

The General's Ally

Introduction

Torrijos' name echoed like a thunderclap throughout Panama, a name synonymous with change, hope, and a fervent desire for a better future. As a young and ambitious military officer, he burst onto the political scene, his charisma electrifying the nation. With a vision for a more just and equitable Panama, he led a bloodless coup in 1968, ushering in a new era of transformation.

Torrijos, the son of a schoolteacher and a farmer, rose through the ranks of the National Guard with an unwavering determination and a deep-seated love for his homeland. He witnessed firsthand the plight of the Panamanian people, the poverty, inequality, and social unrest that plagued the nation. Fueled by a burning desire to rectify these injustices, he rallied a group of

like-minded officers and seized power, promising a new beginning for Panama.

In the aftermath of the coup, Torrijos assumed the mantle of leadership, becoming the de facto ruler of Panama. He embarked on an ambitious program of social and economic reforms, aimed at uplifting the downtrodden and empowering the marginalized. His policies touched every aspect of Panamanian society, from education and healthcare to land reform and workers' rights.

But Torrijos' greatest achievement lay in his tireless efforts to renegotiate the Panama Canal treaties with the United States. For decades, the Canal had been a source of both pride and contention for Panama, a symbol of both its strategic importance and its subordination to American power. Torrijos skillfully navigated the treacherous waters of international diplomacy, securing a new set of treaties that granted

Panama sovereignty over the Canal, a victory that resonated throughout Latin America and beyond.

Torrijos' leadership extended beyond the borders of Panama. He emerged as a prominent figure on the world stage, a champion of non-alignment and a fierce advocate for a more just and equitable global order. He played a pivotal role in the founding of the Contadora Group, a regional peace initiative aimed at resolving conflicts in Central America. His vision for a more peaceful and cooperative world earned him respect and admiration from leaders around the globe.

However, Torrijos' life was tragically cut short in 1981 when his plane crashed under mysterious circumstances. His death sent shockwaves through Panama and beyond, leaving a void that has yet to be filled. To this day, Torrijos remains a revered figure in Panama, remembered as a charismatic leader, a visionary statesman, and a tireless champion of the people. His legacy continues to inspire generations of

Panamanians, serving as a reminder of the power of one person to change the course of history.

Book Description

In the annals of Panamanian history, few names resonate with such profound significance as that of General Omar Torrijos Herrera. His rise to power in 1968 marked a watershed moment, ushering in an era of transformative change and propelling Panama onto the world stage. This book delves into the life and legacy of this enigmatic and influential leader, shedding light on his vision for a more just and equitable Panama.

With meticulous research and vivid storytelling, this biography paints a vivid portrait of Torrijos' early life, his military career, and his audacious ascent to the presidency. It explores the motivations behind his policies, the challenges he faced, and the lasting impact of his leadership on Panama and beyond.

At the heart of Torrijos' vision was a deep-seated commitment to social justice. He embarked on an

ambitious program of reforms, aimed at eradicating poverty, improving healthcare and education, and empowering the marginalized sectors of society. His land reform initiatives redistributed wealth and provided opportunities for thousands of landless peasants. His unwavering dedication to the welfare of the Panamanian people earned him widespread admiration and support.

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This book is a testament to the enduring legacy of Omar Torrijos Herrera, a man who transformed Panama and left an indelible mark on the world. Through a comprehensive examination of his life and accomplishments, this biography provides a deeper understanding of this extraordinary leader and his lasting contributions to Panamanian history and global affairs.

Chapter 1: The General's Rise

Torrijos' Early Life and Military Career

Omar Torrijos Herrera was born on February 13, 1929, in Santiago de Veraguas, Panama. His father, José María Torrijos, was a schoolteacher, and his mother, Joaquina Herrera, was a farmer. Torrijos grew up in a poor but loving home, and he learned the value of hard work and perseverance from his parents.

Torrijos attended the Instituto Nacional in Panama City, where he excelled in his studies. He was also a gifted athlete, and he played on the school's basketball and soccer teams. After graduating from high school, Torrijos entered the Panamanian National Guard. He quickly rose through the ranks, and by 1968, he had become the commander of the Guard.

Torrijos was a charismatic and popular leader, and he soon became a major figure in Panamanian politics. He was deeply concerned about the poverty and inequality

that plagued his country, and he was determined to make a difference. In 1968, Torrijos led a bloodless coup that overthrew the government of President Arnulfo Arias. Torrijos assumed power as the de facto leader of Panama, and he began to implement a series of reforms aimed at improving the lives of the Panamanian people.

Torrijos' early life and military career shaped his political views and his leadership style. He was a nationalist who was deeply committed to Panama's sovereignty and independence. He was also a populist who was determined to improve the lives of the poor and marginalized. Torrijos' early experiences also taught him the importance of discipline, hard work, and perseverance. These qualities would serve him well during his time as Panama's leader.

Chapter 1: The General's Rise

The Panamanian Political Landscape Before Torrijos

Prior to the rise of Omar Torrijos, the political landscape of Panama was characterized by instability, corruption, and a deep sense of national frustration. The country had a long history of foreign intervention, dating back to the construction of the Panama Canal in the early 1900s. The United States maintained a strong military presence in Panama and exercised significant influence over its political and economic affairs.

The Panamanian government was often plagued by corruption and mismanagement. Elected officials frequently enriched themselves at the expense of the public, and there was little accountability for their actions. This led to widespread disillusionment among the Panamanian people, who felt that the government was not working in their best interests.

Social and economic conditions in Panama were also dire. Poverty was widespread, and there was a large gap between the rich and the poor. The country's economy was heavily dependent on the Canal, and it was vulnerable to fluctuations in global trade.

In addition to these internal challenges, Panama was also facing pressure from its neighbors. Colombia, in particular, had long claimed sovereignty over Panama, and there were occasional border disputes between the two countries.

Amid this turmoil, Omar Torrijos emerged as a charismatic and popular figure. He promised to bring about change and to restore Panama's dignity and sovereignty. His message resonated with the Panamanian people, who were eager for a better future.

Torrijos' rise to power was facilitated by the weakness of the Panamanian military. The military had been

plagued by factionalism and corruption, and it was unable to effectively resist Torrijos' coup in 1968.

Once in power, Torrijos embarked on a program of reforms aimed at addressing the country's deep-seated problems. He cracked down on corruption, improved social welfare programs, and promoted economic development. He also took steps to assert Panama's sovereignty over the Canal, which led to the signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties in 1977.

Torrijos' reforms had a profound impact on Panama. He restored a sense of national pride and confidence, and he laid the foundation for a more just and prosperous society. His legacy continues to inspire Panamanians to this day.

Chapter 1: The General's Rise

The 1968 Coup and Torrijos' Assumption of Power

In the annals of Panamanian history, the year 1968 stands as a pivotal moment, a watershed that marked a profound shift in the nation's political landscape. It was the year that Omar Torrijos, a young and ambitious military officer, led a bloodless coup that toppled the government of President Arnulfo Arias and ushered in a new era of transformation.

Torrijos' rise to power was fueled by a potent combination of popular discontent and military support. The Panamanian people, weary of political instability, corruption, and economic stagnation, yearned for change. They saw in Torrijos a charismatic leader who promised to address their grievances and lead the country towards a more just and prosperous future.

Within the military, Torrijos had cultivated a network of loyal supporters who shared his vision for a better Panama. These officers, disillusioned with the status quo and inspired by Torrijos' leadership, played a crucial role in the success of the coup.

On October 11, 1968, Torrijos and his fellow conspirators launched their meticulously planned operation. They swiftly seized control of key government buildings and military installations, encountering little resistance. President Arias, caught off guard by the coup, fled the country, seeking refuge in exile.

With the coup a fait accompli, Torrijos assumed de facto leadership of Panama. He established a new government, the National Guard, and embarked on an ambitious program of social and economic reforms aimed at addressing the deep-seated problems that plagued the nation.

Torrijos' assumption of power marked a turning point in Panama's history. It ushered in a period of profound change, a time when the country's destiny would be shaped by the vision and determination of a charismatic military leader.

This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.

Discover the complete 10 chapters and 50 sections by purchasing the book, now available in various formats.

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