

The Yankee Comandante: The Untold Story of Courage, Passion, and One American's Fight to Liberate Cuba

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Mitch Weiss

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The story of intrigue between rival factions in the new Cuban government and William Alexander Morgan's place in the middle of it all is as compelling as a crime novel.

The Yankee Comandante is the second book coauthored by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists Michael Sallah and Mitch Weiss, and it is an excellent one. Sallah and Weiss tell the true story of William Alexander Morgan—an American who went to Cuba to join the revolution against dictator Fulgencio Batista—and his future wife Olga Rodriguez Farinas, an activist who joined the rebel cause. Their story begins as a romance amid the war, gets even more interesting after the revolution succeeds, and is expertly told in *The Yankee Comandante*.

A dishonorably discharged army veteran, Morgan headed to Cuba in 1957 to join the Second Front, one of several distinct movements fighting for Cuban independence. The book introduces both William and Olga, tells how they met among the rebels plotting in the Escambray mountains, and tracks their roles during and after Batista's overthrow. The interplay between rival revolutionaries is the most fascinating aspect of the story. Starting with a confrontation between Che Guevara and a Second Front leader, the tension between the Second Front and rival Castro's 26th of July Movement grows worse, with confrontation sidelined only until the victory against Batista. Once the dictator flees, the anticommunist Second Front and Castro's revolutionary government present a united front while turning on one another behind the scenes.

The book is a work of classic journalism, a compelling narrative that is a combination of interviews, documents, and news accounts from the time. Morgan made international headlines by playing a key role in the capture of Cienfuegos, and his status as the one American commander in the rebellion made him a recognizable figure. Too recognizable, as his profile also made him an attractive potential double agent, sought out by the mob and even the Dominican Republic's dictator as a potential weapon against Fidel Castro. The stakes are many and real, the characters are compelling, and the shifting allegiances make for effective suspense. This is a good story told well, making *The Yankee Comandante* a worthy read.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Spring 2015)

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