

U.S. Major Had Role in Bolivia Coup

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SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia, Aug. 28—Conversations here make it clear that a U.S. Air Force major serving as an advisor to the Bolivian air training school in Santa Cruz played a role in last week's coup d'état.

However, it was not possible to determine whether this role was actually important to the coup's success.

The U.S. Air Force officer, Maj. Robert J. Lundin, sources here said, had been in close contact with the plotters over the past six months.

Further, a local ham radio operator confirmed that when the plotters were in military control here in Santa Cruz, and their lines of communication to the capital, La Paz, broke down, they switched to a separate radio system of Maj. Lundin's.

Maj. Lundin normally uses the radio system to report to the U.S. embassy, 300 miles away in La Paz, although normally his sole assignment here is as a pilot trainer.

In La Paz, left-wing supporters of the ousted president, Gen. Juan Jose Torres charge that he fell as a result of U.S. intervention. They offer no proof, but the allegations include a charge that U.S. companies in Bolivia bankrolled the coupmakers (American investment in Bolivia is estimated at less than \$11 million), that the embassy or embassy personnel bribed forces that could have saved Torres and, of course, the ever-blooming claim that the CIA took part in the coup.

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One means of measuring the U.S. role, if any, in the coup would be to know the content of Maj. Lundin's talks with the plotters, but this could not be determined with certainty.

Planning for the coup began not long after Col. Hugo Banzer, the new president—said to be the third chief executive from Santa Cruz among the nearly 200 presidents in Bolivia's chaotic 150 years of independence—failed in a January attempt to overthrow Torres.

Banzer was exiled to Argentina, where he began to plot with soldiers and civilians who are convinced that Torres was leading Bolivia toward a Communist dictatorship.

Banzer appears to have come and gone across the Argentine border with impunity. Early on, he met with Maj. Lundin, according to a responsible source in a position to know.

Maj. Lundin is said to have been pessimistic of the plot's chances at that time and to have given it no encouragement.

Important Ally

Banzer and leaders of the two traditionally antagonistic political parties drew together and won a most important ally: the 800-man ranger unit 15 miles north of here in Montero.

This unit was trained by U.S. Special Forces Green Berets at the time of the guerrilla insurrection led by Ernesto (Che) Guevara and several other Cubans near here in 1968.

The rangers are an elite arm of the generally inept Bolivian army. There are no longer American advisors with the rangers, and Maj. Lundin appears to be the only U.S. military man in this vast and lightly populated lowland of eastern Bolivia.

As the plotters consolidated support, rumors thickened in Santa Cruz that a coup was

in the last weeks it was well known that the fugitive Banzer was in the city. Santa Cruz has about 100,000 people. Strangers are always noted, and few secrets can survive in its tropic atmosphere.

Among the people Banzer met with at this time was Maj. Lundin. Banzer's presence in Santa Cruz was almost certainly known to Torres, but inexplicably he did not move to have him captured until 10 days ago, when the plot was ready to be sprung.

Santa Cruz, itself, played a role. A demonstration by the women of this frontier town, and a bomb blast on the plaza injuring many of Santa Cruz' most prominent citizens happened. This seems to have provided the initiative that eventually resulted in the overthrow of Torres.

The subsecretary of justice was sent to Santa Cruz, and between 2 and 6 a.m. on Aug. 18, about 30 prominent citizens were arrested. They included Banzer, but scarcely any other major plotters.

One of those shaken out of bed was businessman and honorary Peruvian Consul Juan Franco Suarez, 59. "There was a list of 100 citizens to be captured," he said. "It included the assistant manager of the First National City Bank and a former rector of the university. We were not plotters."

Many of those arrested were jailed in the crumbling adobe prefectorate on the town plaza, and it was announced that they would be taken to La Paz.

Their wives turned out in force before the prefectorate, local seat of the highly distrusted central government. Churchbells pealed in the cathedral next door, calling out the protest.

Banzer in La Paz.

Col. Banzer and a few others were spirited to La Paz in a small plane, but in the afternoon the prefect buckled to the shouts of the women—now several hundred in the square—and he released the prisoners.

The women had threatened to "attack" if he did not turn the prisoners loose, though apparently they had no arms. In return for his freedom, businessman Franco Suarez stood on a truckbed and asked the crowd to disperse, "But they did not want to," he said later.

Shots are alleged to have been fired on the women from the university building, which is also on the square. By then, the plotters had set their troops in motion. The rangers arrived from the north and in-

vaded the university. The town was in the hands of the plotters, backed by the traditional leadership, with only the students and one main union as a few Torres loyalists in active opposition.

Troops in other provincial cities began lining up with Santa Cruz on Friday. Short-wave radio owners listened avidly as the orders went out from here according to plan.

A huge crowd gathered in the plaza and the plotters met in the prefectorate. Supporters were jammed in an office outside the prefect's when a bomb, apparently planted in a desk drawer, exploded.

Among at least 20 people injured was the sister of Mario Gutierrez, chief of the Bolivian Socialist Falange party and now foreign minister. Her leg was blown off.

Rooftop Snipers

According to those supporting the coup, the bomb's explosion was followed immediately by firing on the plaza from snipers on the rooftops. The rangers returned the fire, and all witnesses agree that for 10 minutes, a substantial part of Santa Cruz upper class was prostrate on the plaza with bullets whizzing overhead.

Figures on the dead and wounded run to extremes. Torres supporters say that

eight students were lined up and gunned down in the prefectorate as planters of the bomb.

The new prefect, retired Cap. Gustavo Melgar, denied this in an interview. He said that four attackers were killed, including two Cubans. (This charge that Cubans, along with Chileans, had recently filtered into the university student body is widely repeated here, though no one could provide proof.)

Prefect Melgar said that the Cubans' documents were in the custody of military investigators.

With the bomb blast on Friday, attributed by all authorities to the leftist opposition, any conservative doubters here rallied to the coupmakers.

On Saturday came the critical question of whether troops in La Paz would rally also. One major unit stayed with Torres, and street-fighting broke out in earnest on Saturday afternoon.

An ad hoc airlift by pro-coup air force personnel, was assembled here, and the rangers were being loaded aboard for the attack on La Paz loyalists when word came that the last main unit had swung over.

Banzer had lost his status as a prisoner, it is not clear just

how, and on Sunday he was sworn as president.

Here in Santa Cruz a purge of leftists began. Some allege that several were killed outright, but this is unproven.

Most estimates of overall casualties run to 50 dead and three times as many wounded.

Two American churchmen, Maryknoll priest the Rev. Frederick Zierten and former priest Richard Ramsay, were jailed until Monday and then released on the condition that they leave the country.

Yesterday, Jaime Bravo, a Bolivian and coordinator in eastern Bolivia for the Methodist Church, was released from jail and taken to the capital. Church sources say that he—like most major Torres backers in La Paz—must leave the country.

Prefect Melgar, who said he quit the army in 1956 because he disagreed with the revolutionary government then in power, offered this explanation for the deportations:

"There are some priests, both Catholic and of other churches, that these days are called Third World priests. They work intimately with the Castro Communists. They have been asked to abandon Santa Cruz, a request with which their churches have complied."

Language Center Only U.S. Presence

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SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia, Aug. 28—The only public U.S. presence here is a binational center, run by a Bolivian, which offers English language lessons and propaganda.

In one of the periodic attacks on U.S. installations here during the regime of Gen. Juan Jose Torres, who was ousted from power last week, sacked by students. Its four movie projectors were stolen and installed in a "theater of the people" set up nearby for showing Soviet and Cuban films.

The French equivalent of the U.S. Binational center here also lent films for showing on the stolen projectors.