrived. As I look at him, I wish one day I could take responsibility for the whole homeland, the homeland of Great Bolívar, and my homeland, for that matter.

The parade was magnificent, marvelous. I was second in the base column of the Second Company. We were the best institute.

In the afternoon there was leave of absence for everybody, including sportsmen. I did not leave. I spoke for a long while with José Vicente Rangel Jr.⁸ His departure hurt me badly. I tried to help him. He was a hope.

In the evening, after turning the lights off, I went to see the replay of the parade on TV. I focused on my passage before the tribune. I wonder if they saw me at home.

⁷ An outdoor space for military ceremonies.

⁸ José Vicente Rangel Ávalos (1956). A member of the Constituent Assembly (1999-2017), born in Caracas; elected as mayor of Sucre municipality in 2000, 2003 and 2017.

After that, I was the star of the show at dinner time in the Village.

Caracas, March 14, 1974

Today, I got up before the reveille⁹ in order to turn lights on. I handed over the round guard to Dumas Ramirez.¹⁰ There were classes in the morning. I handed in the works of Descriptive and Physics.

At midday I took a break at the Village. Carrasco¹¹ returned from his leave of absence for his batting on Friday. I must concede that he was kind of lucky. The whole team is done in the Village. Now, we lament the departure of Rodriguez Vivas [aka Cachorro]. All of us love him.

At 14:00 hours, regular teams went down in our sports uniforms. The rest of the battalion¹² headed for the parade on the occasion of the change of the Army Commanding General. We bated for a while in the baseball field.

[Illegible] recalling that the day after tomorrow is the fifth anniversary of the tragic death of "El Látigo" Chavez.¹³

9 Trumpet call to wake up the troops.

10 Dumas Ramírez Marquínez.

11 Andrés Eduardo Carrasco Oses.

12 Military unit composed of several companies, usually commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel.

13 Néstor "El Látigo" Chávez (1947-1969). Outstanding pitcher born in Caracas. He played baseball in Venezuela and the United States in 1963-1967.

Caracas, March 15, 1974

There was free study in the morning. We took classes of Artillery and Cavalry. Major Visconti Osorio¹⁴ gave us some recommendations.

At midday there was parachuting training for the "guerrilla members," as we call non-regular in sports teams.

In the afternoon, in Sports, I did it regular at bat. I failed to strike the ball as I had been doing before. However, my top ambition is taking part in all the games of the Inter-Institute contest. I think I will make it. Some effort, nothing else.

Tomorrow in the afternoon, we will have a play with La Fusta.

At night, we saw Kings of the Sun, featuring Yul Brynner. It was pretty good, as far as human feelings is concerned. It dealt with the Mayan civilization.

Today I hanged the posters at the canteen. I also was provided with the marks of the sixth six-month term. I got a GPA of 88.94. Very good.

¹⁴ Virgilio H. Visconti Osorio.

Marks of the fifth sixth-month term

Analysis	67.56
Descriptive	66.24
Chemistry	63.93
Methodology	66.24
Close-order Formation	95.00
Marches and Bivouac	94.00
Open-order Formation	96.00
Tactics III	89.25
General Tactics	100.00
Infantry	79.50
Armor	93.00
Military History	87.00
Sports	88.50
Physical Education	87.87
[Illegible]	
GPA	88.94

Caracas, March 16, 1974

Today is the fifth anniversary of that dire Sunday, when Isaias Chavez died.

In the morning, we engaged in a *caimanera*¹⁵ at the baseball field. Later on, I cleaned the armament and went together with Mendez Muñoz¹⁶ and Martinez Morales¹⁷ to mark the ground for the afternoon game.

The "La Fusta" team came reinforced with some AA players (third base and centerfield). We won over them 8-2 in seven innings. I bated 4-0. I hit the ball hard three times, but they stopped them. Two low lines by the second base and a high and large swat towards the right field. For eight times in a row I have failed to have a hit, yet I know I am batting well.

In the morning, Salmeron¹⁸ got injured in athletics. It does not seem serious, yet we are very concerned.

15 Improvised game between amateurs, characterized by harshness, informality and a lot of fun.

16 Oswaldo Rafael Méndez Muñoz.

17 Rafael Cipriano Martínez Morales.

18 Raúl Enrique Salmerón.

After dinner, we, together with Silva P.¹⁹ and Hernandez,²⁰ went to the other Village to complete the Physics work.

¹⁹ Luis Emilio Silva Bone.

²⁰ Antonio José Hernández Borgo.

Caracas, March 17, 1974

Today, we got up and hoisted the flag. Nor did we, the regular team, go out to the street.

We went to Mass. I prayed for Isaías and for many other things.

Next, we went for baseball training and I also went to the swimming pool.

There was visitation in the afternoon and then we pulled down the flag.

In the accommodation block, we shared a cake brought by Ernesto Rodriguez's family.

I maintain a firm hope of playing regularly in all the Inter-Institute Games.

Today was an ordinary day. Only, in the morning, I went out and batted a lot. I left with my hands aching. We have bats with ball bearings. Next, I went to the swimming pool, as I said before, and swam for a while. For five months I had not done it. I lack training, for I get tired so quickly.

Today, the Academy²¹ awoke in a buoyant sports atmosphere. Earlier, last night, a group of us hanged posters everywhere.

21 Military Academy of Venezuela, the House of Blue Dreams, the birthplace of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Caracas, May 18, 1974

Today is an ordinary day. Reveille at 05:00 hours, later, free study time, canteen and classes until 12:30 hours.

For me, however, it was not that normal, as I was named day class,²² and it seems that today was the news day. People going in and out of the infirmary; a cadet with his leg broken, he fell down and also had his arm broken. Training courses in and out.

But I handed over the guard with the right dispatch and report, at 4:00 in the afternoon [16:00 hours]. Later on, I went to sports. My turn at bat, business as usual. Coach Benitez²³ does seem very interested in my batting. He gives plenty of advice.

I went to the library in the evening and discussed with the librarian the issue of the textbook of Tactics I missed. I think I am going to find it.

Then, I was in my platoon accommodation block, from which I have been absent this month because of the sportsmen gathering. I

22 Distinguished student entrusted with oversight role.

23 Héctor Benítez Redondo (1913-2011). An international first-class baseball player, born in Caracas, Redondo played with the Venezuelan professional league until 1957.

had a talk with the Second Lieutenant and left my letter there. I checked my chest, which is abandoned. Afterwards, I headed for the Olympic Village.

Caracas, March 19, 1974

Fiesta en Elorza [Party in Elorza] A song of the plains, of the bygone moments with Isabelita, in Sabaneta, refers to that day. Many memories of Isabel came back to me in the morning. I wish she is doing well and remembers me as I do remember her.

We got up at 6:00 hours. Today is a holiday (Saint Joseph's Day). After breakfast, we saw a parachuting movie. The course is upcoming. In seeing the film, at the time of jumping through the aircraft doorway, one can feel the emotion. I can imagine how it will be in fact.

A parade to bid farewell to the Academy teachers going into retirement was held at 10:00 hours.

In the afternoon the non-regular ones were allowed to go on leave. I slept part of the afternoon, as I did not go out to the street.

In the evening I studied Descriptive and completed a work for Analysis.

The Company Commander gave me a notice because of a freshman in my squad.

Caracas, March 20, 1974

Morning classes as usual.

After the free study time, during the formation to enter the canteen for breakfast, Lieutenant²⁴ Camejo, the Company Commander, congratulated my platoon, under my command, for the work done on close-order formation. We, the brigadiers,²⁵ are in command of platoons, because second lieutenants are attending the basic course of their respective weapons.

At 14:00 hours, we went to the Academy theater to attend the Wednesday conference. The speaker was an Italian father that was not speaking that good. The subject was: "Who is the man?" Eventually, he defined man as "the son of God."

Afterwards, we went to sports. I saw Ken Norton,²⁶ because he was getting in shape for the world heavyweight title, here, in our gym.

24 In the military hierarchy at the corps of officers of air and land armies, the next rank higher than sub-lieutenant (existing until 1999) and the next rank lower than captain.

25 Student or cadet of a higher grade in a class or course.

26 Ken Norton (1934-2013). An US professional boxer who defeated Mohammed Ali in 1973 and won the heavyweight title in 1978.

In baseball, I trained hard. The games against the Navy School, the Aviation School and the EFOTAC²⁷ are only nine days away.

27 School of Officers of the Cooperation Armed Forces.

Caracas, March 21, 1974

There was Physical Education in the morning. We ran for a while across Los Próceres,²⁸ and I started to feel an acute ache in my left knee. I cannot flex it all of a sudden and I am worried about the games; only eight days to go.

Yesterday, I studied to late night, and because of that, I performed well today in a test of Descriptive.

In the afternoon, I collected the stipend of March and then I received a letter from mum. She sent me some money, and I was happy to have news from home. Anibal wrote me a letter, telling me that Isabel had arrived in Sabaneta,²⁹ from Spain. At the end, he confessed he was just kidding.

In the afternoon, at 4:00 in the afternoon [16:00 hours] we went for the new baseball uniform. I must say that it is the best uniform ever worn so far. It looks like the uniform of a big-league team.

28 A monument located in Caracas, in memory of the heroes of the War of Independence.

29 The birthplace of Hugo Chávez, located in the state of Barinas, Venezuela.

Afterwards, we ran again around the Los Próceres circuit and did some exercise in the athletics track.

I continue feeling acute pain in my knee.

Caracas, March 22, 1974

We took Artillery classes with Lieutenant Torrealba,³⁰ and Cavalry classes with Major Visconti. At midday, we went for the clean clothes to the laundry room, and we, third-year students, received a brand-new blue headgear.

The new blue uniform provided to me was too big; so, today I replaced it with another of my size.

In the afternoon, we continued Cavalry classes. Then, we went to Sports. I performed well at bat. I hit 16 lines and only two (2) flies.

I pitched for six batters. I am stout and controlled. The coach has told me that I could also pitch in some game. I have not done it for a couple of years, yet I feel capable of doing it. Memories of the games as a pitcher in the National Championships come back to me. I lost none.

In the evening we saw *Once upon a time in the West*, a film featuring Charles Bronson and Claudia Cardinale. I liked the movie, particularly Claudia Cardinale.

30 Pompeyo José Torrealba Rivero.

My left knee still hurts.

Caracas, March 23, 1974

There was no Physical Education, because half battalion left for the Navy School for the rehearsal of the opening of the games. I studied until 07:15 hours. After cleaning the armament, regular teams took Sophrology lessons with Colonel Aguilar Sanchez. After that, we, the members of the baseball team watched a match EFOFAC vs. UCAB.³¹

Today, we got news of the death of an Aviation cadet. A turbine in his training plain turned off. Initially, he had enough time to eject himself. However, because the aircraft was to crash into a settlement, he opted to deviate it. Once he did it, he had run short of time to eject himself. A brave and courageous action of the Second Lieutenant.

In the afternoon, I studied Physics. Nor did we go out today, as we continue concentrated. I can see El Valle highway³² nearby and I wonder if they miss me, out there. I will go out again soon.

In the evening, I studied until 21:00 hours and drew Isabel's beautiful face.

³¹ Andrés Bello Catholic University.

³² El Valle highway, located in south Caracas.

Caracas, March 24, 1974

We hoisted the flag at 06:00 hours. Next, we went to Mass.

After breakfast, we trained. We engaged in a five-inning match among ourselves. I pitched on one side. I performed nicely. I received only two hits and a run with a balk from the catcher. I swapped a hit in three turns at bat.

Next, we went to the swimming pool for a while. We returned for lunch at 12:30 hours.

After lunch, I showed the parade trousers³³ with the sawn half belt to Second Lieutenant Pereira Adames.³⁴ Afterwards, I studied. At 5:00 in the afternoon it rained heavily, so there was not flag pull-down.

Today, my desire to become a pitcher has born again. I always dreamed of it, anyway. I had big troubles to be in top form when I was 13 years old.

Playing at the age of 16 in the "A" category deprived me of such good physical condition. Now, however, I am in good shape again, and I have improved. Actually,

³³ Blue-listed trousers of cream color.

³⁴ Diego Luis Pereira Adames.

I am even pitching better than some regular pitchers in the team.

Caracas, March 25, 1974

We took a regular Physics test. I performed well. Last night, I studied until 02:00 hours [2:00 in the morning]. The test results rewarded me for my effort.

In the afternoon, I studied Chemistry, from 14:00 to 15:30 hours. Then, we headed for Sports. I crave to be included in the roster, rather than the bench. Today, I caught up some swaps, continuing with training. In my turn at bat, I was fine. Coach Benitez provided me some advice; he advised me not to let others stand in for me, because the team badly lacks a lefthanded player.

Also, I pitched for some batters. My left arm is sore. Dario Rubinstein has given me massages in my arm.

I am writing down this journal in a hurry, because I need to study a lot. Tomorrow, I will take the Chemistry ordinary test and I need to do it well. The opening of the games is only four days away. They will be the last ones for me, as a competitor.

Caracas, March 26, 1974

We ran for a while at 05:30 in the morning. Last night, I studied until 01:00 in the morning, but I performed better than ever in the test. I must have 100 points.

At midday, I received some materials from Lieutenant Camejo to prepare 20 posters for the Second Company. In addition to all the tests I have been taking, I wonder when I will be able to sleep. If all that was not enough, I have a game slated for Sunday. Then, I will sleep on Saturday and Sunday during the day, as the game will be in the evening.

In the afternoon, we trained in the field of Bolívar Infantry Battalion N°1. We swapped for some time. Today, I really struck the ball. Then, I pitched for two batters only, as my arm still hurts.

After dinner, I came back right away to study Analysis, as my term test is tomorrow. The Norton vs. Foreman fight is tonight, right here.³⁵

³⁵ George Foreman (1949). A US professional boxer, a gold medalist at the Mexico Olympic Games in 1968, two-time world heavyweight champion (1973 and 1994).

Caracas, March 27, 1974

I studied from 05:00 through 06:30 in the morning. I am drowsy. Still, I had a superb performance at the Conic test (Analysis II). Yesterday night, I studied until 02:00 hours.

At midday, we went for the new uniform. I was given N° 14. It is a novel model. Blue headgear with grey visor, and the uniform is grey-blueish.

In the afternoon, the coach milked us dry.³⁶ He made me run after the ball batted by him from centerfield to right field and from right field to centerfield.

The opening of the games is only two days away. Together, the Colonel gathered us and told us that he harbors grand illusions, and that he only hopes to have them not shattered. His illusions are our landslide victory in the games.

I did not study in the evening, because I was working on the posters. I completed two works of Descriptive in the classroom to be turned in tomorrow.

³⁶ To wear someone down.

**Last night, Foreman won over Norton by
knockout.**

Caracas, March 28, 1974

Today I was relieved from the round guard received yesterday. Note was taken of me for having left a light on at the casino. It was not my fault, because the switch was inside the casino, and it was locked.

There was no Physical Education in the morning. They were sorting out the issue of the full-dress shoes.

In the morning, we discussed in the classroom the issue of the technological expertise of Army officers.³⁷ I wrapped up with an important presentation, where I brought forward the need to reform the Military Service Law.

A group of high school students visited us today. I looked favorably at two girls from among all the girls that came: a rosy blondie and a divine skinny girl, so I think. They spent all day here. In the afternoon, we went to the swimming pool. I was very happy to meet again with Luis Reyes,³⁸ an Aviation cadet. He was my classmate at

37 Upper rank of army officers, from sub-lieutenant or second lieutenant to division general.

38 Luis Reyes (1952). Military officer, born in Barquisimeto, state of Lara. He and Chávez became friends in Barinas, in their early life. Currently, he is a leader of ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

high school in Barinas. I spoke with him for a good while.

Caracas, March 29, 1974

I studied Artillery in the morning, because I had firing exam, monitored by Lieutenant Torrealba.

The exam was on the fourth hour. I performed well.

The atmosphere of the Games reigns; everybody is looking forward to them.

In the afternoon, the entire battalion headed for the Navy School of Venezuela, located in Mamo, for the opening ceremony of the XV Military Inter-Institute Games. The longed-for event had come at long last. These will be the last games for me. The next ones will be held in 1976, and I will be a graduate by then, God willing.

I did not go to the Navy School. The teams scheduled to compete here, in Caracas, remained to take a break. In the evening, I watched the splendorous ceremony on TV in the casino of our Academy.

The contest begins tomorrow. Shall God help us win.

Caracas, March 30, 1974

This morning, we wiped them out in the athletic games; 40 points over other institutes. Salmeron won the gold medal in shot put. We won gold and silver medals in 1,500 meters; gold in 110-meter steeplechase; gold and bronze in broad jump; to sum up, it was bloodshed.

In the afternoon, we won over the Navy School in soccer, scoring 3 goals vs. 1. Our archer is a phenomenal guy. He is Velásquez, a cadet of my squad.

In the evening, we won over the Aviation School in basketball, 100-57.

From all those contests, I attended athletics and basketball at the University³⁹ Olympic Stadium and the Navy School gym, respectively.

In sum, in the first day of the contest, we, the military cadets, proved our superiority at large. Should we continue this way, we will win at one blow.

The first baseball game will be tomorrow.

³⁹ Central University of Venezuela, located in Caracas, the capital city.

Caracas, March 31, 1974

Today, I did not attend any contest; the baseball team rested all day. In the morning, we went neither to the national flag hoisting nor to Mass. At 10:00 in the morning, the baseball teams of EFOFAC and the Navy School played. EFOFAC won by 2-1. This is the most challenging team for us. A couple of years ago they beat us and were the champions. Let us see this year.

As early as at 18:00 hours [06:00 p.m.] we were in the stadium. Our first foe will be there: the one that never in the history of the games has managed to defeat us. We, in our brand-new uniforms, with dozens of bats and helmets, also new, looked like "the superpower."

We were there already. All the efforts and deprivations during one year would come to fruition at that moment. My expectations to be in the line-up came true when manager Casanova⁴⁰ read it for us. I was listed in the left field and sixth turn at bat.

This was our line-up:

⁴⁰ José Antonio Casanova (1918-1999). A baseball player, born in Maracaibo, state of Zulia. Casanova managed professional baseball teams in Venezuela, in 1943-1967.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| 1. Oswaldo Mendez | CF |
| 2. Dario Rubinstein ⁴¹ | 2B |
| 3. Raul Salmeron | SS |
| 4. Henry Moreno ⁴² | C |
| 5. Julio Garcia ⁴³ | P |
| 6. Hugo Chavez | LF |
| 7. Manuel Rosendo ⁴⁴ | 3B |
| 8. Andres Carrasco ⁴⁵ | 1B |
| 9. Ernesto Rodriguez | RF |

We were the visitors.

The game started with Oswaldo Mendez struck out. We did no run in that inning.

At the close of the first inning, we were given four runs. For a moment, the sensation of defeat went through my mind; however, a look at the electric board reminded me that the game was just beginning, and I also re-

41 Darío Segundo Rubinstein Bracho.

42 Henry E. Moreno Colmenares.

43 Julio Manuel García Anuel.

44 Manuel Antonio Rosendo.

45 Andrés Eduardo Carrasco Oses.

called our strong slugging. So, I said to myself: "We cannot lose by any means."

I opened the second inning at bat. I failed from short to first base, after striking a mighty hard foul line by the first base. However, "that does not count," as the coach says.

After that, showtime began, with a triple of Salmerón the game was tied. In that situation, with all the three bases occupied and two outs, I was on-deck, for the second time in the inning. By some quirk of fate, the pitcher was replaced, and they brought in the least desired person for me; nothing less than Reyes, the Black. Anyway, beyond friendship, there is the game and an obligation to win.

In the first pitch, I hit a strong rolling between first and second bases. The right fielder missed the ball. Then, I scored the eighth run with a hit by Rosendo. And I struck two hits in five turns, and the most beautiful line ever struck by me in all my life, as far as I can remember, was caught. It went alongside first base.

I also produced the last out. We won 9-4. We have accomplished our first success-

ful task. I am extremely satisfied. I have played my first game, and I did it well.

Also, today, we took it all in sports.

Caracas, April 01, 1974

I went to the second athletics journey.

The 5,000-meter race was the best. We won gold and silver medals.

We won most of the contests. We won in soccer and basketball.

Should we continue this way, we will win at large these games.

REPÚBLICA DE VENEZUELA
COMANDO ESCUELAS DEL EJERCITO
ESCUELA MILITAR

BARINAS 19 de MAYO de 1971

ANEXO 1 AL PROSPECTO DE ADMISION
DE LA ESCUELA MILITAR
SOLICITUD DE INSCRIPCION

1. En acuerdo a lo establecido en el Cap. II, Sec. II, Art. 6.i del Reglamento de Admisión de la Escuela Militar, y debidamente autorizado por mi Representante Legal, respetuosamente me dirijo a esa Dirección a objeto de solicitar mi inscripción formal como aspirante a participar en el Concurso de Admisión correspondiente al año 1971, para lo cual acompaño los documentos especificados en el párrafo del presente Anexo.

Rafael Chávez *[Firma]*
(Firma representante legal) (Firma del candidato)

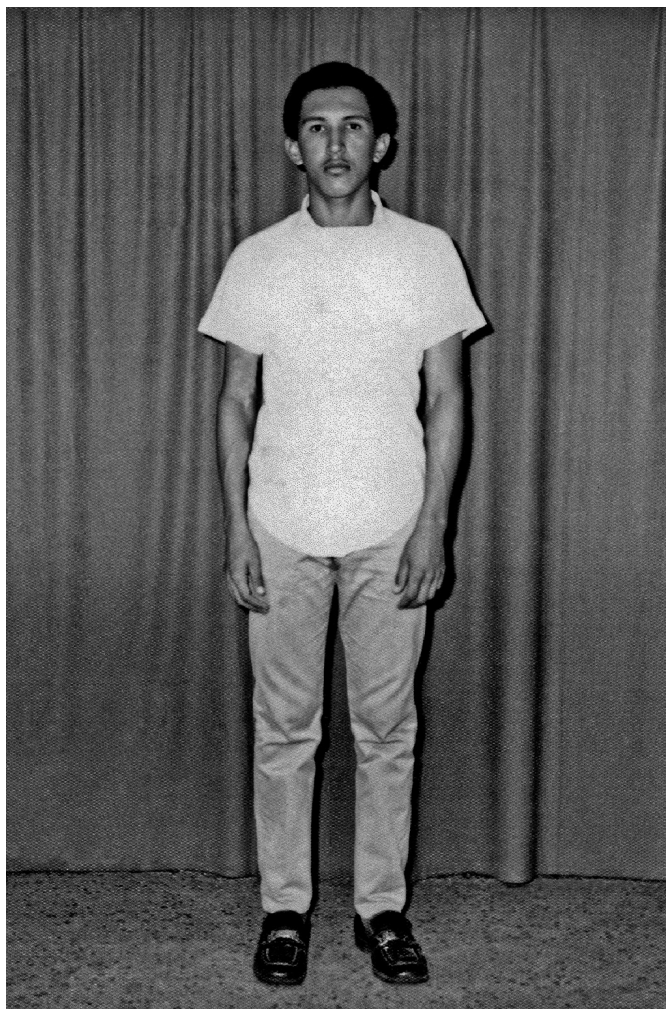
Rafael Chávez *[Firma]*
(Aclaratoria de la firma) (Aclaratoria de la firma)

2. Lista de Documentos. (Marcar con una X la casilla correspondiente a cada documento anexo).

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☒ Hoja de datos personales. | ☐ Libreta o Boleta del Servicio Militar. |
| ☒ Certificado de buena conducta y moralidad, expedido por tres personas de reconocida honorabilidad. | ☒ Partida de nacimiento por DUPLICADO. |
| ☒ Certificado de Estudios. | ☒ Certificado de antecedentes. |
| ☐ Certificado de salud (con fluoroscopia y exámenes de heces, de orina y de sangre). | ☒ Certificado de buena conducta y moralidad, expedido por la dirección del liceo o instituto de procedencia. |
| ☒ Autorización del representante legal. | ☒ Certificado de soltería. |
| ☒ Una fotografía de frente, a cuerpo entero tamaño postal (10 x 15 cm.). | ☒ Declaración de apoliticismo. |
| | ☐ Nombramiento de apoderado. |
| | ☒ Tres fotografías de frente tamaño pasaporte (3 x 4 cm.). |

NOTA: En caso de faltar algún documento, explique el ¿por qué?
(PARA SER LLENADO DE PURO Y LETRA DEL CANDIDATO)

APPLICATION FORM, MILITARY ACADEMY OF VENEZUELA.



HUGO CHAVEZ. PHOTO ATTACHED TO THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTS TO JOIN THE MILITARY ACADEMY OF VENEZUELA.



CANDIDATES FOR CADETS (HUGO CHAVEZ, TO THE LEFT).



INAUGURATION OF CADETS (HUGO CHAVEZ, FIRST FROM RIGHT TO LEFT).

PATROLLING EXERCISE

**States of Portuguesa
and Lara**

June 1974

Wednesday, June 12, 1974

We set off from Valencia in convoy, approximately at 12:30 noon. I am the commander of truck N° 21. Right now, we are headed for the meeting point, at Paso de Cojedes ranch, on the borders of this state [of Carabobo] and the state of Portuguesa.

We have sung for a while, accompanied by Jesus Gonzalez's cuatro. All of us were tired. Most of the first- and second-year students are sleeping. It is a monotonous journey because of the sun and the slow motion in convoy. Only sometimes, from time to time, we are enlivened by some beautiful lady who overtakes us in her car. At bottom, I am happy, because we are heading for the plains in Portuguesa.

Right now, I am writing at the beginning of this four-day period, until June 15, when we are set to arrive at Barquisimeto and play baseball against Central Western University.⁴⁶ I am tired of the days spent in Valencia. I am sleepy. I think I am going to sleep.

It is 6:00 in the evening. I am writing sitting down on the floor, my back leaning

46 Lisandro Alvarado Central Western University, state of Lara, Venezuela.

on my field gear. I am happy and proud of setting foot on the plains and feeling the smell of mastranto⁴⁷ and of the cattle. We arrived about one hour ago. We are in the state of Portuguesa, near Agua Blanca, where Narciso studies. The meeting point is a paddock. There is plenty of cattle tick here.

I have gathered all the 15 cadets of the patrol that will be commanded by me as of tonight. I have given them the necessary directions. All of them are sitting down, resting. As I look at them, I remember that I will be responsible for their security when leading them through the mountains ahead. I wish everything will be all right. Particularly, I feel quite capable of making it. I am to stop writing right now. Captain Guevara has called the patrol commanders.⁴⁸ I suppose that he will supply the necessary materials to accomplish our mission.

It is beyond 9:00 in the evening. I am writing down sitting down on a stone and covering my lantern light with the waterproof jacket to prevent anybody from finding our whereabouts. We are presently on the top of a small hill, and down there, within easy

47 *Salvia scutellarioides*, abundant in Venezuelan plains.

48 Soldiers entrusted with the command of a specific number of troops to carry out exercises in the field.

reach, the road of San Rafael de Onoto-Agua Blanca passes.

On my right-hand side, I can watch Agua Blanca lights nearby. Will "El Churro Mogotero" be there?⁴⁹ Such is life. He must be asleep, or perhaps in the street, doing who knows what. For my part, I am in close proximity, in the wild, in my campaign uniform,⁵⁰ holding a rifle and looking after 14 men, and also taking care of myself.

Going back: This afternoon, Captain Guevara gave us some directions about local patrolling. He warned us that the terrain is dangerous, rugged and, worse, there is no water on this site. All of us brought in two canteens filled with water and food for one day.

Afterwards, they delivered the materials to us: one signal launcher, a pair of binoculars, three smoke grenades, one compass and the ammunition.

We departed from Paso de Cojedes at 7:00 in the evening, on trucks, and the patrols were left alongside the road. Mine was the next to last patrol to leave the vehicles.

49 Narciso Chávez, Hugo Chávez's brother.

50 Uniform worn by troops to carry out tasks in the field.

Dumas' patrol was the last one. He was further to the right, nearer Agua Blanca. When I got out the truck, together with my patrol, Lieutenant Machilla⁵¹ handed over to me a paper, printed in red ink, which read as follows: Patrol N° 11. Pc. 3. 12° 15 km. These data are necessary to arrive at the baseline, and then to Gamelotal,⁵² near Barquisimeto, where our camp for the exercises this year is located.

Since it is a very dark night and we are bound for the mountains, I sent the boys off to bed and start walking very early in the morning. I set up two sentry posts, for security. However, I doubt that in such a dark night and with so many mosquitos, someone will dare attack us. Not even a bonfire we could build. Otherwise, they would know at once our whereabouts, and enemy containment lines⁵³ are nearby.

About half an hour ago I met with my peers Pedro and Luciano.⁵⁴ Each of them leads a squad.⁵⁵ I expounded my plans for tomo-

51 Pablo Rafael Machillanda Pinto.

52 A settlement situated in the state of Lara, Venezuela.

53 Imaginary lines of troops entrusted with the task of containing the enemy.

54 Luciano A. José Bacalao Von S.

55 A group structure, adopted for optimum tactical efficiency during a combat.

row's action. I explained to them our location in the map and had their feedback. I was forthright and told them that I would give the orders, but, at the same time, I was ready to accept any recommendation, if I deemed it right.

Down there, on my left-hand side and beside the road, there is bonfire. I approached to find about it. There was a house, with a few peasants in the small yard, around the fire. I gave them a fright when I approached, but then they warmed up and offered me coffee. I took a seat with them and chatted for a while. I inquired about the technicians' school. The old man explained that he had worked there for some years. It is some far away from here. They also advised me that shortly before the sunset, some individuals in green passed by their place. The particulars provided by them correspond to the Second Lieutenant and Commander of the enemy containment line. Therefore, they must be close. Perhaps tomorrow we will have troubles with them.

Right now, I am smoking a cigarette, covering the fire to hide the light. I am remembering as well an illusion with the name of a woman that was formed in me in the past Easter holidays, over there, in Bari-

nas. Perhaps it is a fleeting illusion. I wish it will, because, as I think it over, and bearing her current situation in mind, it will be difficult to materialize. I will try to take it away from my thought before it is too late. Better safe than sorry.

It is late. Tomorrow, Lara-Portuguesa cordillera awaits me. I would better sleep for the time being. Before, I will check the north with the Polar star. Next, to the stone bed.⁵⁶

56 Hard and uncomfortable bed.

Thursday, June 13, 1974

I woke up early, at 5:30 in the morning. I did not have a good night's sleep, because of cold weather and mosquitos. Besides, the ground is very hard. I made an inspection of the two sentries and the ones of the fourth turn were there. It was still dark and all of them were asleep. I lighted up a cigarette and next, I proceeded to wake the boys up. At 6:00 in the morning, all of us were ready.

I let nobody eat. Based on my experience, I know that the freshmen eat it all at once, then, when the going gets tough, they don't have even the green peas to eat, which almost nobody likes by the way.

As soon as it dawned, I oriented myself again and the compass indicated 12° northwards. I made it known to the patrol the advance direction. Next, I turned around and observed the immense Venezuelan plains. Quoting Don Rómulo Gallegos, "All horizons, like hope; all ways, like willingness."

The magnificent Las Majaguas⁵⁷ dam completes the beauty of the immense plains and feeds these dry lands of Portuguesa. We can

57 Settlement located in the state of Portuguesa, Venezuela.

see dry trees, like yearning skeletons poking out their claws in the water.

I peered into the landscape, for immediately we would turn our backs and advance in the opposite direction, to cross the state of Portuguesa, arrive at the state of Lara and climb up to the vicinity of Barquisimeto.

Finally, at 6:30 in the morning, I gave the order: Put your gear on; first squad to the right; second squad to the left. All of us left very excited. We came down to the road and I took the 12° azimuth,⁵⁸ from the exact point where we were left the previous night. We passed by the house where I had drunk coffee yesterday night. The lady came out, this time with two children, and they waved goodbye. I saw the kids with immense sadness, their big bellies, surely full of earthworms from eating dirt, barefooted, naked. That scene made my blood boil and I get convinced of the need to do something, whatever, for those folks.

We walked around one hour, parallel to the road and crossing corn and yucca plantations. We started to climb up the mountain,

58 Horizontal angle, measured clockwise from a north baseline.

growing exhausted and tired of the heavy gear and the striking sunrays.

At 8:30 in the morning, we arrived at a hill, from which we could appreciate the entire area for kilometers around. At that point, I ordered a stopover in a tiny forest, in order not to be seen from the air, for a helicopter was flying over. I took my binoculars and scrutinized the plains. Further on, I saw Las Majaguas dam and its extensive water body. Next, I caught sight of the valley resting to my left, and could distinguish, as I watched the trees, the yellow, rusted zinc⁵⁹ on top of a house.

I resolved to go down with my people. Gonzalez C.⁶⁰ and I took the lead to make a reconnaissance of the area. We went down fast at a leafy, quiet forest. A small prairie, crossed by a crystal-clear stream. In looking at that, I felt a tremendous distrust, because sites like this are ideal for irregular troops to camp out. To the left, beyond the stream, there was a house made of zinc, the house I watched from up there. The house had a stockyard with pigs and cattle. Fairly suspicious. I called Gonzalez

59 Corrugated zinc plates used as rooftop.

60 Andrés Eloy González Cárdenas.

and ordered him to replace the blank cartridges with war cartridges and take out the reforming cone, just to be on the safe side.

While I passed the brook and headed for the house with extreme caution, he covered me. I peeked in the window. The house was empty. Then, I looked beyond, at where the water runs and I saw in amazement a large amount of multi-colored wax candles spread over the ground all covered with dry leaves.

I moved forward and signaled Gonzalez to cover me. My distrust of the place in question kept growing. It looked like witchery or something of the kind. Further ahead, there was a small house. Very carefully, looking at all sides, I entered. My surprise was even bigger. Inside there were still more candles, smoked cigars, panties covered with dried-up blood. And the weirdest part of it, some headless saints. There was a handwritten paper in the front. I read it. It was a curse at everyone entering there for reasons other than worship.

"This is with us," I thought. Anyway, I do not believe in that bullshit. So, I tore the notice off, went out and kept on watching. Further, to my right, there was a small dam made of zinc. To my left, above,

"Oh, what is that?" I said to myself. A series of stones, stacked one on top of the other, forming stairs edged by candles and butts.

The stairs ended up in a dark cave. A stench overpowered the inside of the cave, which stretched out for about five meters inwards the mountain rock.

I held my nose with my fingers. There were bats inside. I went out and told Gonzalez it was nothing. Immediately, I ordered the cadet to bring in the rest of the patrol. They had been waiting on the slope of the mountain, about 200 meters from there. I sat down, recalling what I had seen. Then, all the boys arrived. I ordered them to take their gear out and set up the security in the perimeter, using for that purpose four second-year cadets. I resolved to take breakfast there. We looked for a good site, on the banks of the stream, beneath a genip tree.⁶¹ Here is where I have been writing this for about half an hour, sitting down on the floor, eating some of my combat ration,⁶² and smoking Belmont cigarettes. I do not like them that much, but this is what it is

61 *Melicoccus bijugatus*. Green-shell, small oval fruit. The seed is covered by a humid, sweet pulp, which is the edible part.

62 Packed food, ready to eat by troops in the battlefield.

in the ration. The boys took a bath and ate. Afterwards, they pried around for a while.

Pacheco⁶³ killed a coral snake.⁶⁴ He shot at its head. Afterwards, Guevara called me from up there, where he was standing sentry. We went up and there was a house made of palms. Inside, there were four coffins coated with black paint. We opened them; they were empty. Weird indeed.

Now that I am refreshed and relaxed, my memory travels back again to Barinas. I cannot stop thinking of that woman. I wonder what she is doing. Does she remember me? Possibly I do not pass through her mind. Such is life. All of us, except for the sentries, are taking a rest. However, it is as late as 9:30 in the morning and there is still a long way to go.

All of us have eaten and filled our canteens with water. I am to stand up, to put my gear on, to reorganize the patrol and, here we go, up to the hill! I will continue writing later.

In fact, I do not feel like writing. I am, all of us are, very tired and yearning

63 Ohrland Pacheco Tayhardat.

64 Venomous serpent species.

for a rest. I will just recap on the events of the day. Right now, it is 6:35 in the afternoon since we left "The witches' valley," as the boys named it.

Well, at 9:30 in the morning, we departed from that haunted place. We went up the mountains with the sun getting stronger. Around 11:00 in the morning, we found a chaffed road, pretty good, for there were trails of vehicles. I appointed two second-year cadets as scouts, Pacheco and Gonzalez. They are the most veteran ones after Pedro, Luciano and I.

The road was consistent with the 12° azimuth, followed by us since our departure. First thing I thought was about the danger of advancing across a road, because of potential ambushes. Therefore, to be sure, I resolved to send the explorers about 100 meters ahead of me, at the forefront of the patrol, and inside the bushes; one explorer on each side of the road. Pedro's squad moved forward to the left of the road, and Luciano's squad walked to the right of the road. The radio operator [Barrios, Cadet I] and the nurse [Rodriguez, Cadet I] walked beside me. Thus, we moved up along the fresh road, bordering the leafy trees, until approximately 13:00 hours [1:00 p.m.].

We reached the end of the road and I ordered a stopover. I climbed up a hill together with the radio operator. We could observe from up there mountains everywhere. I made some calls on the radio to locate Toro, the company commander.⁶⁵ He must be far away, in Gamelotal. Damn it! The long-distance transmitter broke down! Therefore, I tried to get in touch with some patrol that must be a short distance away.

Finally, Toro 3 replied, that is, Dumas' patrol. I was extremely happy at speaking with him in those mountains. He provided me his coordinates I could spot them with the binoculars. Over there, about three kilometers, in another hill showing a ploughed section with plantain trees alongside, the patrol of "El Cabezón"⁶⁶ had been deployed. Its axis of advance ran parallel to mine. Commander Dumas informed me that a cadet of his patrol had to be evacuated in helicopter after a snake bit him. In addition, a freshman had fever and was dehydrated. He also told me that patrol N^o 5, commanded by fellow Ortiz,⁶⁷ was missing, with no news at all of its whereabouts.

65 The commander of four platoons, composed of approximately 100 cadets.

66 Dumas Ramírez.

67 José Miguel Ortiz Contreras.

Fortunately, my patrol was complete, alive and kicking, for the time being. Finally, we said goodbye and wished each another luck. I used the binoculars to explore the area. Far away, blurrily, the Venezuelan plains can be appreciated at all their greatest, grandiose extent. Having surveyed the terrain, I opted to continue alongside a small valley to the right. Therefore, we went down where the boys were. Pedro informed me that an enemy patrol of about seven men had passed in close proximity. They went in the opposite direction.

We climbed up the valley very carefully not to be taken by surprise. We went up alongside a water course. The climb was extenuating and exhausting. We did not stop until reaching the top. At that point, I realized that there was no exit, except for one. There was an escarpment in front of us and we lacked ropes to go down.

The only accessible way was to the right, yet that represented two major disadvantages. Firstly, we would have to be diverted from the route of advance. Secondly, we would have to continue going up to a range of mountains running parallel to our azimuth. There was no other choice. We could not get slammed there. We were running out of

water. Needless to say, spending the night at that mountain would be not that pleasant. So, we kept on going up. It seemed that we would never end. That bloody range of mountains is the steepest terrain I have ever climbed. My legs were stiff and numb because of the abnormal blood flow.

However, precisely at moments like these, under dire circumstances, is when you are destined to demonstrate whether you have the guts and whether you have "those" well rounded,⁶⁸ in their place, and whether you are able to set an example for your subalterns and lead them to the hell, if necessary.

And modesty forbids me from mentioning that I have done a great job so far. I have noticed the boys' behavior and can see they have put their trust in me.

Finally, we arrived at a place with no possibility of climbing any further. From there, I could see the entire range of mountains.

Nobody had water, and most of the food had been consumed. The helicopter flied alongside the mountain many a time, but we

68 To be brave and courageous.

were out of sight, because the leafy trees covered us. I did observe the helicopter and its occupants through the binoculars. Knocking down such "animal"⁶⁹ with a rifle shot would be as easy as 1, 2, 3. They do it this way in Vietnam.

Well, while taking a rest there, on top of that mountain, I went over the surroundings and realized that northwards we could stretch to a flat, green area.

"There must be water over there," I thought. This is the only time I have hesitated since our departure yesterday. I spent over half an hour to make a decision and go down the slope that, besides being very steep, had scratchy, thick vegetation. Water was my concern. What if there was no water down there? What about been unable to break through that damned vegetation and get stranded tonight, with no water or food? If that ever really happened, then I do not know who could help us. But I gambled on it.

Still another thing: the radio is not transmitting. We just listen to what others talk, but they cannot listen to us. Well, we put our gear on, like beasts of burden, and

⁶⁹ Reference is made to the helicopter.

I, to cheer up the boys, exhausted as they were, their dried chapped lips, went ahead, breaking ground. That was horrible. It was well beyond 4:00 in the afternoon and the sun was sinking from the distance. The guys moved forward, in a column, one by one, behind me. I assisted myself with a trenching knife and, above all, with my rifle, painfully clearing the way. That seemed to be the way to the hell.

Going down was almost impossible. Besides obstructing the way, bejucos, trumpet trees and cují trees⁷⁰ appeared to be determined to devour us. After innumerable falls, bumps and scratches, much swearing and rude remarks to vent the rage, we arrived at a fairly cleared area. We stopped in order to take a breather for 10 minutes. There, I felt the need to gather the patrol and say some inspiring words to hearten them.

It was 6:00 in the afternoon. That means that it took us almost two hours to go down and cut the bushes with no break. While resting, I measured again the azimuth with the compass and could see, within one kilometer, the entry to an extensive valley with low,

⁷⁰ Widespread plants in dry areas in Venezuela. Trumpet and cují trees have thorns.

very green vegetation [scrubland].⁷¹ Palms abound. And further on, where we are heading for, there are no significant elevations.

Only numerous promontories and low hills can be observed. "Thank God," I said to myself. Now, we can move faster and we will certainly find water over there." I smoked a cigarette and we kept on marching. We walked more than half an hour in the scrubland, but no water at all. We found a path and further on, we arrived at a paddock. I saw potential salvation: a sloping raised land, perpendicular to our axis of advance. I was sure that there must be lagoon there. And I proved to be right. The lagoon was approximately 100 meters wide. Nevertheless, it has a very special characteristic: the water is so turbid that resembles tamarind juice. In looking at it, all of sudden a dark foreboding popped into my head. Was it drinkable? Or should we continue "barking" of thirst?⁷² I ordered the troops to surround the area. Once surrounded, I went with Pedro for an inspection on the banks of the water body, and we found an unoccupied place in the middle of some shrubs and palms all the way

⁷¹ Abundance of weeds.

⁷² Reference is made to extreme thirst.

down the lagoon, at the end of a cliff, with incrustated stones.

Here I am, right now. I have been writing down for almost one hour, sitting down on my gear, with my feet inside the water, to relieve the pain. I made a reconnaissance of the area and there are no more water bodies, other than this. I resolved to camp here, tonight. The sun is below the horizon and keeping on walking makes no sense.

The boys have been applying rudimentary methods to filter the water, passing it through a shirt or through a thin sand layer. It occurred to Velasquez boiling it and he smoked the whole steel helmet. All of us drank the water. Particularly, as far as I am concerned, nothing will happen, even cows drink from it. Furthermore, two enormous alligators are playing around in the middle of the lagoon.

Here, in addition to mosquitos, which flow like fighter jets, there is plenty of cattle ticks. And they are in love with human meat, the bastards. But what can be done? Putting out a bonfire is the only thing I can contrive in order to shoo the plague and, potentially, wildlife, even if it is anti-tactical, for we would give ourselves

away. I am terribly hungry, even though I drank plenty of tamarind juice, as the boys call the lagoon water. I found it succulent. That which does not kill me only makes me stronger, my grannie says. I will stop writing down right now. I feel physically and mentally worn out.

It is 8:30 in the evening. I am resting on my field bedding, beside the bonfire. Finally, I made a decision and ordered the troops to build it with cattle manure, as mosquitos were unbearable. I was intent on not writing any more for today. However, I can feel enormous relief in my body and soul, and that motivates, inspires me to continue writing these lines, which will be eventually helpful to recall these times of grief and hardships.

After ending with writing this afternoon, I took my map out and estimated our location. If I am not wrong, we have passed the state of Portuguesa and must be in the south-eastern part of the state of Lara. In that case, I am almost sure that we will arrive at the camp tomorrow, in north direction.

Here, in the surroundings, bitterweed abounds. It rekindled the bygone, yet inde-

lible image of my early childhood, collecting, together with Adán and my grannie, in Sabaneta paddocks, bunches of that plant to sweep our humble, dirt floor dwelling.

That evening, once it got completely dark, I gathered the boys, gave them all the instructions for tomorrow and responded to their questions. Afterwards, I shot the red fireworks to ascertain whether any other patrol could locate us. Should the enemy discover us, we are ready and prepared to defend ourselves. Next, I shot a short burst of war cartridges, as I thought I heard a faraway burst. Possibly, tonight, another patrol will approach us. I think there is one nearby.

Today is Thursday and tomorrow will be the deadline to arrive at Gamelotal. Based on my estimates, about thirty [30] kilometers are still to cover. Should we have no major obstacles in the road, I think we can make it.

Right now, I am thinking of my folks. It is impossible for me not to think about some people. We are in June. I will become Second Lieutenant soon. Thereafter, the parachuting training course and later on, HOLIDAYS. Luckily no subject matter is pending. By the

middle of July, I will be back in Barinas,
insofar as no accident occurs during the pa-
rachuting training course.

.....//.....

Friday, June 14, 1974

I woke up not long ago. I drank some tamarind juice to quench hunger, and I am smoking a cigarette. It is 6:00 in the morning. The boys are still asleep. I will let them rest some time more. I did not have a good night's sleep. I woke up many a time during the night. On one occasion, an alligator was lying beside me. It scared the crap of me! I also dreamt of HER. So, I was not in the mood to come back to reality. I woke up about two meters away from the site where I laid down last night. It was an awesome dream. I will continue writing later. Right now, I will measure the azimuth again and check the map. I will continue moving northwards.

It is 12:30 noon. We are in a region called Bucarito, property of a farm in the state of Lara.

This morning we departed at 7:00. We found a path and walked through a jungle. However, the path ended inside there. We kept on walking and finally arrived at a clearance. I climbed up a hill and made a visual reconnaissance of the horizon. Far away, perpendicular to our axis of advance, there was another road, in very good condi-

tions. We arrived at there and noticed trails of vehicles.

We took a break by the side of the road. I seized the opportunity to remove all the cattle ticks stuck to me last night. I lighted up a cigarette and used it to remove the cattle ticks sticking to my skin. Now, I regret to have done it, because the burns get very itchy in the sun together with sweat.

We had been resting for 15 minutes, smashing the fruit of a corozo palm⁷³ next to us, when an old peasant came closer to our makeshift camp. I spoke a good while with him to find our exact location. The information proved very useful. The road to the right would lead us to a town called El Altar; to the left, about 5 kilometers, we would find a black road leading to Barquisimeto, arriving at La Miel, a town located by the side of the road. I checked the map and realized that we could not go to El Altar, because it is located at a distance of more than 10 kilometers from here and we would drift away from my northward direction.

The peasant also advised me that, to the left, following the way, we could find

⁷³ A hard-shell fruit, similar to coconut, but smaller. It contains two or three edible nuts.

a water stream. Therefore, I resolved to go leftwards. Cadet Hernandez N.⁷⁴ has told me that he does not feel good because of his legs and that he has a terrible headache. I encouraged him with my words, promising him, among others, that we would arrive soon and the full patrol should enter the camp at Gamelotal, which was not far away.

As a matter of fact, we could not find the bloody water stream. Instead, we met with a group of working peasants. They gave us some water. I disposed of the "tamarind juice" taken from the lagoon (I still had some of it) and filled my canteen with fresh water, from a big container held by the peasants.

We found a hog plum tree⁷⁵ and stuffed ourselves to the gills. Then, for the second time, I hesitated to make a decision. First time was back there, up there, on top of the mountain. Now, it was here, in the Lara prairie. I hesitated because these peasants supplied additional in-depth information. Should we continue leftwards, we would find, before reaching the road, a ranch where the-

74 Edgar José Hernández Nieto.

75 A small deciduous tree up to 20 meters high. The fruit pulp of a thin layer is either eaten fresh or made into juice.

re was cheese, cowmilk, arepas, that is, food. We were starving.

Sure enough, the boys were willing to get there, me too. But also, there was a problem: we would lose plenty of time, and today is the deadline to arrive at the camp. I gathered the boys and told them that we would not get to the ranch. All of them grumbled, even Pacheco uttered something to the contrary of what I had said. I had to be tough with him to prevent collective troubles. Possibly, in his shoes, I had taken the same stance; hence, I can understand him. However, I cannot please him, for I am responsible for the timely arrival at Gamelotal with the whole patrol. Therefore, in a strained atmosphere among us, we pulled out of the road to take again our axis of advance. Paths abound in the area, and taking them is not appropriate, otherwise, we ran the risk of straying from our set direction. Nonetheless, a path, for someone hungry and tired, as we were, is a temptation.

After walking for a good while, we arrived at a pond, consisting of a cement tank and the endpoint of two pipes used for water supply for the cattle. Here I am, writing now, sitting down on the edge of the pond.

There was no water when we arrived. However, we found the pump engine and after several failed attempts at starting it for over half an hour, Luciano, who claimed that he had worked for one year on an engine of same make in his father's farm, laid down his arms, tired of pulling the string.

We had resigned to keep on walking, missing the chance of throwing a bit of water on our head and face. However, all of a sudden, a boy of about 17 years of age emerged from the dusty road, riding a horse. He wore shabby clothes, he is clearly a peasant. I think he took fright. I invited him to get down and have a chat. He did start the engine and we could take a cowboy-style shower.⁷⁶ His name is Francisco. Right now, he is over there, in the engine booth, ensuring that it will not stop running. I have always been more than grateful, particularly with those guys, who stay away from meanness, with no more ambition but their work and living at leisure in the countryside. So, I collected some money from among the boys and gave it to Francisco.

In addition to providing us with water, the young peasant will lead us through a

⁷⁶ Ironically, brief shower, taken in a rush.

trail up to a path that, according to him, goes straight to Gamelotal. If so, we are done.⁷⁷ I will continue writing later...

It is 4:00 in the afternoon right now. To my left, the sunrays fall fully onto the green prairies of the Lara landscape as the gorgeous Barquisimeto sunset overwhelms the Venezuelan crystal-clear blue sky. I am sitting down on a oil pipeline, stretching down, like a huge snake, crossing lagoons, plains and estuaries, and ultimately mingling in a point where the horizon breaks perpendicularly.

Once Francisco led us to the broad and reddish road, we walked in forced march, in terms of speed, bound for the longed-for Gamelotal camp. We passed through a village where some peasants gave us huge arepas and cow milk. Finally, after two days, our stomachs had received something appealing.

After 2:00 in the afternoon, the sun was blazing furiously and I had to slow down the march, because my boys were lagging behind. Luciano was barely walking. Same thing happened to freshman Edgar Hernández, who was virtually dehydrated.

⁷⁷ To attain the goal.

At 3:00 in the afternoon, I deviated from the route and resolved to follow northwards, as indicated in the compass. In doing so, I saved at least a couple of hours of marching. We found the pipeline. I ordered the patrol to stop and climbed up to this hill, where I am now and where the pipeline passes through.

The boys are down there, at a distance of approximately 200 meters. If they could see what I am seeing right now, they would come up here in a rush, forgetting about their pains. I take my binoculars and watch northbound. Over there, in the direction we are moving forward, about five kilometers lies, magnificent, challenging yet vanquished, the GAMELOTAL CAMP.

Situated in a small esplanade, it is surrounded, north and east, by a tiny forest.

Farther on, there are some hills. The Mobile Bull [the helicopter] rests on one of them. Further down, there is a big tent, next another one. To the left there is a green-green prairie, seemingly aimed to set up there our tents. In a road that crosses the camp, the vehi-

cles that transported us from Caracas are parked, forming one line. It is an administrative camp. For this reason, it is fenced with stakes painted in white. Everything looks beautiful, but nothing compared to our buoyant, haughty Venezuelan flag, hoisted and waiving in the middle of the facilities. Yellow, blue and red, the colors of glory and liberty, Simon Bolivar's strong desire for the people, incapable of understanding, let alone realizing, his ideals. In any case, here we go, trying to change something. It will be hard indeed, but we will make it with perseverance.

Now, I am going down to give the boys the good news. I will continue writing later.

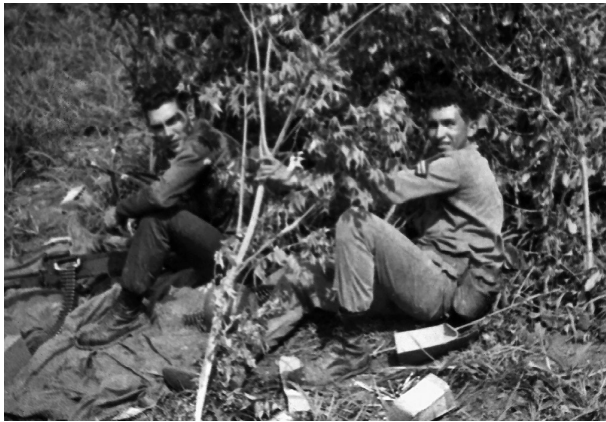
It is 30 minutes after midnight. I am inside the tent, writing down under the light of a gasoline lamp. They welcome me fairly well, considering that I am so tired. Round guard, second shift.⁷⁸ I made a reconnaissance already of all sentry posts. Now, I will continue writing down this short journal. I have lighted

⁷⁸ Tour conducted by a deputy officer or officer to ensure the surveillance by the sentries under their command.

on a Belmont cigarette, a souvenir of my combat ration.

This afternoon, we arrived at the camp at 6:00. We took dinner and put our tents up. Two patrols are missing and out of reach. I inquired my mark for the patrolling exercise and learned that I scored 95 points. That is to say, I performed very well, in spite of being my first time at commanding men into the wild. Today (for it is past midnight), we will travel to Barquisimeto, to play baseball versus the team of Central Western University. It is more than likely that I will meet with Wladimir⁷⁹ there. Since all my body aches, I am not sure that I will play well. I am afraid of screwing it up. Still worse, the pitcher set to open the game is still missing in the middle of nowhere.

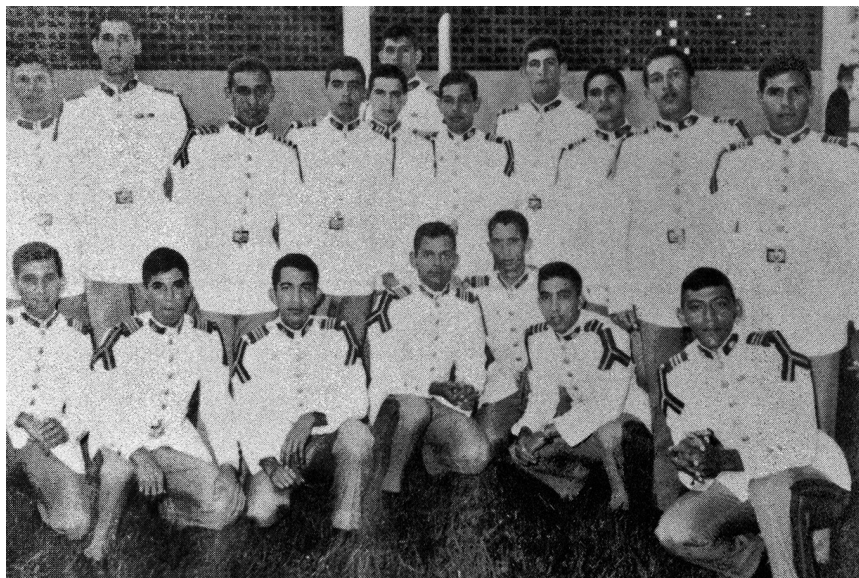
79 Wladimir Ruiz Tirado (1949-2015). A historian, professor and diplomat, born in the state of Barinas. A childhood friend and fellow of Hugo Chávez.



BRIGADIERS (THIRD-YEAR STUDENTS), PATROLLING EXERCISES (HUGO CHAVEZ TO THE LEFT)



FIELD FIRING PRACTICE (HUGO CHAVEZ TO THE LEFT)



A GROUP OF BRIGADIERS (HUGO CHAVEZ, TOP, SECOND FROM RIGHT TO LEFT)



ON INSTITUTIONAL VISIT (HUGO CHAVEZ, BOTTOM, THE FIRST ONE TO THE LEFT)



BRIGADIERS TAKING LESSONS (HUGO CHAVEZ, TOP LEFT CORNER)

PARACHUTING TRAINING COURSE

Maracay, 1974

Maracay, June 24, 1974

We set off from Caracas at 14:00 hours. At 16:30 hours, we were already here, in the Aragua Airborne Task Force. Since today is the Army Day, we had no activities, except only for our accommodation in the block.⁸⁰ I was placed in Sector "A" and Ordoñez Montero⁸¹ and I were in the same bunk bed. We got the only one cabinet in the block.

Today, I proceeded through my psychological training for the course. Certainly, I will make it. Many reasons compel me to complete it. I trust in myself, sure that everything will be all right.

It is hot here in Maracay. It does not affect me that much, because the weather in Barinas is hotter.

Lieutenant Machillanda Pinto got sick today. He will have to return to Caracas. I still have some flu.

80 Bedroom.

81 Joaquín Ordóñez Montero.

Maracay, June 25, 1974

The reveille was at 6:00 hours. I got up eager to commence the training course. After breakfast [food here is pretty good!], we received a theoretical class on the parachuting gear. We were split into three groups: A, B and C. I am B-4. Next, we were delivered the paratrooper helmet. It was a little small for me. Dumas, as usual, had troubles with finding a helmet of his size. His head is like a block. All of that happened in the packing room. From there, we went straight to the training area for the baseline physical exam.

I performed well, and I won in the 300-yard race, but I felt dizzy. I had a headache for a while. Some fellows were vomiting.

We were off duty all the afternoon. Today is a day off for the army. I think we should be in the street. Never mind, as my primary and sole goal right now is becoming a paratrooper. I keep on feeling great self-confidence.

Today, I saw for the first time an officer beating a soldier with a saber.

My promotion to Second Lieutenant is 12 days away, whereas holidays are 10 days

away. "The present is a time for struggle;
the future is ours."

Maracay, June 26, 1974

Today, we tried the gear. In the first hour, I learned to put myself the main parachute on and, next, the reserve parachute. Next, I learned to get in the plane and remain in there. Later on, we went for the jump.

In the morning, some EFOFAC second lieutenants graduated as paratroopers, including one from Barinas. As I look at them, after having completed their last two jumps, I think that if they made it, I will make it faster.

In the afternoon, I learned to handle the parachute in the air [hanged harness].

Later, during Physical Education, a very regretful event occurred. All of the 14 engineering students that should made up subject matters were recalled to Caracas, being unable to continue the training course. They will do it subsequently. It is sad indeed, as they had shown to be in high spirits.

It rained in the evening. I completed the second shift in the accommodation block guard.

Maracay, June 27, 1974

We continued a hard training of falls, boarding of the plane, individual and group jumps. I learned to pick up the gear after the fall.

In the afternoon, during the training of falls, I severely hit my left shoulder. It hurts badly. I beg God it will be nothing serious. Still, my enthusiasm remains undiminished. I continue excited at becoming a paratrooper.

Today, I thought a lot about my family. God willing, I will reunite with them soon. Ysabel and Irene also occupied for quite a while my thinking time.

Maracay, June 28, 1974

Today, we woke up with an idea put into our heads: The Tower.⁸² In the morning, we were supposed to make a familiarization jump. That was not possible, though, because some fixtures were being made and grease applied to the structure. Instead, we received post-fall training. I learned to get rid of the parachute in case that, because of the wind, it could drag me after falling. It was fun, because if anybody failed to get untie on time, could fall into a muddy pit. I nearly fell into it by about half a meter.

At the end of the morning, we watched a demonstration of a jump from the Tower. First, Sub Lieutenant⁸³ Belisario;⁸⁴ next, Lieutenant Poly,⁸⁵ who jumped in an acrobatic style [on his back].

In the afternoon, all of us went to the Tower. Mine was the 19th turn to jump. At long last, the longed-for moment had arrived. I was up there, and I had to go down in the air. A fellow hesitated to jump and the lieutenant had to push him. At that moment,

82 Upright frame, used for parachuting drill.

83 Military rank of officers graduating from the Military Academy of Venezuela, effective until 1999.

84 Miguel Ángel Belisario Hergueta.

85 Germán Rafael Romero Polly.

I swore on my holy mother's life that I would jump. I did it. I was frightened when I fell into the void. That was my first jump.

Maracay, June 29, 1974

During the morning, those who did not jump yesterday, jumped from the Tower. A fellow was close to chicken out. He had to jump many a time.

At midday, we departed for Caracas. I was happy to see my Academy again. We went out to the street until 17:00 hours. We had close-order formation for one hour.⁸⁶ I set the pace of the company⁸⁷ and missed it for the first time.

The culture and sports year-end ceremony was held at 20:00 hours. Raúl Salmerón won the baseball medal, and also the athletics medal and the medal for the Best Athlete of the Year.

After the ceremony, we went out overnight.

I spent the night with Nury. We talked about many things, sometimes nonsense, sometimes seriously. I still have the sensation of her soft hair and flagrant skin. She told me quite a few things of herself, her way of

86 Military tactical formation in which soldiers are close together and regularly arranged for the tactical concentration of force.

87 Infantry unit composed of 70-250 troops, tantamount to a cavalry battalion and/or artillery battery.

being, although she is likely to ignore that I already was aware of it. Two years are time enough to get to know somebody, even more so if she is a girl and we like her.

Caracas, June 30, 1974

Yesterday I went to bed late. I got up around 9:00 hours. During the morning, I gave a lesson of Chemistry to Raulito. Nothing really significant happened the rest of the day.

I came back to the Academy at 20:00 hours and started packing for the trip to Maracay tomorrow.

In arriving, I received a letter from Adán. I was very happy to learn from him.

He recounts that Mamá Rosa has gotten very skinny. Right away, it occurred to me doing something for her. However, as "Macha Macha" wisely says, you feel powerless. In any case, one fine day I will be able to do something and I think that day is not very far away.

Maracay, July 1, 1974

I received a letter from Nancy, the girl I first met with last year during my holidays as a brigadier. I will try to spend some time with her soon in July.

There was a general rehearsal of the parade of July 5 in the morning. Later, we returned the sports materials.

In the afternoon, there was a rehearsal of the commencement ceremony for the end of the academic year, next Wednesday, July 3. Dumas won no medal at all. All of us were taken aback by the news.

Approximately at 16:00 hours, we, the third-year students, were bound for Maracay. We are determined to become paratroopers. The Tower awaits us. I have promised to myself that next Wednesday, on my way back to Caracas, I must have ranked among the five top jumps from the mythological 34-feet Tower.

We took dinner at the GATAR [Aragua Airbone Group]. Afterwards, the Major Brigadier gathered us and said a few words of encouragement.

Maracay, July 2, 1974

In the morning, I jumped twice from the Tower. In the first jump, I opened up my elbows; in the second one, I did not draw in my head.

In the afternoon, I insisted. I jumped twice again. The first jump was not too good, but I was feeling more and more comfortable and less fearful. Finally, my last jump in the afternoon was, actually, excellent. I bended my back to the extreme. I stuck my nose to the reserve parachute. The Olympic jump in the air looked perfect.

In learning that Rondon Rivero⁸⁸ and Romero Hernandez⁸⁹ had gotten in the ranking, I swore on my mother's health that I will be qualified tomorrow. I will do my utmost. I need to make at least three (3) jumps in a row, like the last one today.

I am sure I will make it tomorrow.

88 Alcides Daniel Rondón Rivero.

89 César Rafael Romero Hernández.

Maracay, July 03, 1974

I should fulfill two promises this morning; both of them depended on one thing only: jumping nicely from the Tower. For such purpose, however, I need to persuade the referee who is down there, holding an evaluation form where he can tick at least ten errors. For only one of those, a jump could be classified as poor. However I was determined.

First jump: perfect.

Second jump: perfect.

Third jump: perfect.

I had honored my promises. In the afternoon, I departed for Caracas more than satisfied. I had come to debunk the myth of the Tower and I made it. I got some blows on my face, and the upper part of my legs, close to my testicles, are peeled off. In any case, I entered the ranking and it was all that I wanted. I was in the top five.

We arrived in Caracas, straight to the academic year-end ceremony. My promotion to Second Lieutenant is three days away.

Caracas, July 4, 1974

Close-order formation in the morning.
Nothing of note the rest of the day.

Caracas, July 5, 1974

In the morning, we went to the Congress. Later, we paraded before the president. It is my last parade holding a rifle.⁹⁰

Afterwards, we went out the street until 23:00 hours [11:00 p.m.].

I had a telephone conversation with Nury. Next, when I was getting ready to leave for the Academy, she showed up. We chatted for a while. She told me she had cried because she wanted to come after our telephone conversation, because she was very bored in a get-together where she was. The fact of the matter is that all her family was there and she had to wait for them.

Today, I had a telephone conversation with my mum. I noticed her somewhat frightened and anxious to find about me. Dad had gone fishing.

I was very happy to learn that all of them are fine.

90 A type of gun with a long barrel, fired from the shoulder and designed to be accurate at long distances.

Caracas, July 6, 1974

We spent all the morning cleaning the Academy. Lieutenant Machillanda gave us some advice, which I consider valuable.

At noon, fourth-year students departed for Maracay. Finally, they left. They will never come back. Tonight, they will become sub lieutenants.

Those of us, who did not go to Maracay, went out to the street at 16:00 hours (4:00 p.m.).

In arriving at Josefa's place, the girls were playing bingo. I joined them and lost five bolivars.

In the evening, I took Marysabel and Nury to the movies. We meant to see *The Exorcist*, but it was scheduled to end too late and I had to return at 24:00 hours (12:00 midnight). We opted to go to the Arauca and see *The Unforgettable Party*. We got a kick out of it. Since we went out from the movie at 11:05 p.m. and no mini vans⁹¹ would appear, I took each of them by one arm and all of the three of us ran like kids.

91 Vehicles used for public transport.

Caracas, July 7, 1974

The promotion ceremony took place at 10:00 in the morning. The General handed over to us the sabers and addressed himself to us. He made us clear that from now on, at the Academy, lies what he called the big hope of the army: the entire Andrés Bello Plan. We are the first second lieutenants that form part of such plan, responsible for either advancing or burying it.

Later on, we went out the street. I felt weird with the saber,⁹² and very proud of boasting my four stipes and stars.

Nury was sitting down on the wall when I arrived at home. She was the first one to congratulate me with the respective peck.

The boys were very happy at seeing me with my new "sword," as they call it. Armandito is the one who queries the most into the meaning of things. Thank God for having them here, in the absence of my family. However, I cannot stop thinking of my beloved ones.

Armandito asked me a question that caught me unawares. We were speaking of promo-

92 A heavy sword with a wide, usually curved blade, used as a symbol of command by military officers.

tions and the ranks of Colonel⁹³ and General. All of a sudden, he asked the question: "Will you visit us when you become General?" I replied that, whatever my rank would be, I would never forget them. I could notice from his face that he was very happy to hear my answer.

The graduation party was that night, with the Billo's.⁹⁴ I arrived at home at 3:00 in the morning, because we, the fourth-year students, were off duty and tomorrow we will go on leave.

93 The sixth and highest rank in the hierarchy of army officers.

94 Billo's Caracas Boys, a renowned Venezuelan orchestra of dance music.

Caracas, July 8, 1974

Today is Isabel's birthday.

In the morning, I explained to Raulito some things of the novel *Doña Barbara*.⁹⁵ I studied it four years ago.

Then, Nury showed up; all her body aching. She told me that the night before she had fever. She took some tablets and then we chatted in "our sofa." Today, her parents left on a holiday trip.

She wondered if that stuff of parachuting was very dangerous. I replied, "no, but if something happened to me..." She did not let me continue talking.

Maruja called me last night. She wanted to go to the party, but I was gone already. In addition, it was not convenient for me that she would go.

I returned from my leave of absence at 13:30 hours. I spoke with Lieutenant Angarita.⁹⁶ He advised me that he would go to Maturín, to a hunters' battalion.

95 A widely known novel written by Venezuelan author Rómulo Gallegos.

96 José Rafael Angarita.

I gave him as present a book on tactics and a tight hug as a token of gratitude. That is when you realize that time passes. José graduated already.

At 15:00 hours [3:00 p.m.], we headed for the GATAR [Aragua Airbone Task Force] to continue the parachuting training course.

Caracas, July 9, 1974

I woke up in high spirits to restart my course. During the training at the Tower, I watched my peers jumping. Since I got in the ranking already, I had no need to jump today. Later, I qualified for the exam of falls.

I feel prepared to board the plane. However, I was somewhat demoralized when Major⁹⁷ Urbano⁹⁸ gathered us and informed that we would jump on Saturday and that they would bend over backwards to make us jump five times that day.

I was somewhat annoyed in the afternoon because all we do now is to review the fall. My left tiptoe is aching.

We were on the platform when it started raining. At that point, the training ceased. We did not take Physical Education, for we are in very good shape.

In the evening we saw Spinout, a musical film and comedy starring Elvis Presley.⁹⁹

97 Army officer of fourth rank and the first rank in the category of chief and top officers.

98 Tito Rigoberto Urbano Núñez.

99 US singer and musician of international fame, also known as Elvis the King (1935-1977).

Maracay, July 11, 1974

In the morning, all of us jumped from the Tower. I made my last jump, and it went wrong, because I tilted sideways. I realized it when I was with my body inverted in the air [with my head down]. I got the second blow fully on my neck. I was knocked out, not even verified the parachute canopy. I do not know why. Not even my first jump was such a disaster. I think I was over-confident. Anyway, that jump was not taken into consideration.

In the afternoon, we reviewed the fall. The Dirty Dozen went straight to the Tower and finally were classified.

Nelson Rodriguez¹⁰⁰ looks like he had been whiplashed on his neck.

Today, it was confirmed that we will make three jumps on Saturday. The remaining two will be after holidays.

I am feeling my throat sore.

100 Nelson F. Rodríguez Delgado.

He who abandons all to be useful to his country loses nothing, but gains all he consecrates.

[Simon Bolivar]

Maracay, July 12, 1974

We stood up in sport uniform. After breakfast, we went to the physical exam. Earlier, we took a group jump from the Tower, unscheduled, incidentally. I was the fourth one to jump from the batch, and I did it well.

I passed the physical exam. In the 300-yard race I arrived in the third position, in 39-second time.

A big fuss was made when Major Urbano shared the Command decision: completing the jumps from the plane on Sunday morning and holding the commencement ceremony in the afternoon, including the presentation of the Paratrooper's Wing.¹⁰¹ Two jumps were slated for tomorrow and two for Sunday. One would remain: the tactical night-time jump, which we will make back from holidays.

I went to bed thinking that tomorrow I will jump from a plane for the first time in my life. It will be a great experience, perhaps the most thrilling in all my 20 years.

¹⁰¹ Insignia granted upon successful completion of the parachuting training course.

Maracay, July 13, 1974

We got up at 4:00 hours in the morning, had breakfast and at 6:00 hours we were deployed already on the ramp. We put our parachutes on and right away to the plane. It was my third time onboard a C-123.¹⁰² I was sitting down, looking out the front window at my peers who were on ground, expecting to jump from a second plane. I was supposed to go out through the left doorway and in the shift number 10. That is, I would jump in the second turn of the plane, for we would leave five at a time.

We took off, looking through the window at the ground drew slowly away. I asked to myself whether I thought I was a superman, because I had not been frightened so far. Nevertheless, I felt fearful when the first group of five stood up and I looked at them vanishing up, one after another, through the doorway. We made a second veer and now it was my turn. The jump instructor, Lieutenant Brusco H., ordered us to stand up. We hooked. It is said that true courage lies on mastering fear, and I did it. I looked at the first four jumping.

102 Fairchild C-123 Provider, military transport aircraft.

I stood up on the doorway. The faces of all the persons who motivate my life went through my mind. In less than 30 seconds I also recalled when I was a child. Lastly, I thought of God. I barely heard the word "Jump!" and could feel the jump instructor slapping on my left leg. At those moments it seems as though you are not alive. I only felt the wind gusting me to the side. I was not afraid, yet I remember that I got in despair at seeing the white cloth in front of me. It was the parachute due to be deployed. In a fraction of a second, it opened up. Then, I felt an immense happiness at looking up at the white dome, the canopy,¹⁰³ wide opened.

Everyone let out shouts of euphoria in the air. I felt the pleasant sensation of floating in the air. Immediately, though, I realized that the air was blowing very hard and that the ground was "coming in close proximity to my feet." I closed my legs and put my tiptoes downwards. I hit the ground harder than I thought. On my back, head and somersault. Captain Serrano¹⁰⁴ looked at me falling down and drove his vehicle to the site, thinking that something had happened

103 The part of the parachute deployed in the air.

104 Pedro Jesús Serrano Zapata.

to me. I just hit myself strongly. I picked up the parachute and went out to the road. I spent about one and a half minute in the air, from the time of jumping from the plane until falling down. I jumped at 1,200 feet on the terrain, with a 14-knot wind, very dangerous. One hour later, we made the second jump. I fell down in the same way, yet somewhat gentler.

In the afternoon, we went out for a walk around Maracay.

Maracay, July 14, 1974

I made the third and fourth jumps. Nothing new.

In the third jump, I fell down gently; touched down and flexed my knees, but I did not fall down with my whole body.

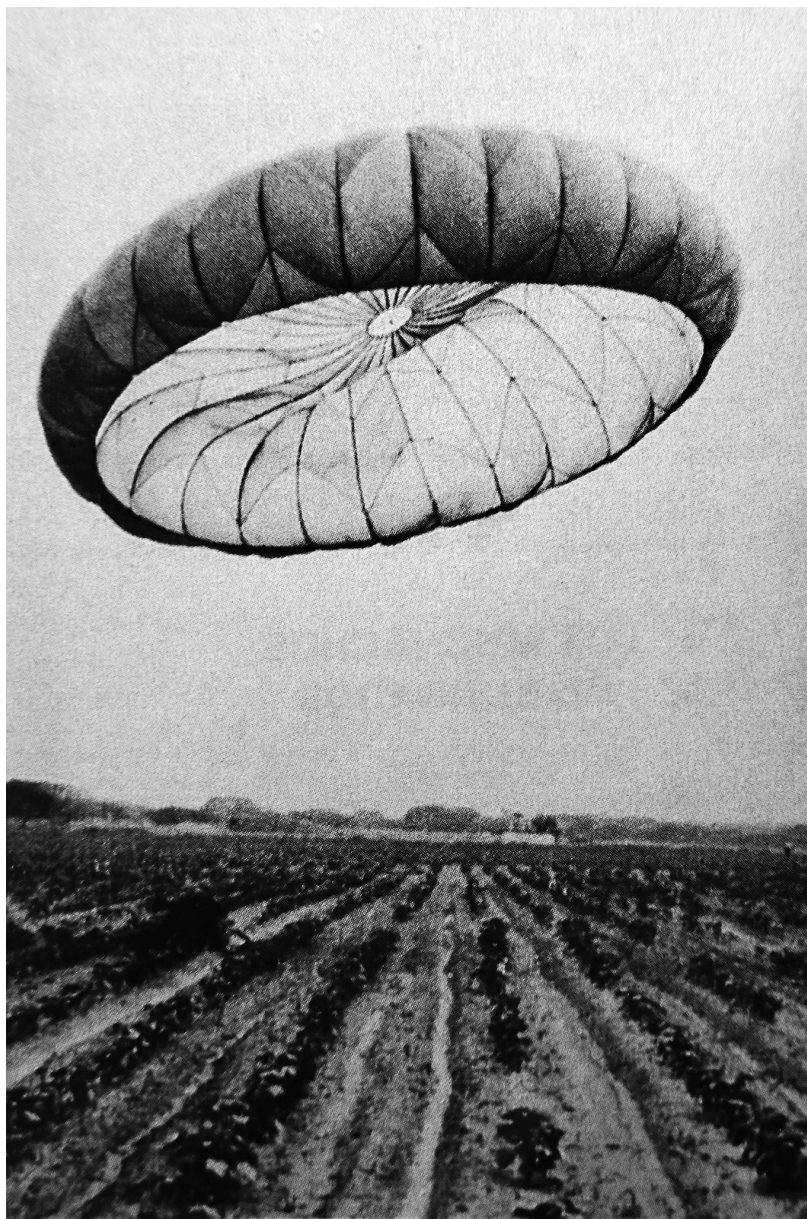
The fourth time, we jumped rather outside the jump area and some peers ended up hanging in the trees.

Now, we are paratroopers. So many efforts rewarded at that moment by the scored goal. Nonetheless, the night-time jump is still ahead; we will make it after holidays.

We were awarded the Paratrooper's Wing, followed by the baptism. Finally, there was a toast at the officers' casino.

At 15:30 hours, we departed for Caracas. Holidays at long last. Thank God.

I AM A PARATROOPER!



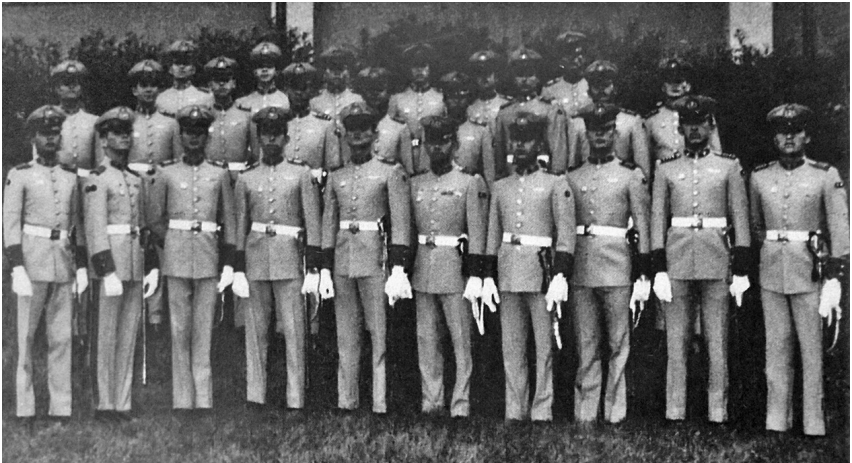
PARACHUTE JUMP. TOUCHDOWN STAGE.



JUMP PRACTICE FROM THE TOWER.



GROUP OF CADETS SOCIALIZING (HUGO CHAVEZ, FIRST ON THE LEFT).



SECOND LIEUTENANTS OF THE SIMÓN BOLÍVAR II CLASS (HUGO CHAVEZ, FIRST ROW, SECOND FROM RIGHT TO LEFT).

**FIELD PERIOD
WITH THE CANDIDATES
FOR CADETS**

GUAICAIPURO FORT, CHARALLAVE

SEPTEMBER 1974

Guaicaipuro Fort, Wednesday, September 11, 1974

All of the 12 Engineering Second Lieutenants departed together with the candidates to Guaicaipuro Fort.¹⁰⁵ After a 12-kilometer march, we pitched camp in a forested area. I put up my tent along with Ordoñez Montero. I gave it a woman's name to recall beautiful things, but also sad at the same time.

I was appointed commander of my company's first platoon, being entrusted with the responsibilities inherent in the post. In the afternoon, Ordóñez and I gave a lesson on water purification and power plants. It was fairly good. Next, I made arrows and signs for vehicle traffic in the camp and roads in the immediate vicinity.

Tonight, I will be in the third shift of the round.

Today, I learned a lot about campaign and engineering. I had no knowledge of it.

I have decided to start this short journal of the field period with the freshmen of this year. It will be for a week; another experience in my life.

105 Military compound, situated in the state of Miranda, Venezuela.

Guaicaipuro Fort, Thursday, September 12, 1974

Mosquitos virtually did not let me sleep last night. We got up at 6:00 in the morning. I immediately received the inspection officer's guard. The freshmen today completed two courts.¹⁰⁶ In the morning, elementary combat training; in the afternoon, sound and smell training. I acted as referee in the afternoon. A freshman pulled two of his teeth out with his rifle.

In arriving at the camp, I carried out my duties as an inspection officer, taking into account all the advice given to me last year by Lieutenant Perez Ramirez.¹⁰⁷

In the evening, I typed the briefing on the typewriter. Lieutenant Perez Ramirez spoke for a while with me. We have gotten to know one another. Right now, I am writing my journal by the light of two gasoline lamps, in the command big tent. The lieutenant just said goodbye. It is drizzling and I light up a cigarette. As I puff my cigarette when listening to the monotonous sound of the light rain trickling against the tent, I cannot stop bringing to my memory intensively a certain woman at this moment.

106 Military exercises.

107 Adeldo Emiro Pérez Ramírez.

My thoughts go back to the last time I met with her, last Saturday, there in Barinas. It seems to me that I was a bit detached. I barely talked to her. I had every intention of telling her many things, yet did not have the least chance of doing it. I said goodbye to her on Saturday evening. In addition, it was very early. The farewell was dry, significantly drier than the desert. She left without casting a glance at me, and I saw her closing the door behind her. Such is life, damn it!!

The rain is falling down softly. I am sleepy. I will use my hand lantern to guide myself into the wild. I turn on my pocket radio. Oh, what a coincidence! They are playing a song called Señora Bonita [Beautiful Lady]. It is 11:00 in the evening and there is total silence in the camp. Everyone has fallen asleep.

Guaicaipuro Fort, Friday, September 13, 1974

Today, the freshmen completed the court of Movements in daylight attacks. Lieutenant Serrano Zapata appointed me to give the candidates the theoretical lesson prior to the court. After the training, I went to the court to play the role of Commander Ernesto "Che" Guevara.¹⁰⁸ We had a guerrilla camp, where we chanted protest songs and ambushed the freshmen. I got a kick out of it; shouted myself hoarse.

I am writing on a plank, using the light of my hand lantern, listening to music. Over there, from a distance, toads croaking and crickets chirping in an adjacent lagoon can be heard. Again, memories of my childhood, in my faraway town, come back to my mind. The image of my beloved grandmother, and of my dearest parents and siblings comes to my mind. I hope that they are healthy and having a good time.

It is 8:25 in the evening. I keep on thinking of my family. I turn off the lantern and light up the usual cigarette.

¹⁰⁸ Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1928-1967). Argentinean-Cuban revolutionary physician; the leader of the world struggle for socialism and a benchmark of the leftwing for his actions in Cuba, Congo and Bolivia.

I cannot stop thinking of the same woman as well. I wonder what she must be doing now.

Sometimes, I think that I may not act as I do. She must be very happy, and this is what I want fervently for her. However, I can feel something burning inside me.

Guaicaipuro Fort, Saturday, September 14, 1974

This morning, the freshman completed the court of "Instinctive firing." A freshman was short of killing Dumas, after shooting at him accidentally. I did not attend that exercise, because I had left with Lieutenant Perez Ramirez to prepare the infiltration court, scheduled at the very last minute. I spent all day working on barriers [fences, pits, machine gun deployment, etc].

We got out from there at 6:00 in the afternoon, straight to the night-time court. There, we waited for dinner, which came late. All of the freshmen had gathered there, a bit nervous, fearful of the night-time court. I had come to deal with a certain situation at the court. I ate and left quickly for the sector designated to me. On my way, a heavy rain fell down, accompanied by thunderbolt and flashes of lightning. I did not get wet that much, for it occurred to me bringing my waterproof jacket, which also served as overcoat.

Since the way set to be taken by the freshmen is up the hill, and given the clayish, loose ground, we barely advanced. We slid in the mud, having a difficult time with it. Imagine how would it be for the

freshmen, frightened, swallowing tear gas, dragging themselves beneath barbed wire, and feeling the machine gun shots flying over them! "Those guys will die tonight," I thought.

Finally, I get to the site where I need to lit a bonfire, build a small hut and set the stage where Dumas and I will play the role of guerrilla men camping. Dumas has not arrived yet, and I am sitting down on my fiber helmet, inside the hut. The heavy rain is persistent. The flashes of lightning light up the road for brief moments. I can see the water falling down across the earth furrows.

I am writing now, at 8:45 in the evening. Sitting down on my helmet, I uphold the paper against my knees, lighted by my hand lantern. I am wet from my knees down and my feet are cold. I choose moments like this to write because they will be unforgettable eventually, because of the circumstances under which I am right now.

I feel very uncomfortable. At least, though, I am not getting wet, as those who failed to bring in waterproof jackets. While I feel the water pelting against the ground and my cold body, I think about the way

life is. Today is Saturday. I wonder what the young people of my age must be doing somewhere else; those who are free from so many sacrifices like this. Sure enough, they must be partying in a disco with their chicks, or going to the movies, or having fun anywhere else.

If they only knew what we are doing here, they would call us crazy. No, I am not. I am keenly aware of what I pursue and do, and because of that, I make sacrifices. I can remember right now a statement by Che: "The present is a time for struggle; the future is ours."

Now, I can remember that last Saturday, at this time, I was in Barinas. It is 9:00 in the evening already. At this same time, I was sitting down with my mum, Argenis and Cecilia, speaking nonsense. I only wish I could be with them right now, feeling the warmth of the family home where I grew up. Hey! What is that? Someone is approaching by the way. I am going to ask who he is. He replied: "Barinas, I am Dumas." As I see him, I remember when we were civilians. By then, we had no friendship bonds, as we have nowadays. How time flies and circumstances change!

Dumas brings in two cardboard boxes. I am to stop writing. Now, we will try to make a bonfire. We can build it with the cardboard, but we need to wait for the collected brushwood¹⁰⁹ to dry up. We will go to bed very late tonight. I wish it would stop raining.

109 Made of a tall-stalk plants.

Guaicaipuro Fort, Sunday, September 15, 1974

We went to bed at 3:30 and got up at 8:00 in the morning. Last night, Dumas and I managed to lit the fire with lot of flames. Fortunately, it stopped raining, and we spent the night at the heat of the bonfire, spooking and ambushing the freshmen. Farias sustained a serious injury in one hand after falling down on the fence, driven to tremendous despair by tear gas.

This morning, we saw a demonstration of flight-trajectory and curve fire weapons, including pistols, FAL FIN-30 rifles, carbines, rifles, machine guns (AFAG, .50, UZI), rocket launchers and mortar.

In the afternoon, freshmen completed the infiltration court. I was responsible for the theoretical instruction and organization of patrols. I am writing down beside a bonfire, on Guaicaipuro small square, made by ourselves with stones. A group of second lieutenants is playing cuatro. I sang a couple of songs from the plains: Furia [Fury], a corrido that reminds me of Narciso, and Fiesta en Elorza [Party in Elorza]. I am not in the mood for writing, I am worn out. Instead, I will think of my family and of the usual woman. She must be thinking of me.

"Still, in any day, at all time, at any time," as Pierina's song goes.

Guaicaipuro Fort, Monday, September 16, 1974

Today, the freshmen completed the final court, a combination of all the previous exercises. I spent all day firing an AFAG machine gun with war ammunition as the freshmen passed by. Honestly speaking, firing it has a pleasing flavor. The rattle of gunfire is exciting and you do not feel like taking your finger off the trigger.

Incidentally, when the next to last squad was passing by, the barrel was very hot, after having fired too many cartridges. A shot blasted in the machine gun chamber, damaging it. Luckily, Lieutenant Perez Ramirez, who was beside me, can bear witness to it.

We returned early to the camp. After dinner, Lieutenant Perez Ramirez taught me to operate the power plant. I highly appreciate it, for I will need it someday.

Later, in the evening, we made the usual farewell show. We improvised some comedy sketches. A freshman imitated me. He went up the table used as stage¹¹⁰

110 A framework made of wooden planks in form of stand.

and sang Furia, a corrido. Next, he described Barinas, as I do for them. After that, he got along with me.

Finally, the artists sang. I sang the song of Furia, the horse, and Downhill, by Los Terrícolas,¹¹¹ to humor the audience. Actually, I dedicated the song to someone very far away, at a distance of more than 500 kilometers. Also, I performed a comedy sketch, called The Rocky Soldier, together with Second Lieutenant Gustavo Perez Issa.¹¹²

I am finishing my journal before going to bed. Today the field period ended, concomitantly with these lines. I had a great week. Another stage in the struggle of the present, which will become a victorious future.

111 Venezuelan music band, very famous in the 1970's.

112 Gustavo Manuel Pérez Issa.



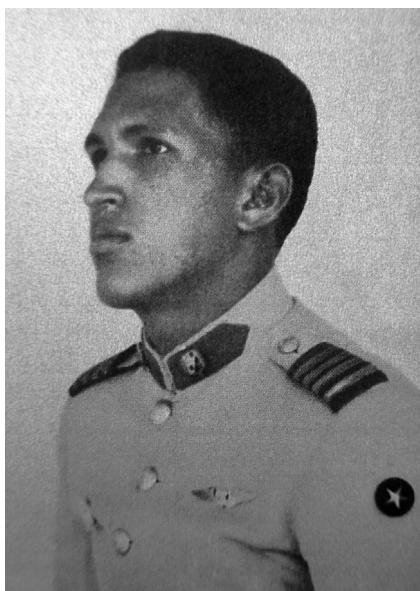
SECOND LIEUTENANTS AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY OF VENEZUELA
(HUGO CHAVEZ, AT THE TOP CENTER).



SECOND LIEUTENANT HUGO CHAVEZ RECITING.



HUGO CHAVEZ, MASTER OF CEREMONIES.



PORTRAIT OF HUGO CHAVEZ IN THE YEARBOOK OF SIMÓN BOLÍVAR II CLASS.



GRADUATION CEREMONY (HUGO CHAVEZ, FIRST ON THE RIGHT)



RECEPTION OF THE ACADEMIC LAUREL (HUGO CHAVEZ, FIRST ON THE RIGHT)



SIMÓN BOLÍVAR II CLASS. REDOUBLING THE PACE (HUGO CHAVEZ, FIRST FROM RIGHT TO LEFT)



INAUGURATION PARADE AS AN OFFICER (HUGO CHAVEZ, FIFTH IN THE BASE COLUMN)



PORTRAIT OF SUB LIEUTENANT HUGO CHAVEZ.

Afterword

I was recollecting one of my journals, things that one used to write. To tell you the truth, they were not extrictly journals because sometimes you wrote every other day; every other week. I have been writing down from my childhood.

These journals, or papers, or notebooks, almost of all them have gone with the wind... I have none of them. I have asked anyone who may be in possession of any of them to give me at least one copy, because some papers are somewhere there... Look what I wrote in 1974. Let me read this excerpt: "We passed by the house where I drank coffee last night..." [laughing] It is an old little quirk... I clearly remember that because it was a patrolling exercise... I was a third-year student at the Academy. I was Brigadier already, that is, I was a petty chief, as it were, of a platoon.

I remember that we were transported in trucks: it was the year-end exercise. All that was assessed. There was a referee for each patrol. Then, we were left over there, in the night, near Agua Blanca, in Portuguesa. We were set free over there: "Get out here!" We needed to move forward, in the direction of Barquisimeto.

We had only a compass and an azimuth. We were given a little sheet of paper with the azimuth. "Go straight!" And we were given combat rations for two days. However, the march was expected to take at least five days. Therefore, it was a matter of survival, day orientation, night-ti-

me orientation, comprehensive assessment from the military point of view.

That evening, I led my platoon uphill...

Because there was a drill: you ran the risk of being captured; there were mock enemies in the area. And the most wicked cadets were handpicked to play the role of enemies. Patrols were deployed and sometimes trained troops, professional troops, sergeants –mostly the members of anti-guerrilla units– played the role of enemies. That is, one could be captured. Imagine! The platoon could catch you and you were finished [laughing]. Therefore, one was in a continuously strained situation.

That evening, I led the platoon up the hill, about 200 meters from the road, and there, we cobbled together a camp on some rocks. We put some blankets and stood in night-time guard. No bonfire or anything of the sort. Beware! Forget about lights or turning on lanterns. Later on, walking through the slope, I sighted a tiny light and headed for there with a small group of four or five peers. It was a countryside house, of course. The housewife and her husband were there and offered coffee to us.

We left in order to take a rest. We advised them not to be scared, that it was an exercise, a work of ours... Then, the next day, we resumed our march by daybreak and passed by the little house... It was a march for about five days until reaching Barquisimeto. I remember that it was Father's Day, June 15, 1974.

So, look what I wrote:

We passed by the house where I drank coffee yesterday night. The lady came out, this time with two children, and they waved goodb-

ye. I saw the kids with immense sadness, their big bellies, surely full of earthworms from eating dirt, barefooted, naked. That scene made my blood boil and I get convinced of the need to do something, whatever, for those folks

I found those pages somewhere: “whatever, for those folks.” Afterwards, on another occasion, in another context, I wrote, also in 1974, but in August, when the freshmen joined the Academy... It was here, in Bejarano. Then, I wrote down:

We had a guerrilla camp, where we chanted protest songs and ambushed the freshmen. I got a kick out of it; shouted myself hoarse.

At night, mostly, I loved to ambush the freshmen. They were terrified... Sometimes one hanged some bags filled with cloth and a bunch of dirt -for them to be heavier- in a tall tree. When the freshmen came -all of them aghast- one dropped the bag through... [laughing] ...it was like a pulley, a string, and there the bag went, followed by a scream...

Those freshmen got lost, they threw themselves into the wild. Sure! It was soldier training. Soldiers are not supposed to be afraid of noise... but the freshmen were always frightened. Certainly, as a freshman, I also got scared.

At night, sometimes, we took drums, those of 200 liters, used for water, and we put stones inside them. When the freshmen were going up, we released about 10 drums from upside. Here the cavalry goes! Beware of horses! [laughing] These were playful tricks, for them to catch up with training.

It was tough, hard training; sometimes, two nights in a row, until the following day... I wrote this down on September 14, 1974:

I wonder what the young people of my age must be doing somewhere else; those who are free from so many sacrifices like this. Sure enough, they must be partying in a disco... If they only knew what we are doing here, they would call us crazy. No, I am not. I am keenly aware of what I pursue and do, and because of that, I make sacrifices.

And look how I complete this page: I can remember right now a statement by Che: "The present is a time for struggle; the future is ours."

Hugo Chavez

October 8, 2007



COMMANDER HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS, 2012,
HOLDING A HARD COPY OF THE JOURNAL OF A CADET

"It is an administrative camp. For this reason, it is fenced with stakes painted in white. Everything looks beautiful, but nothing compared to our buoyant, haughty Venezuelan flag, hoisted and waiving in the middle of the facilities. Yellow, blue and red, the colors of glory and liberty, Simón Bolívar's strong desire for the people, incapable of understanding, let alone realizing, his ideals. In any case, here we go, trying to change something. It will be hard indeed, but we will make it with perseverance."

Hugo Chavez, 1974.

— FUNDACIÓN —
HUGO CHÁVEZ

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