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Security Information

2003

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CASTILLO ARMAS AND THE SALAMA UPRISING [29 March 1953]

Although Col. Carlos CASTILLO Armas took no part in the revolt following the assassination of ARANA on 18 July 1949, he, CASTILLO, was removed from his post as commander of the Military Zone of Mazatenango on 22 July 1949 by Col. ARBENZ. On 23 July CASTILLO Armas went to Guatemala City and entered civilian life. In August 1949, he was arrested and charged with the crime of illegal possession of arms. He was released on 23 December 1949, apparently at the orders of ARBENZ.

Shortly thereafter, CASTILLO indicated that he was in the initial stages of planning an armed revolt to change the then government of Guatemala, and bring about a true democracy. He planned to use the same constitution and to have free elections. He further indicated that his plans were in the initial stage, and that it might be months before any action took place.

In August 1950, Col. CASTILLO said that he had been working quietly for several months perfecting his plans for the overthrow of the AREVALO Government. At this time, he claimed to have the military zones in the western part of the country already committed to him. He felt that, although there would probably be resistance, the main danger would come from intervention by Mexico and Cuba.

Again in October 1950, CASTILLO stated that he was slowly making contacts and building his organization for the revolt. He claimed that the police were under orders to arrest him, but did not look for him very vigorously. He did, however, take the precaution of living in a house other than his own, and only went out at night. At this time, he was planning a trip to Salvador to "make arrangements about arms." A demonstration was scheduled in Guatemala at this time. If this had developed into a serious one, CASTILLO considered taking advantage and starting his revolt.

According to CASTILLO's own statements, on 5 November 1950 he headed a group which attacked and tried to take the Military Base in Guatemala City. He attributed their failure to the betrayal of a lieutenant among them. CASTILLO was taken a prisoner and shot. He was only wounded, pretended death, and was taken out of jail with the bodies of his companions. When he was found to be alive, he was removed to a hospital; thence to a penitentiary from which he eventually escaped. At that time he planned to store arms in El Salvador for another attempt.

Among the leaders of the Salama uprising were Col. Julio Pablo GARCIA y Garcia and Col. Roberto BARRIOS Pena. GARCIA left Guatemala for Havana several days before the uprising and returned to El Salvador after it had taken place. Probably to justify his actions, he called a meeting of Guatemalan refugees living in El Salvador, using BARRIOS Pena as an intermediary in arranging it. SOSA Cruz appeared at the meeting to represent GARCIA. SOSA said that SIMONS, another leader, had been offered assistance which had been obtained abroad, and that that was the purpose of GARCIA's trip. While still in Havana, SIMONS had sent word to GARCIA and SOSA that the action would take place on Good Friday (27 March 1953). They had then

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SECURITY INFORMATION

-2-

tried with no avail to dissuade him, and for this reason had communicated with some people in Guatemala and with Carlos H. GARCIA y Garcia in El Salvador. When SOSA was asked for proof of what he said about stopping the movement, he showed copies of an enciphered message as follows: "Friday 27, Progreso will attack Zacapa, Jutiapa and Mazatenango, will rise, we need frontier assistance. Please hasten aid; if not all is possible, at least the part by air. If you can manage it, communicate at once by radio; we await your advise?" This message had been taken from Guatemala to San Salvador, and sent from there to Havana.

When BARRIOS Pena arrived in El Salvador, on 27 March, he claimed among other things, that he had completed arrangements with the government of Salvador for frontier assistance and material aid if his movement would hold out for 72 hours. Late that same day he sent a coded cable by Tropical Radio to the Dominican Consul in New York, and was certain he could count on assistance from that country.

During the month of March (1953), General YDIGORAS Fuentes, another of the leaders, asked Carlos SALAZAR, hijo, a leader of one of YDIGORAS' parties in the last presidential campaign to obtain assistance from Mexico for a revolt to be led by him on Good Friday (27 March). SALAZAR explained to YDIGORAS that he was committed to the organized opposition led by Col. Carlos CASTILLO Armas, and could not comply with YDIGORAS' request.

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2 PAGE (S)

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