

## BOOK REVIEW

### Marianas in Combat

*Teté Puebla and the Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon in Cuba's Revolutionary War, 1956-58*

BY TETÉ PUEBLA

---

**Reviewed by:** Tiffany A. Thomas-Woodard, University of New Mexico

Mary-Alice Waters' book, *Marianas in Combat*, differs from Maclean's book in several ways. Not only is her central protagonist, Tete Puebla, still living, she is also the highest-ranking woman in Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces and a Deputy of the National Assembly of People's Power. For her part, Waters is an active socialist and feminist whose strong support for the Cuban revolution is evident throughout the text. The principle sources for Waters' book are two interviews conducted with Puebla in November 2000 and March 2002. During these interviews, Waters poses questions that focus more consciously on women's roles in the Cuban revolution than Maclean does in her text. An interesting early section addresses the male combatants' initial reluctance to accept females as military equals. The creation of the Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon -which eventually became Fidel Castro's personal security detail in the Sierra Maestra -marked a new commitment to gender equality within the revolutionary ranks. Unfortunately, Puebla's brief discussion of contemporary gender issues focuses on the U.S. embargo as the primary source of continued social and economic disparities within Cuban society to the exclusion of other domestic factors that have likewise complicated women's struggles for equality. Puebla's compelling personal life story is complemented throughout by an assortment of visual materials; including maps, excerpts from correspondence between members of the July 27 Movement, and photos of significant historical figures. A brief chronology of events discussed in the text would have been a helpful reference tool, but Waters does include a few brief footnotes and a glossary of key terms. Overall, the initial chapters that discuss women's roles in early mobilization and combat efforts are the most noteworthy, while later chapters concerning the current role of women in Cuban society offer few new insights.

Biographical works are invaluable classroom resources that can help bridge the gap between events and experiences; yet, their length and cost often make their use impractical. The two works discussed here offer the advantages of being brief, inexpensive, and highly accessible, making them potentially useful sources for undergraduate Latin American History and Women's Studies survey courses. The brevity of these texts would, in fact, allow instructors to assign additional readings that complement, or contrast with, the life experiences of Haydee Santamaria and Tete Puebla. For example, students could compare the testimony of these two notable women with that of Cuban women from other backgrounds, career paths, or generations. Secondly, while both works address how gender roles shift during periods of revolutionary upheaval, neither sufficiently addresses the difficulties encountered by women following the revolution's completion. Instructors may therefore wish to assign supplemental readings that more fully address the lingering difficulties of renegotiating well-entrenched gender roles in a postrevolutionary setting. Finally,

either book could be used to spark a conversation about historical method -namely, the perils and pitfalls of oral history -OR the connections between gender, revolution, and memory.