THE STRATEGIC VICTORY

In a few days the book, under the title "The Strategic Victory," in which I recount the battle the small Rebel Army waged against extermination, will be published.

I begin with an introduction explaining my doubts about the title I would give it "... I did not know whether to call it 'Batista's last offensive' or 'How 300 defeated 10, 000,' which might have seemed like a science fiction story.

It includes a short autobiography: "I did not want to wait for the day they publish the answers to countless questions about my childhood, adolescence and youth, stages that turned me into a revolutionary and armed combatant."

The title I finally decided to give it was: "The Strategic Victory."

It is divided into 25 chapters, containing many photos of the quality possible to achieve in those circumstances, and relevant maps.

Finally, there are some graphic sketches on the types of weapons used by both sides.

In the final pages of Chapter 24 of the narrative I made statements that were prescient.

In the last dispatch I wrote to be read on Radio Rebelde on August 7, the day after the conclusion of the final battle of Las Mercedes, I said:

"The offensive has been defeated. The biggest military effort that has ever been made in our Republican history, ended in the most terrible disaster that the arrogant dictator could have imagined; his troops are in full flight, after two and a half months of defeat after defeat, signaling that the days of his odious regime come to an end. The Sierra Maestra mountain range is now completely free of enemy forces."

The book on "The Strategic Victory" literally explains:

"The defeat of the enemy offensive, after 74 days of relentless fighting, meant the strategic shift in the war. From that moment the fate of the tyranny was finally cast as its imminent military collapse became clear. "

"That same day I wrote a letter to Major General Eulogio Cantillo, who led the enemy campaign from the command post in the area of operations, based in Bayamo. I confirmed to Cantillo that in the custody of our forces were around 160 prisoners, including many wounded, and we were willing to establish the relevant negotiations immediately for their return. After complicated negotiations, this second return of prisoners took place several days later in Las Mercedes.

"During those 74 days of intense fighting to reject and defeat the great enemy offensive, our forces suffered 31 fatalities. The sad news never daunted the spirit of our forces, but it tasted a bitter victory many times. Still, the loss of fighters could have been much higher, taking into account the intensity, duration and violence of the land actions and air strikes, and if it wasn’t so, it was due to the extraordinary expertise achieved by our fighters in the rugged nature of the Maestra and the solidarity among the rebels. Many times, some seriously wounded saved their lives, firstly, because their comrades did the impossible to move them to where they could be treated by the doctors, and all that despite the rough terrain and the whistling of bullets in the crossfire.

"Throughout these pages I have been mentioning the names of the fallen, but I want to bring all their names again here to offer at once the whole picture of our martyrs, worthy of eternal memory of respect and admiration of all our people. They are:

"Commanders: Andres Cuevas, Ramón Paz and René Ramos Latour, Daniel.

Captains: Ángel Verdecia and Geonel Rodríguez.

"Lieutenants: Teodoro Banderas, Fernando Chávez, The Artist, and Godofredo Verdecia.

"Combatants: Misaíl Machado, Fernando Martinez, Albio Martinez, Wilfredo Lara, Gustavo; Wilfredo González, Pascualito, Juan de Dios Zamora, Carlos López Mas, Eugenio Cedeño, Victuro Acosta, El Bayamés; Francisco Luna, Roberto Corría, Luis Enrique Carracedo, Elinor Teruel, Juan Vázquez, Chan Cuba; Giraldo Aponte, El Marinero; Federico Hadfeg, Felipe Cordumy, Lorenzo Véliz, Gaudencio Santiesteban, Nicolas Ul, Luciano Tamayo, Angel Silva Socarrás and José Diaz, El Galleguito.

"Collaborating farmers: Lucas Castillo, other members of his family, and Ibrahim Escalona Torres.

“Eternal honor and glory, infinite respect and affection for those who died then.

"The enemy lost over a thousand men, including more than 300 dead and 443 prisoners, and at least five large complete units of their forces were wiped out, captured or broken up. We captured 507 weapons, including two tanks, ten mortars, several bazookas and twelve 30-caliber machine guns.

"We must add to all this the moral effect of this outcome and its importance for the progress of the war: from that time on the strategic initiative was definitely in the hands of the Rebel Army, the sole owner also of a huge area that the enemy would not even try to re-enter. The Sierra Maestra was, in fact, freed forever.

"The great victory over the enemy offensive in the summer of 1958 marked the irreversible turning point of the war. The Rebel Army, triumphant and extremely strengthened by the huge quantity of arms captured, was able to start its final strategic offensive.

"These events opened up a new and final stage in the liberation war, characterized by the invasion of the central part of the country, the opening of the Fourth Eastern Front and the Camagüey Front. The fighting spread throughout the country. The final major offensive of the Rebel Army led, with the lightning campaign of Oriente and Las Villas, to the final defeat of the Army of the tyranny and, therefore, to the military collapse of the Batista regime and the capture of power by the victorious Revolution.

"The victorious counter-offensive in December of that year decided the victory with about 3,000 men equipped with weapons seized from the enemy.”

"The columns headed by Che and Camilo advancing across the plains of Cauto and Camagüey arrived in the center of the country. The old Column One trained over one thousand new recruits at the Minas del Frio School, and with leaders that emerged from their own ranks, took the towns and cities on the main road between Bayamo and Palma Soriano. New T-37 tanks had been destroyed, and the heavy tanks and combat aircraft could not prevent the taking of cities a hundred times bigger than the hamlet of Las Mercedes.

"In its advance, Column One was joined by forces with the Frank País Second Eastern Front. So, we occupied the town of Palma Soriano on December 27,1958.

"Exactly on January 1st, 1959 - the date specified in a letter to Juan Almeida immediately before the last

offensive by the dictatorship against the Sierra Maestra -, the revolutionary general strike, decreed through Radio Rebelde from Palma Soriano, paralyzed the country. Che and Camilo were ordered to advance along the central road to the capital city, and there were no forces that could pose any resistance.

"Cantillo, in a meeting with me, Raul and Almeida, admitted that the dictatorship had lost the war, but a little later, in the capital, he made coup, counter-revolutionary and pro-imperialist maneuvers, breaching the conditions agreed to for an armistice. However, in three days a hundred thousand guns, and the boats and planes that had supported and enabled the escape of the last battalion that entered the Sierra Maestra, were at our disposal.

A tireless team of staff with the Historical Affairs Office of the Council of State, the Creative Design Group of Casa 4, under the direction of the assistantship; with the cooperation of cartographer Otto Hernandez, Brigadier General Amels Escalante, Cartoonist Jorge Oliver, young designer Geordanis Gonzalez, under the direction of Katiuska Blanco, a journalist and brilliant and indefatigable writer, are the main actors in this feat.

I thought this book could take months to be published. Now I know that in early August it will be already on the street.

I, who worked for months on the issue after my serious illness, am now encouraged to continue writing the second part of this story to be known, if the team does not suggest another title, “The Final Strategic Counter-offensive.”

Fidel Castro Ruz
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