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CIA man who helped capture Guevara coming to Sac State

Prominent in the Thursday, Nov. 14, opening-night audience of Professor Roberto Pomo’s play Che Guevara and the Dispossessed at Sacramento State will be the man who spearheaded the Marxist revolutionary’s capture five decades ago in a Bolivian jungle.

Col. Felix Rodriguez, aptly depicted as the “Shadow Warrior” in his memoir, accepted Pomo’s invitation to travel from Miami to Sacramento because the professor spent two summer days interviewing the retired Central Intelligence Agency operative at the downtown Bay of Pigs Museum and at his residence.

“It was an intriguing experience,” Pomo recalls, “as I was late that first day getting to the museum by car.” A visibly apprehensive Rodriguez asked to see Pomo’s cellphone to verify that the battery was indeed dead as the professor explained why he failed to call and say that he would be late in arriving.

The colonel was no less suspicious when Pomo arrived at the Rodriguez residence. Studded with security devices that include a sophisticated surveillance camera, courtesy of the CIA, his home is a reminder of the threats of violence Rodriguez received after Guevara’s execution and many years after the event.

Rodriguez has recounted in numerous media interviews the moment on Oct. 9, 1967, when he informed Guevara that he was about to be executed in a ramshackle schoolhouse. He recalls the guerrilla leader’s stunned yet stoic reaction: “It’s better like this, Felix. I should never have been captured alive.” They shook hands, embraced and Rodriguez went outside, not wishing to witness the execution. As much as he disagreed with Guevara’s communist cause, the colonel continues to respect a fellow warrior who “died with dignity.”

Rodriguez recalls that he was struck by Guevara’s ragged appearance, with matted, dirty hair and strips of leather covering his feet. “He looked like a beggar,” the colonel says, instead of the dashing revolutionary depicted in the media. “I felt sorry for him.”
While Guevara’s capture and death remain a defining moment for Rodriguez, his career includes such daring encounters as slipping into Cuba via boat six weeks prior to the ill-fated 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and then escaping capture by Castro’s forces. He advised anti-guerrilla forces in Vietnam, logging hundreds of helicopter missions. He was involved in counterinsurgency operations in El Salvador and Nicaragua, which is why he was called before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to testify in the Iran-Contra hearings.

*Che* is produced by students, faculty and staff from the Theatre and Dance, Film, Music and Communication Studies departments. Performances are at 8 p.m. Nov. 14-16 and 22-23; 6:30 p.m. Nov. 20-21; and 2 p.m. Nov. 17 and 24. Tickets for the 6:30 p.m. shows are $8 general, $5 for children. All other performances are $12 general, $10 for students and seniors, $8 for children. Tickets are available at [www.csus.edu/hornettickets](http://www.csus.edu/hornettickets).

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Alan Miller

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