
History and Legend of the only Woman in Che's Guerrilla

24/06/2017



In her short and intense life she had to adopt different personalities and names like Haydée, Tamara, Vittoria, Marta and Laura, but the internationalist revolutionary who followed Che's route through the Bolivian jungle went down in history as Tania the Guerrilla Fighter.

Born in Argentina, of German father and Polish mother, this young woman arrived in Bolivia in 1964 with the name of Laura Gutierrez Bauer, with the mission to create conditions to organize a revolutionary front.

She came as a specialist in ethnology and a folklore expert of Argentine background and managed to infiltrate all spheres of government, said Cuban researcher and historian Froilán González, who along with his wife Adys Cupull, has written several books on the life of Che.

She was a physically attractive, charismatic, educated girl who mastered four languages and played accordion and guitar, and stood out in sports.

Hugo Herrera, who had the opportunity to meet her while working in the Department of Folklore of the Ministry of Education, recalls her as a beautiful and active young woman, who was always very attentive to everything that happened.

Tania met General René Barrientos, president of Bolivia at the time, and joined forces with important figures, including the head of the National Information Office of the Presidency, Gonzalo López Muñoz, and Defense Minister Alfredo Ovando. In La Paz she was linked to painters Juan Ortega Leytón and Moisés Chire Barrientos and gave lessons of German language to children of the oligarchy with the purpose of relating with his relatives and obtaining useful information for the rebel movement.

'Her life was very intense', affirmed in conversation with PL the Cuban historian, whom we interviewed during the premiere in La Paz of the documentary 'History of Ita: Unpublished stories of the life of Haydeé Tamara Bunke,

Tania the Guerrilla Fighter', with script of Adys Cupull and made by his sons Leandro and Livan.

We chose this country for the premiere because she loved Bolivia, admired her folklore and her pottery and here organized the first exhibition of typical costumes, the researcher recalled.

The documentary is titled 'History of Ita' because her mother told us that when she was a girl, they called her Tamarita, and since she was so small, she only pronounced Ita and that was the name she used in all correspondence with the family, González recalled.

Tania was born in Argentina and at the age of 14 moved with her parents to the German Democratic Republic, from where she followed closely all the events in her country and in Latin America, in particular the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

In Berlin, she worked as a translator for Latin American delegations. That's how she met Ernesto Che Guevara when he was Industry Minister, and the director of the National Ballet of Cuba, Alicia Alonso, took her to Havana.

In Cuba she worked in the Ministry of Education, in the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples and in the directory of the Federation of Cuban Women, became a militiawoman and participated in several volunteer works.

When she was commissioned the mission in Bolivia he adopted the name Tania in honor of a Russian girl named Soja who fought the Nazis under that pseudonym and was captured, tortured and hanged.

Tamara left Germany in 1961 and never returned, and her mother, Nadia Bider - despaired of not hearing from her - decided to make a trip to Cuba in 1964, says the historian.

There she met an officer, who told her she was fine, studying in a course and showed her a photo where she was very transformed and almost unrecognizable, but her mother stared into her eyes and said: yes it is her.

Tania came to Bolivia for a clandestine network, however, she was forced to join the guerrilla in March 1967 when on a trip to the camp of Ñancahuazú two members of the rebel movement deserted and reported her presence, so she could no longer get out of there .

In his diary, Che wrote: 'Everything seems to indicate that Tania is individualized, thus losing two years of good and patient work ...'

She was part of the rearguard group commanded by Juan Vitalio Acuña (Joaquín) and one of her tasks was to listen to the various Bolivian, Argentine and Cuban radio stations and report what was happening, the historian added.

For five months she had to face the hard life in the Bolivian jungle, the lack of water and food, bad weather and constant enemy hostility.

On August 31, 1967, the guerrilla was ambushed while crossing the Rio Grande at Vado del Yeso. Tania was waist-deep in the water, with her rifle held above her head, when she was shot through the arm and the lung and killed along with eight of her fellow insurgents in quick succession. Her body was then carried downstream and only recovered by the Bolivian army several days later on September 6.

According to the Cuban historian, the villagers of Vallegrande have a somewhat mystical image of the only woman in Che's guerrilla.

The Bolivian people turned her into a legend and say that she leaves the river when there is fog with a large basket of flowers and fruits, the researcher explained.

A poem written in his notepad says: 'Will my name be anything at all? / Will it leave nothing left behind me on earth? / At least flowers, at least songs ... '

Tania is known as the Flower of the Rio Grande and there is a gravestone covered with white roses in the place where her remains were found in Vallegrande.

