

Are you or aren't you?

"...Father, I said: are you or aren't you or who are you? And gazing out over the Cuartel de la Montaña, he said: 'I awaken every hundred years when the people awaken'."

That was the answer given by the Liberator of the Americas to Pablo Neruda's impertinent question after the Spanish Civil War broke out, when Spanish workers managed to prevent the fascists from taking the Cuartel de la Montaña of Madrid.

Those memories came to mind when thinking about the events occurring in the sister Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. In our solitary homeland, the Revolution had arisen many years ago and we were immersed in an unequal and practically inconceivable fight against the most powerful empire ever known to mankind.

Suddenly the telephone in the room rang, the one that is only for emergency situations. The call was coming from Hilda Castro, the widow of Tamargo who was the first stenographer I had known in my life after the triumph of the Revolution in January of 1959. Forty-three years had gone by.

In this part of the checked documents, Hilda's transcription begins; I print it in its entirety:

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN COMMANDER IN CHIEF FIDEL CASTRO RUZ AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA HUGO CHÁVEZ FRÍAS. 14/04/2002 - 07:01 a.m.

PRES. CHÁVEZ-...Heroine María, Fidel. (It seems I had called the hero a second earlier)

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Oh my, she is the champion, caramba! What a story! What a story!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- (laughing) This is beyond belief, Fidel!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- I was just meditating right now, I couldn't sleep. I was going to bed and I couldn't get to sleep, when the phone rang, and there...it's amazing!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- What a day it's been, Fidel! I'm... it's incredible, incredible! I'm still processing it all. And the kids...because I was isolated; they took me away, when I came out, that dawn, something like two hours after we talked. Well then, finally, like we were saying, I said: "No, I'm not going to step down. So I'll be going to jail." So I go, voluntarily. I talked to the kids who are, as well you know, warriors, and I told them: "Don't start doing anything crazy. Well, we're going to jail and this hasn't ended." Because I now had no cards left to play. Other loyal units, but they were far away. You know? Those that were solid, especially the Maracay Paratrooper Brigade. Baduel called me.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- No, and they couldn't move it, Hugo, because they were getting a battle ready, not even a civil war.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, yes, that's exactly right. I told him...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- I heard it said that they wanted to come but you told them not to do it.

PRES. CHÁVEZ - No, I told them: "Hold your position." And some of the boys from Maracaibo called me, over there in Occidente, a tank unit, and Alcalá told me: "Here is my tank battalion ready in

columns, and all my officers and troops. Homeland or Death! I'm going to take Maracaibo." I told him: "No. Hold your position. All I need is for you to hold the moral position, of combat, but keep your physical position as well. But do this; keep them armed and ready, just in case the air force attacks you, or something else."

And this grew at the level of the commanders of the tank battalions, infantry, a Jungle Battalion over there in the jungle. They started saying they weren't recognizing this presumed government, this new illegitimate government. And Baduel became the hub, and other loyal generals went over there. A lot of my guys that were scattered around got together in Maracay.

I was making a plan after I talked with you. The only alternative I had left was to go to Maracay. But you know that it's almost two hours away by land. Well, so we didn't have any certainty that we would be able to get there.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- It was impossible, it was impossible.

PRES. CHÁVEZ - No, no. They would have stopped us on the highway and perhaps a battle would have ensued right there, who knows what would have happened! And so, for that reason, I decided to give myself up.

They took me to five locations. They moved me around from place to place. They pressed me to sign my resignation. I said: "No, I'm not resigning. I'm a prisoner and that's that. Put me on trial."

At midnight they took me over there, to a naval station, and what happened was that in two hours they had won over almost all the sergeants, because they are the commandos there, paratroopers and everything, right?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- It happened on that day, on Friday.

PRES. CHÁVEZ - What was that?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- On Friday?

PRES. CHÁVEZ - No, on the day before, on Thursday night.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- On Thursday. Ah, that was...!

But you were at the Palacio.

PRES. CHÁVEZ - No, that was on Friday, sorry.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, at 03:50, that was when you went out, on Friday, before dawn.

PRES. CHÁVEZ - Right.

So they moved me to three places that same day. And finally they decided, since the people were creating crowds...I was over there at the Military Police Regiment, a prisoner, the cell where I was being held is at about one kilometer away from the Tiuna Fortress exit, and you could hear the people shouting. Because the people knew that's where I was, right? I called from there, I called Maria; I talked to Maria Isabel with the family: "Tell them I'm here in Tiuna Fortress." And the people started going over there, forming crowds. But it was thousands of people, shouting slogans, fearless...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-What time on Friday?

PRES. CHÁVEZ - That would have been on Friday afternoon.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Sure. And how were you able to talk to Maria and with the Minister of Education and Labor?

PRES. CHÁVEZ.- The soldiers... a soldier lent me his cell phone.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Where? At that time? Over there in Tiuna Fortress?

PRES. CHÁVEZ.- At Tiuna Fortress they lent me a phone and I started making some calls: to my kids, to María Isabel... and I asked them to talk to the world; that I hadn't resigned. That was when Maria called you...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Maria called me at 10:02, on Friday.

PRES. CHÁVEZ.- At night.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- No, in the morning.

PRES. CHÁVEZ.- Ah!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- She called me at 10:02. And that's when I suggested, I asked whether she would be willing to speak herself. She told me: "Yes: I would do anything for my father!"

So I immediately prepared conditions so that she could talk to Randy, the journalist, and at 12:40 we put it on the air. When we shot it out there, we handed it over to the news agencies and to CNN too. That's when CNN started to broadcast it and every half hour it was on the news.

PRES. CHÁVEZ.- How long did Maria talk?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Well, it could be that she spoke for...it was for six minutes...six minutes. She told it very well, in six minutes.

PRES. CHÁVEZ.- Ah, yes! She's a real heroine!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- No, no, but yes. But it was phenomenal, because those people...

PRES. CHÁVEZ.- No, that was very, very important.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Then Felipe went at around 4 in the afternoon. He was besieged at our embassy. But that's where it was...they wanted to attack him. There was a moment there... well, the order had to be there, first, shots...they had to defend themselves because they would all be killed, there were 5 women and a child and 17 comrades there. It was very tense...

PRES. CHAVEZ- It was said they had even cut off the light and the water.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- It was very tense. They cut off the light, they cut off the water, they couldn't move, and well, they were even at the point of attacking them. That was the most critical time. That was terribly disturbing. Because to start a shootout...

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Germán was there, wasn't he?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Germán was... everybody behaved like real heroes! There. Because they were surrounded. A crowd. Romani and all that gusanera (worms, despicable persons). If you could hear the speech he made! Because they broadcast it. The radio stations were broadcasting everything.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Sure, they were broadcasting everything.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- And they spent the entire day slandering and slandering, and talking about the resignation, the resignation, the resignation.

And then they built their whole scaffolding on the base of the resignation. That was how they really got themselves up the creek.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- (laughing) Yes, because they started spreading something that I didn't want to sign, when I got together there at Tiuna Fortress with those traitorous generals, the generals who had been paid by our oligarchy and other sectors.

Well, and then they took me away. When the people started to mass together at Tiuna Fortress, by the afternoon...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- What time did the shooting start over there? Because there was shooting. It was getting dark, or at night.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes. There were some shots fired. It seems it was in the air.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, because the people were massing together and coming down from the hills.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yeah.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Then they took me away in a helicopter, during the night, to a naval station that was about an hour-and-a-half's helicopter flight from Caracas.

I didn't know where they were taking me. So, they put me into the helicopter and took me to a naval station where there was a Navy Commando Group.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, Riuma...

PRES. CHÁVEZ- What was that?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- It has a name... I saw it yesterday morning because a friend, one of your people was telling AFP. I'm talking about Friday, right? No. Saturday morning. AFP was told that they had taken you somewhere, and they named the place then and there; they say its 100 km from Caracas, towards Miranda, more or less. And they mentioned the name of the place where you are.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Turiamo.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Turiamo, exactly. I find that out when a function ends in the morning, where we were tough, right? So, I was leaving the function and I'm informed that a cable has come out indicating where you were. Over there.

So I called. Your parents had heard Maria. They had seen everything that night on CNN. So your mother sends a message. She calls us, wanting to speak to me, because she also wants to make a statement.

So, first I call Gobernación (department of the interior), but they left me three telephone numbers and they were at the residence, over there where we were eating that fish.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes. (laughing)

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- So, she was in very good spirits. But there I realized, because I also talked to your father, and I asked him how things were going. Relations with military headquarters were very good; they had been meeting. And over there, the one at Sabaneta was also very active. They had also gotten in touch with the paratroopers over there and they had the situation in hand, and it was very well organized.

And so, the first news starts coming in.

When I finished talking with them, I called Maria; it was around 10 o'clock, 10 something, to see what news she had, and I gave her the information about how they had taken you to that base.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Correct. That's where I was that night. Well, I rested a bit, I talked to the guys, the commandos...because they are paratroop commandos, even though they belong to the Navy, and so I am winning them over, I'm winning them over, they are gaining in confidence. And so in the morning one of them proposes that I get out of there. In other words, they would take the base and rescue me, and I could get out of there and go to Maracay by land, because the helicopter isn't close by, it was at the station where it was being closely guarded. And so they put me into a bay with a commando unit made up of around 100 men; but they told me, a group of officers and sergeants told me, "Listen, my Commander, we are ready to get out of here with you. We'll arrest some officers here who aren't on our side, and we'll head to Maracay, because that's where my General Baduel is getting strong, the people in the streets, in Caracas the people are in the streets. So, let's get out of here."

Well, they were now making a plan, and soon they arrive...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-And how would you have all gotten to Maracay?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- By taking the highway, because that zone is close to Maracay, it's like two hours by land.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- But is Maracay to the east or west of Caracas?

PRES. CHÁVE- Maracay is to the southeast of Caracas and it forms a sort of triangle with the place where I was located, an almost equilateral triangle between...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes. But then that base; is it in the Miranda area or to the west of Maiquetía?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No, to the west of Maiquetía, in the state of Carabobo, going towards...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-That base?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Turiamo, yes.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Sure, now I understand, now I understand.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- And it's in the state of Aragua, Turiamo is in Aragua, and its capital is Maracay. They made a mistake there because they took me to the state of Aragua.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- They took you to a place that was close to where the paratroopers were.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Close! They didn't realize that. So, over there I was feeling much stronger and the guys were ready.

Now, what happens? In Maracay not only did we have Baduel, there was also another general who was with me at the Palacio, Garcia Montoya; it turns out it was he who had also told me to give myself up.

He told me: "No, you have to save your life. We'll look after the resistance here. So, give yourself up; ask for guarantees, and well, we'll look after demanding terms that respect your life."

On the one hand they were taking me out as a prisoner and on the other hand he went to Maracay, because that's where my friend Baduel was and over there he, as the Division General, organized the Resistance and Dignity Commando. And that commando starts, with my guys over there, the young men that you know; they went over there too, to Maracay, about an hour and a half out of Caracas. They went there, escaping from their chiefs here, those who had capitulated.

Now here they had a plan. Some remained hidden in the basement.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- I think that Martínez was there as well, wasn't he? ,

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, Martínez was there. They were all there. Martínez...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- I spoke with that general.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- García Montoya?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes; first I talked with Baduel, because Maria had informed me of all this. First she put me in touch with the Chief of the Commandos, Lucas, the man who was the Armed Forces Commander.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Ah, Lucas, Lucas! Did you speak with him?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes. She put me in touch with him.

At the time you were in Orchila; already at that time.

That was in the afternoon, more or less early afternoon. I was in touch with him.

And so, afterwards Maria tells me that Baduel wants to talk as well, and she gave me the numbers. It was difficult, the line was interrupted twice, with Lucas, and then, through Maria I could...she told me that Baduel wanted to speak with me. So I talked to Baduel for a while and we were enormously concerned about where you were and about pressing them so that they wouldn't do anything desperate, you understand?

Then he puts that general on the line, that man who was there.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- García Montoya.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Montoya. And then he also asks for them to be able to make a public statement.

So, talking with me there, I started to record the conversation and I told him I was doing so: wham! And he then made a speech addressing world public opinion and all that.

We immediately passed it on to the television people and we also delivered it to all the stations here, that speech he made.

Imagine that! You had no idea about what was going on over here, am I right?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No. I didn't know anything about that.

Of course my intuition told me about the popular and military reaction, but I was concerned, because

that could have even started a civil war. But as it happens...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- No; Baduel and the other [general] maintained a very clear position. I praised them for it. They were undecided about whether to come out or not. And so I said: No; it's not a good idea to have combat. I gave them my opinion but they were already thinking exactly the same thing.

So, if I spoke...

PRES. CHÁVEZ- I think they gave an ultimatum to those people here in Caracas, telling them I had to appear. Otherwise, the paratroopers would come to Caracas.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, but the problem is that what the two of them did, Baduel and the general, was to follow the tactic of not making a move and they called out to all units. Then they spoke in that message they delivered, which we broadcast all over the place.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, that became... they turned the Paratrooper Commando into the Resistance Commando. Then they called on all the units, the generals, the commanders, and they tell me they had a cadre on the wall. And then, one of the boys, one of my boys over here, one of the lieutenants was taking notes, and the general called and called: "Listen; whose side are you on? Take a stand." Then: "No, we haven't decided." Then they began to talk to them, and they gradually won them over, they won over all the officers again, explaining to them that I hadn't resigned, that it was a huge lie, that it was treason, that they were handing over the country again to FEDECÁMARAS, to the business community, the Adecos, the Copeianos; because those were the people celebrating here yesterday.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- They came here to the Palacio and they celebrated.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, yes: they caught them at it there. (laughing) They were caught there inside with the ministers.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Here you have some prisoners, but that so-and-so of a president, and all the ...

El negro Churio... Do you remember Churio?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Churio, the Major, that boy is the chief of my commandos. They were in the basement and then...thank goodness they didn't do it! Because while they were swearing allegiance to that presumed president, they wanted to take them hostage, they wanted to take hostages in the great hall.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- (laughing)

PRES. CHÁVEZ- We have material here to write a book, Fidel.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- No, no; we could write a book.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- A book for history, listen, because...you who have been involved in this for so much longer than I have; I can't remember anything like it...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- No, there's nothing like it, nothing, nothing like it.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- I didn't want to believe it.

Listen, Fidel, last night I was there, I was there with the guys from Turiamo Bay —because it's really hot

over there—, and I told them: “Well, let me get over there for a while, I am not going to escape from here.” And I started talking with them.

Oh yes! That was something else that was very useful for me, Fidel: talking with soldiers, hearing their complaints, listening to the sergeants. Those days they would complain a lot about the chiefs they had in those years with my government; that they had forgotten them. Damn! That they were having money problems, their facilities there were very old; they lacked resources for training, to provide maintenance for the weapons. So they started to tell me about all that, right? And that is a lesson. I cannot forget about those guys and rely just on the senior officers and what they tell me. You have to get involved right at the bottom, listen to them, listen to their problems. It was a great night and I even told them: “If I should be condemned and they should degrade me, I am going to ask those condemning and degrading me to make me a private in this unit. I’ll stay with you right here as a private. Because I was really enjoying this. What I am is a true soldier, just like you”.

These boys came over and they made me some coffee and they left me alone; they went just a short distance away. I remained there, thinking, and I started to look up at the sky, and then I said: “Yes, I’m sure that everything we have sown among the people for all these years, these popular organizations which we have been encouraging, organizing, promoting, the Bolivarian Clubs, the parties, the MBR, PPT, MAS and PCV, all those people, those people cannot stay quiet because if these people don’t do anything, damn!, it means they don’t deserve all this stuff, they don’t deserve a revolution yet.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, but they were duped, they were bloody bamboozled, disconcerted with the campaign that was being carried out.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, yes. Sure. And besides, they cut off the signal of the State channel on me, and some traitors in the military then took my channel over there at the station, and I was left with no way to communicate with the people.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes; they left you incommunicado.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- That shows me I should install transmitting equipment right here, right here in the Palacio. Those are things I am now coming to conclusions about, I am going to...

Of course, I am still here, as I told you, astonished, still assessing this thing, this hurricane and this counter-hurricane, like this. It was all so fast, that I don’t think I believed it. I am still here...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- It’s because yesterday, on Friday, right from the morning hours, there was a flood of people over there, going towards the Palacio. And they surrounded Tiuna Fortress as well: over 100,000 people.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Everything, all of that. They made human chains and blocked off highways almost all over the country. They blocked off the highways. But with no violence. There was a rash of pillaging in Caracas at night, but now...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Was it a lot? Because everyone was talking ...I mean, your people, on TV, they were talking and talking against that. And afterwards you spoke; what a good speech you gave, excellent!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Did you hear it?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Of course! Absolutely!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- There was...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- You were impartial, quite reflexive. I thought it was excellent. Everyone there

thought so. You were speaking for about an hour. .

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, more or less. That's right.

Then after that chain stopped, I went out on the people's balcony. People were crowded around outside and they didn't want to leave until I had come out.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Ah! were you able to salute?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Sure! I went out onto the people's balcony after the address, and I was there with them.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Ah! Well I was thinking that everything was over, and then...

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No, no. I went out on the balcony. What happened was...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- And was that shown on TV too?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- I'm not sure, Fidel. Maybe it was. I'm not sure. I saw cameras down below but I don't know if they were transmitting. It was really very fast, very fast. I was there a few minutes because...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- No, because those people were there since... they were there since the morning!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- All day long. I made signs to them for them to go home to sleep, and not...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- But hey, that huge crowd surrounded Tiuna Fortress!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes; there was a priest there, a priest who has come over here now; he's a military priest. He told me that there were about 50,000 people blocking the way and the soldiers couldn't leave Tiuna Fortress.

And that's when they began, imagine this, that's when the helicopter arrives there at Turiamo. And the boys were preparing the operation but I had my doubts, right? Because I told them: "But isn't there a phone over there for me to be able to talk to Baduel?" "No; there's no telephone signal over there," they told me.

—"So we can't go out like that, without planning with it, it's difficult because there might be an encounter on the road and then a battle would ensue, there would be combat."

But we were thinking of that. I was seriously thinking of that because it's closer to Maracay. And because I know Maracay so well, and I know the paratroopers, I know...and so do they.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Now, those two men, Montoya and Baduel, acted very intelligently. They were intelligent. A lot of political intelligence.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- They are very intelligent, two of my most brilliant friends, and they are composed, smart...and now, well, they have shone as military leaders, political leaders as well, with that action, because they transformed Maracay into the second...But you know that is the main square in the country, because besides being the general of the air force base where the F-16 combat planes are, all of them, he also took the base and showed his loyalty to the Revolution. .

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes; they already had the air force, they had everything by then, tanks, planes and the infantry.

Are you or aren't you?

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PRES. CHÁVEZ- Ah! And the Valencia tanks, where General Rangel is, the man who was the Chief of the Casa Militar here and I had visited them just 10 days earlier, I was with them over there.

Listen, the guys were just telling me something that's really amazing, Fidel!...

(He turns to his son Huguito: "Hugo, get me..."

Here's Huguito, he says "hello"; he'll be going over there soon.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, yes: I spoke with him.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- He's going to school. You've already spoken with him.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, I asked him about when he's coming.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- It looks like he is going to be an engineer.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- (laughing) I talked with him and with Rosa.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Listen, here's Rosita, she sends you a kiss. And Hugo says the plan hasn't changed. That's what he told me.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- He makes a lot of plans, but what happens is that almost none of them work out (they laugh).

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- But he seemed to be keen. With these latest ones he seems to be keen.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- This one seems it will really work.

So, imagine... but they have passed you details about the boys here...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Tell me! I'm eagerly waiting for you to tell me! Tell me!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- But they are stories that would fill I don't know how many books.

Listen, just now one of the boys told me that they went to the Military Academy, right? The cadets move around in those circles ...it so happens that around two weeks ago I gave a lecture to fifth year students, the last year before they graduate as second lieutenants, right? And well, I talk a lot with them, I tell them things; well, you have to go on training these boys. And they arrived there, and the cadets were taking over the Military School, man! And the Ensign Major had the key for all the munitions and he said: "I'm not handing over anything."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- They had no weapons. (Laughing.) They were unarmed.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No; they had them warehoused, but he had the keys, ready just in case they had to be removed.

So they take the Military School, they take the Army Command Building and then those generals, I would imagine, running around, trying to find somewhere to hide. The boys are looking for them, man! All of them are taken prisoner. They imprisoned the subordinate soldiers, all those traitors! A lesson in honor, man, I

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- When did that happen?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- That was today, just after noon.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Ah, today at noon! Oh yes!

PDTE. CHÁVEZ.- Yes, and they took that so-and-so transition president over there, that's where they are holding him, prisoner in Tiuna Fortress. The boys! Together with this handful of generals.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- And is that school close to Tiuna Fortress?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- It's inside the School. We went there on inauguration day; we were in that huge courtyard. That's the Military School. The prisoners are kept to one side, close-by, in the Fortress, that so-and-so president and his ministers.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- To Mussolini, a Mussolini. (they laugh) Because when he spoke, I saw him when he was inaugurated, he looked like Mussolini.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- They launched a decree eliminating the Assembly, eliminating the Ministry of Justice, eliminating the...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Hey, that's atrocious! They helped, you know? They also helped because they were damned ridiculous.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes. No, they tried to be funny. And besides, with me being held prisoner and not resigning; imagine that! Breaking everything up. What democracy? They said it was to salvage democracy. Just like that; who would believe them? Even the United States had to check today. This afternoon they released a communiqué rectifying the whole mess.

But imagine, just to finish telling you the story....they came looking for me at Turiamo, in a helicopter. "Listen," and admiral told me. "Listen, President..." when he called me "President" I said: that's it my man!

—"Listen, President, they sent me to guard you and we are also going to Orchila so that you will be..." Orchila is in the north, you've been to Orchila; you visited there...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes that's right, I've been there. How many kilometers is that?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- From Turiamo it's...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- No, from the coast, from the coast.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- It's like 100 kilometers.

So I say to him: "Well, fine Admiral, why did you come looking for me here? I'm starting to get used to being with these soldiers here. I'm being held prisoner here, don't worry about me."

—"No, it's just that it's better over there, so that you can be in the presidential residence."

I told him: "No, man, I don't need that, I feel fine right here."

—"No, but listen, it's just that they want to talk with you."

I started to size up the situation; this was a sign of weakness. But I tried to get the measure of it right? To see how far it went.

Then I tell him: "But, what do they want to talk to me about? Because when we should have talked earlier on, they didn't want to talk, I gave them a series of conditions, proposals."

—"No, no; now they want...now they do want to talk because things are much clearer, they want you to go to Cuba."

So I tell them: "Listen..."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Sure, they didn't want to accept it that night, eh?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yeah, that's what I told them, saying: "Look, as incommunicado as I am, I don't know anything about what's going on, a few of my comrades have been imprisoned." Because I now knew that they had taken out the Minister of the Interior, Rodríguez Chacín; they had taken him from his home in handcuffs. They had taken Governor Blanco de la Cruz from his office in the Ministry of the Interior, they took Deputy Tareck, they took him even though he was a deputy, took him prisoner and everything. So then I say: "Look, there are no conditions for me to make a decision. I can't leave the country, no way. Leaving my people in jail. I have no communications with anyone."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-At what time was that?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- That was today, I mean yesterday, on Saturday, at around 2 pm.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Go on.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- So anyway I told him: "Look, I can go, but call over there and tell him who sent you, an admiral who had been appointed the Minister of Defense, who is in jail now, tell the admiral that I go unconditionally. I don't..."

—"No, because they want you to sign your resignation, and once you've done that, we send you to Cuba".

I told him: "No, I can't sign my resignation that way nor can I leave the country, but I understand that we have a phone over there and we can communicate. So I'm interested for us to go there in order to get some information. And tell them to move over there, and we'll talk there, in order to see what they are proposing."

And that's what we did.

Here's another nice detail: when I was getting dressed a soldier comes in, man, a corporal comes into the little room where I was. I see him and he says to me: "Listen, my Commander, I am Corporal Rodríguez, and I'm from Sabaneta." It was a boy from Sabaneta there, a boy from my hometown. And I tell him: "Boy, what are you doing here?"

—"My family name is Rodríguez, we're related to your uncle Antonio Chávez" —he was also a Rodríguez.

PRES. CHÁVEZ-Damn! And what are you doing here, boy?

It was years since I had seen him and he arrived under cover because he didn't have permission to enter my cell. Right. He took advantage of the fact that I had asked for a coffee and he approached the cook who always brought in the coffee.

So he tells me: "Listen my Commander, did you resign?"

I said: "No; and I'm not going to resign", I told him.

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Then he pulls himself up and salutes and he says: "So, you are my President! Don't resign!" he tells me. "We're going to get you out of this mess."

So I tell him: "Good; OK, I still have two minutes here. I'm going to ask you a favor."

—"Ask me anything."

—"I'm going to give you a piece of paper, a note, so that you..."

(He turns to someone else: "Good morning, Pedro, hello. Say hello to your parents, Pedro. OK.")

I'm here with Pedro, my daughter Rosa's boyfriend.

(He turns to Pedro again: "Go on, go take a rest, Pedro.")

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-iAh, yes, yes! (Laughter.)

PRES. CHÁVEZ- so, he took them and left them over there.....

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, they were there at his home.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- They were protected over there.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- On Thursday night, and after they went over there where Reyes is.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, they were there.

So, the boy...I write down something quickly there and he tells me: "Listen, I can't stay here any longer. Write whatever you're going to write and leave me the paper in the garbage bin, in the wastepaper bin, put the paper there, at the bottom, and I'll look for it." (The Commander laughs.)

Imagine the mess!

So I write a communiqué by hand, very short: "To the Venezuelan people and to whom it may concern."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes, that got on TV.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Well, man, so I leave...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-That I haven't resigned and forever...

PRES. CHÁVEZ- "I have not resigned, Forever!"

And I signed the paper.

So I leave this stuff in the wastepaper bin and they come looking for me and I pick up my things and I leave. And I heard nothing more about that paper. I said: "Well, I hope that boy can do something, but that's no Fax..." That was an inhospitable area, man: there is a commando over there, the Navy, very different from the commandos who train and jump with parachutes. Over there there's no phone, no TV, no Fax, nothing of the sort. Some sheds, you know, for those combat units who are sent into the mountains, a mountainous bay area.

So it happened that when I get here, that message goes around the world, man! The boy grabbed that paper and I don't know how he managed to get out of those mountains and two hours later he was sending faxes all over the place (they laugh), shooting them left and right like a machine gun. And here

everyone had that fax in their hands like...Over there they load them up and I don't know how many of them I had to sign. Besides being signed like that, I signed them again for people who asked me to do it.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Amazing!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- And they tell me that Fax went all around the world.

But imagine! What a capacity for response!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Yes, yes.

PRES. CHÁVEZ-Really impressive!

Now I arrive at Orchila, Fidel, after a helicopter flight of about one hour and in a while the Commission arrives.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-¿Who went there? Who were they?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- The Catholic Cardinal, for one, he was one of the persons signing that ridiculous Napoleonic-Mussolini-style decree they signed. They intended for that decree to erase a years' long struggle, especially the one about the Constitution, and they wanted to eliminate the 48 authorizing laws with one stroke of a pen, and that the Republic should no longer be called Bolivarian, and that no more oil should be sold to Cuba.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-There's a story to be told right there.

RES. CHÁVEZ- A mess... a tale for history, man!

This senseless, stupid and ignorant oligarchy doesn't realize. They believe in their own lies, having repeated them so often, and they end up rejecting reality.

So, they come...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Who else came with the bishop?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- That cardinal arrived; a general, but the one who is the military attorney general, he has no authority, no command...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- From Tiuna Fortress?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- From the army, yes, from Tiuna Fortress.

And a colonel who is one of the men promoting this conspiracy; he is a lawyer and he was sent because he's a friend of the generals, he's one of their buddies.

Well, we all sat down to talk. They had the resignation all ready.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-What was their proposal?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Well, they wanted me to sign the resignation, imagine that, it was back-dated, with an official letterhead and looking like a presidential decree.

Well, "On this day..."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Even though not even this would save them by now. By that time they were

already defeated.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- That's right; no, by then they were making a supreme effort. But they were staging a trap for me to get me out of the country because they told me: "No, the plane is ready for you. And so you're leaving for Cuba."

I told them: "No. I can't do it like that, without any reliable information about what is happening in the country. I'm not going to sign the resignation (I hadn't been intending to sign it anyway) much less am I going to leave the country. Find me a phone so I can speak with President Castro, in order to coordinate with my family. How can you think I'm going to leave the country and abandon my children, my wife, leaving them all alone, leaving my comrades in prison?"

—"No, no; we have already released them all; nobody is in jail."

—"I want to talk to them; I want to talk to Diosdado. I want to talk on the phone to Bernal, to Rodríguez Chacín. Only if you let me have a phone to talk to them, for them to tell me, to give me trustworthy information, could I think about any activity. Unless that happens, I'm not moving from here. And if you keep on holding me prisoner, you can take me to Turiamo again. I don't want to be held prisoner in this luxurious home. No, take me to my prison..."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-But they had a plane there, I think they had a plane all ready.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- They already had a plane there, Fidel.

Furthermore I send them out to investigate the following because José Vicente had told me just them that there was a US plane at Orchila.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-I think they even spoke...they had to speak with Shapiro over there. Check into that as much as you can because there was even some idea about taking you to the US. That rumor was floating around as well.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Well then, on the runway, I saw the plane, with markings...sure it was a private plane but it had American markings.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-It was an American plane.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- So, imagine all that they were planning there. Who knows if they even planned to take me to the United States, or who knows where they were planning to take me!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-That was a very persistent rumor. And what they asked me from the Palacio (it had already been taken), was that we should make a statement there. Immediately we made a declaration and we spread it, that this was just one more lie and that if they took you by force to Cuba, in the fastest plane our Cuban airline had, you would be immediately returned to Caracas, because your people were waiting for you. (They laugh.) We made that declaration.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Well, without knowing anything about that, I told them something very similar: "Look, if you take me to Cuba and you are lying to me, and I find out about that over there that there are people being held prisoner, or that the people are in the streets, and that..." Because at that point they were deceiving me: No, no: the military situation is completely under control."

I ask them: "You're sure about that?"

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-It was being controlled by them, is that what they said?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, they said that to deceive me.

So I asked them: "And what's happening with General Baduel?"

—"No, no, no; he has accepted by now, he is quietly in the barracks..."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-What SOBs they are!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Right. "I'm not so sure; get me a phone so that I can talk to Baduel. Only after I get the explanation, I might consider it."

And so, to gain some time, I made another text for them...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-That is, discussing with the Commission.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Discussing with the Commission.

So I told them: "Listen; no, I'm not going to sign anything."

So after that they were nervous because it seems that Baduel threatened to set out with some paratrooper-commandos in the helicopters that they had there, at Orchila, to rescue me, if I didn't appear.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-He already had a plan; he had a plan.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Oh, yes.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-He had a plan to do that; yes indeed.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- So, the admiral told me...

They took up combat positions over there in Orchila. There was a really small group, but still, they are also commandos, they're very well trained guys.

Then the admiral comes up to me and says: "Listen; don't sign anything. What is probably going to happen is that Baduel will show up to rescue you. If he shows up, there won't be any resistance here; we will go along with him and it seems like we are going to Miraflores," —said the admiral, the man who was with me since Turiamo.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Right.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Well, then, those people... the situation totally changed. They give me José Vicente on the phone —oh, yes, the telephone had appeared—, they call José Vicente and then the incredible happens! I couldn't believe it: "Where are you, José Vicente?"

—"Here at the Ministry of Defense, we have already saved it. (They laugh.)

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-That's the first bit of news you have about that entire situation.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- It's the first news I have, about José Vicente. Everything else was pure counter-information, lots of doubts. No, damn it! But I said: "It's not possible that they have retaken it so quickly..." Well, I ask him: "And where is the presumed president?"

He tells me: "He's been taken prisoner; we have him in prison here along with a few generals, also prisoners." (The Commander laughs.)

—"But have there been any casualties? Was there any fighting?"

—"No; not one shot has been fired, man. An amazing reaction by the people, by the military youth, and these people ran like a bunch of cats to find somewhere to hide. We grabbed them and most of them are being held prisoner."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-And those... What excuse did you use so that they would let you talk with Rangel?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No, because by now... now the Commission which came to get me, had completely changed their tune, and the three of them sat there quietly and it was the admiral who informed me; the admiral was looking out for me, the man who brought me... he is the head of Navy Military Aviation. He took me aside and said to me: "Look, Mr. President; don't go signing anything, don't fall for that trap. It looks like you are going back to Miraflores tonight."

Then the man started to pass me some information that he was getting from his command. And so I felt my strength coming back and I started speaking as the president, and they were saying suddenly: Over here Mr. President, over there, Mr. President.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-And when did they give you the telephone?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- They gave me that phone around midnight, more or less, when I spoke with José Vicente, and later I spoke with Governor Blanco de la Cruz, and they let me talk to another governor: "No kidding! Here the people are in the streets!" Blanco de la Cruz took back the Ministry of the Interior, he was in hiding; he declared himself to be in the resistance in Táchira and he called the people into the streets. And those people in the streets...they surrounded Gobernación from where they had pushed him, the police, those police who had gone too far, then, well, he told me... (change sides)

...Caracas.

Well, we shall see each other soon. I also talked with Baduel, I talked with García Montoya, I talked with the other generals who were with Rangel over there, and then, well, four or five helicopters arrived. Those belonging to Baduel arrived; they arrived full of paratroopers from over there in Maracay.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-No kidding! (Laughing)

PRES. CHÁVEZ- And the Carajos. The Carajos now have a motto, and it says "Loyalty until death."

No kidding, man! Then the Navy Commandos got together with the Air Force Commandos and the Paratrooper Commandos, and we came back on the triumphal flight, and we landed here in Miraflores, where all those people were filling the streets...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Didn't you go through Maracay?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No; but I'm going there tomorrow.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Did they come directly from Orchila or...?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- I had to get to the Palacio, because you know that is the symbol of power.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes, yes.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- And there were a lot of people.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-No, but because of some news they gave Germán, from the Palacio... because

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there was a lot of confusion; they even said at one point that you had been wounded, and we were even hearing the theory that they had gone to rescue you and that you had been wounded. There was also a lot of talk about you having been beaten up. A lot of news was going around, that's for sure. ..

PRES. CHÁVEZ- There was a lot of fear, also because...that my liver had been detached, I don't know what else...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-That too! That the blows had been to the liver. But your own people there were mixed up in the confusion. Everything that was going around. And by noon, Maria was terribly affected by that news.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- But, you know what? Now I am finding out that that news was being spread by my guys, that they were conducting a psychological campaign by phone, right? So that people would get more worked up, right? He's wounded, they beat him up, and then: "Make him appear, make him appear!" And so that the people would apply pressure: "Let Chávez appear, let him appear!" I don't know what else.

So that makes things change.

Well I got here and here I am.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes; I saw that part on TV, when you arrived. And those were some impressive pictures, the faces of the people, the joy, something we hadn't seen before, Chávez! It's something to make paintings about, when the cameras took shots of the people behind the fence. Really impressive photos! We should make a film of all that, because it is...

So, when did the three-man Commission come back?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No; they came along with me.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Oh, they came with you!

What you are telling me is incredible, it's incredible!

Now you have to investigate about the idea they had. Put someone on the job to find out where they wanted to take you. At one point they were talking about Santo Domingo, but there was something in all that, about the plane..

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No, there was something odd there, no doubt about it, because then, it's very strange business...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Because nobody spoke with Cuba, as far as I know, nor did they ask for permission for any plane. You have to find out about it. Put someone on the job to investigate about their plan, where they wanted to take you.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes. I ordered an investigation of that, but tomorrow I'm going clear it all up, to see how true their plan to take me to the US was.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes, because it's insulting. There is treachery in how they deceived you, damned treachery!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Right.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-It was tremendous!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Using the cardinal, you know: “No, I am the one who will ensure it, that it is fulfilled...”

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-No way!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- I told him: “I have my reasons to doubt you as well. Yesterday I saw you signing the bill of that Mussolini. Shame on you – I said – shame on the Church, Monsignor, you appear to be talking about democracy, and you are signing a decree to eliminate Congress, the Assembly, the governors, the judicial power, the attorney general...”

Of course, some of the statements given by Attorney General Isaías Rodríguez were...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-They were decisive. But at around four p.m., around four o'clock...before that, around three o'clock.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- It was like a ray of light.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes, yes; that man was brave, listen, and he used an excellent argument, damn. And he was very calm.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Brave.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Oh, but they didn't let him finish. The television surely deceived him because he started to talk but they wouldn't let him finish either. They didn't let Lara finish either.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- But he said what he needed to say there at that moment. He said: “Where is the President's resignation? I want to see it signed. And if it should exist...”

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-It has to be the other one. And the resignation has to be done before the Chamber – he said. Very solid arguments.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Aha! Then it's the vice president who has to assume the presidency. But I want to see the president's resignation. It seems to me he hasn't resigned.

Listen, that news went right around the world! That was on the first day. It was like a ray of light.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes, that was on Friday, at around...

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Well, I'm going to Maracay. I'm going to Maracay tomorrow. We won't run the “Aló Presidente” program because over here even the equipment has disappeared. These people came and stole everything. They took the cameras, some equipment; they pillaged here, all the telecommunications equipment. They stole some of the cables, pillaging here...

How could that be? In one day they stole things here...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-And what would have happened if they were there for a month? (They laugh)

PRES. CHÁVEZ- They'd clear it all out. In just one day the equipment disappeared.

So, over there, at the paratroopers' headquarters, where Baduel is, we're going to hold a press conference. I'm inviting all the press because today I didn't want to answer any questions because of the time, and because I had to go out on the balcony to talk to the people. So I tell them that tomorrow, at noon, over there at the paratroopers' command, because now that has become a symbol for the contras...I call it the contra-revolution.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-And for loyalty and audacity, for intelligence, for everything there!

They were lost as soon as a single unit made its stand, because they didn't have the forces, because they wouldn't have obeyed the order to attack their comrades over there. They deceived...I realized it from the time it was one unit, and especially a unit like that one, that they didn't have the forces to repress it. They were already lost, at that very moment.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes; it's what they call the virtual country. They thought that in that way, using a media campaign and acting in a virtual manner, they were going to ignore a real country, a combative country, because you know that is what this country is...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes. And that soldiers were going to fight amongst themselves to defend that ridiculous so-and-so who had been installed there in the presidency.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Right.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Soldiers thought they were going to die and they were going to attack their own comrades for that thing.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- But it was a thing, Fidel, well, to make history. Now I'm going to send you ...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-We have to pull all that information together.

We will pull together everything we have, and you, over there, you pull together everything you have.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, and now this, well, we have to read it carefully, and give the revolutionary process a new push forward.

You know that I was saying... the day I left, of course very sad, right? Damn! I was shut up there, all alone.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Really, the bitterness we felt here was not any less that yours over there. The bitterness was terrible!

PRES. CHÁVEZ-You know what? I like... maybe, if at the end, I was saying: "Well if I finally have to leave Venezuela, well then, I must go to Cuba. There is no..."

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-I was thinking, as I was telling you, that this would be for later on, you know?

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Right.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-I couldn't think about anything so devastating.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No, neither could I.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-I said: "You have to hold on, and you have to hold on to those people who are the most loyal."

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Sure, I also thought that, well, maybe a few months ago, by the end of the year...one had time to organize, you know, a reaction among patriots. But those people...

Today I told them: "Damn!, but they gave me no time to rest one day, imprisoned in that cell. They got me out very quickly." (Laughing.) What an impressive thing, wow!

We're going to collect proof and things, pictures...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-I am going to collect everything, everything, everything. Because I made friends there, well, with all those people who...

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Of course, now we have to be much more on top of it...our intelligence service, for example, is very bad, really, very bad! And the military high command behaved very badly, very badly! They hid things from me. I gave orders here that either weren't followed or were half-followed. These fascists were pressing them. And so, well, the trend was to not make any decisions.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-They put you on the defensive. Especially with the trick of putting it up to soldiers. Everything was very well thought up by them, to have soldiers make statements, to make declarations. And imagine this, on your behalf, on behalf of your people, and not one of them was taken prisoner.

PRES. CHÁVEZ-Who?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Those who made declarations. Something in your favor, as an argument, is that none of the people making declarations, which were subversive acts, acts of conspiracy, not one of these people were taken prisoner. I mean, compared to what they did in 48 hours or less, in 24 hours, the patience you had, as an argument, as proof of the difference between the humanity and generosity of the Bolivarian Revolution and what the fascists did in 24 hours.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Exactly.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-It's incredible! They dissolved the judicial power and Parliament; they took over all the governments, almost all the mayoralties.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- I said: "That poor man! If I have such a hard time governing, with so many problems, having nothing more than executive power on my side, how is that poor man going to do it taking on all those powers?" But, really, they were very clumsy, very clumsy! Lusting for power...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-And they must have all argued amongst each other right away. After three days they were all mad at each other.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Right; they were all fighting with each other, generals...as if the position...then, some of them wanted to be chiefs and they weren't assigned the positions, they got mad and left, they didn't attend the act. The CTV people also didn't come because that Mr. Ortega wanted to be the vice president or something like that, and they didn't want that. So they started fighting and everything fell apart very quickly.

But for sure, that was something for history, really!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes; it was unforgettable! Look, I experienced...

PRES. CHÁVEZ-Incredible! Unforgettable! But now we have to give it the treatment it deserves and especially project that case out into the world so that they can see...because, Fidel, it has been shown...what I was telling you: that on that night I, that day I left, a little sad of course, over there in my cell, I was saying: "Damn! So it seems true that a peaceful revolution is almost impossible, right? Because, look at all our efforts!" I was immersed in those kinds of reflections, kind of doubting, right? Doubting. And I said: "Well, but I'm sure that this country isn't going to take it, especially not these young soldiers." But they reacted immediately! I was freed and they were already conspiring against everything surrounding them. (Laughing)

They occupied the Palacio and hid in the corridors, in the basements, they formed groups, they communicated with each other and with the barracks. And, well, everything exploded and it spread all over the country.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-They worked like busy ants! They moved all over.

PRES. CHÁVEZ-And with such courage! They even wanted... One of the boys from the Navy, who is here with me, said: "Look, we were making a plan, four of us over here, to grab that old guy, that Mussolini character and take him to Catia, a highly populated area with around three million persons, to the poorest areas, and then say: "Fine, we are going to exchange him. Until you bring us Chávez, we aren't going to let this old man go."

Thank God this wasn't needed, right? And everything ended as you now well know. What we have to do now is to start rebuilding a lot; there is much to be reviewed, right? We must take corrective measures.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-That's right. Damn, I'm so glad that you spend a day...! I am glad that you have also stopped that because I think that you should rest, right? I don't know how you are going to do that, but luckily they took all that equipment (laughing).

PRES. CHÁVEZ- But I'm going to Maracay. I have to go there, and afterwards I'm going to visit some of the garrisons that stayed loyal, some of the towns.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Listen, you have no idea of the commotion that caused among the people. That was when I could see how much your people love you. It was a genuine commotion!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- I can only imagine how sad they were.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Listen; you have no idea! There have only been few other times in my life when I have been as embittered as I was that day. I wanted.... You know how I am always optimistic and all that, and let's go on fighting, because I just managed to raise my spirits a bit and the other day they call me... I sleep about two or three hours and that day I went to bed around six o'clock; at nine o'clock I wake up and start doing things and at 10:02 Maria called me. That's how it went.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- No; you know what? I was thinking: "Damn it all! If I have to go to Cuba, how is it going to look?"

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes, yes.

PRES. CHÁVEZ-Hey!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Well, you know that you would be arriving and a plane would be flying quickly over there (Chávez laughs). Sure, in the plane, but they went... we have to really look into why they did all that rubbish, because we have to think about the worst, about the worst of intentions.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes, I'm sure. There were some pretty murky intentions, because I'm sure they weren't going to take me to Cuba, I'm sure of that. What happened was that the plan didn't leave them enough time; the patriotic Bolivarian reaction plan was so fast... and I was gaining time, gaining time, the document; yes and no, that I needed them to get me a telephone. Gaining time because I saw that they were in a weak position, you know? I saw it in their eyes, right? In their eyes; they were asking each other questions. And they were very rushed; they wanted me to sign a document. And there I was, stretching it out, stretching it out until the admiral says to me: "Don't sign anything, because Baduel is coming to the rescue." And then they gave me a victorious air.

But sure, this isn't victory. I rather think that this is a lesson, a lesson, because we have to adjust things, we have to make decisions that haven't been taken and that...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-And where is the general who was there in the fortress, the one who was the Head of the Army?

PRES. CHÁVEZ-Oh! He's being held prisoner in the fortress. .

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-He must know the plan.

PRES. CHÁVEZ-Of course!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-You have to let them open up. And the other one, those men who visited you there must also know about it.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes. So tomorrow I'll start to find out about everything. I'll be looking for more details so I can make decisions.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-OK.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Good, my brother.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-And do you think you can sleep now, with all the excitement you've had today?

PRES. CHÁVEZ-Wow! I have to get a little sleep. But it's a marvelous state of excitement, it really makes you feel intoxicated.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes, yes. It's incredible!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- It's like... I'm kind of drunk, well, drunk with the love of that people, but especially Fidel, this is a message of commitment; it is a commitment with all those people who went out into the streets, without weapons or anything. Of course they were backed by the patriotic soldiers...

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-But they began in the morning, that flood of people was moving in the early morning hours and they surrounded the fortress. Because there were already a lot of people.

Well, a million congratulations! You deserve it!

PRES. CHÁVEZ -Well, my brother, it was great to hear from you!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Hey, it seems that a divine hand is guiding you.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Well, it's the people, man. God and the people and, what's that you're saying? Ave María Purísima! (The Commander laughs) Ave María Purísima, how did that happen!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF- Fantastic!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- But now we have to strengthen ourselves.

Rosita and Hugo say hello to you; Hugo is here, and my grand-daughter has fallen asleep. We are all here.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-How wonderful! I hope they are very happy!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Say hello to Felipe and to everyone.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-They have all, they have all been in this.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Yes; I can imagine the suffering. I promise you...

Are you or aren't you?

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Khadafi just phoned me, he was also very happy. I promise you that I'll do all I can to not give you another scare and more sadness.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Good! Along with the sadness we have had the privilege of being witness to the most extraordinary thing that could ever be imagined.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Good. And I for having experienced it all.

I hope to see you soon, right?

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-Yes. We have to get together. Great!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- Good, Fidel.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-To talk about all of this. That is the most important, that's what interests us.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- That's right.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-OK.

PRES. CHÁVEZ- An embrace for you my brother, an embrace!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-An embrace.

PRES. CHÁVEZ-¡Hasta la victoria siempre!

COMMANDER IN CHIEF-¡Hasta la victoria siempre!

PRES. CHÁVEZ- An embrace, my brother.

Bolívar fulfilled his obligation. Over one hundred years later, reincarnated in Chávez, he was true to his commitment to return when the consciousness of the Venezuelan people, more than ever, had awakened.

As for me, I didn't want to take up even one millimeter in the pages of "Granma". For that reason I request that a condensed version, a tabloid, should be published to accompany the Official Newspaper of our Party.

Fidel Castro Ruz

27 March 2014

4: 40 p.m.

Author:

- [Castro Ruz, Fidel](#)

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