



THE STRANGE CAREER OF E. HOWARD HUNT

COMPULSIVE SPY

By TAD SZULC

ARTICLE IV: *Guatemalan Overthrow.*

HUNT'S LATIN AMERICAN career began in 1950 when the CIA assigned him to the station in the American Embassy in Mexico City. Both he and his wife Dorothy spoke Spanish, and it seemed like a good posting for Hunt, as he slowly made his way up the ladder of the clandestine division. The Hunts arrived in Mexico City on Dec. 13, 1950, and Howard joined the large CIA station there under the orders of the late Winfield Scott.

Mexico City, the CIA's regional command in Latin America, was a fairly busy place for CIA agents not only because of the always volatile political situation in Mexico, but also in terms of the shifting politics of Central America and the Caribbean. But Hunt, whose specialty continued to be covert political action, found time to work on his novels, and "A Foreign Affair" was written there. Also in Mexico, the Hunt's second child, a daughter named Kevin, was born in 1952.

For 19 months in 1951 and 1952, Hunt had under his orders William F. Buckley, Jr., who later became the well-known syndicated conservative columnist. Buckley was in Mexico for

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the CIA on what he recently described as a

Above left, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, fled to Mexico in 1954, after his Guatemalan regime was overthrown by Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, below, who greets Richard Nixon eight months later during the then Vice President's tour of Central America. The CIA-backed rebellion was what Hunt would call a clean, surgical operation.



Allen Dulles' CIA accomplished its mission with pride.

"tangential special project." They quickly befriended each other, and Buckley is the godfather of three Hunt children. He remains to this day Hunt's best friend and was named the executor of Dorothy Hunt's estate after she was killed in a plane crash in 1972.

We don't know how effective Hunt might have been in Paris or Vienna, but in Mexico he became a bit of a fumbler, a trait that kept surfacing throughout his career. One typical incident happened sometime in 1953, when Ramon Magsaysay, the late President of the Philippines, arrived in Mexico on a world tour. Magsaysay's government was nearing victory over Huk guerrilla insurgents at home, and his unofficial escort on the trip was Colonel Edward G. Lansdale (now a retired general), who was probably the first serious American counterinsurgency expert and played a major role in Vietnam in subsequent years.

Because one of Hunt's responsibilities in Mexico were labor unions, he somehow contrived—and Howard was a master at contriving situations—to arrange for a meeting between Magsaysay and a Mexican labor leader whom the CIA was courting. The American government was then very concerned about the activities of Lombardo Tolledano, a left-wing labor leader with a considerable following in Mexico and much of Latin America.

The CIA and Hunt were naturally trying to develop non-Communist labor leadership in Mexico. The embassy was trying to do likewise through its regular labor attache, and sometimes friction would develop between the embassy and Hunt about who was doing what.

In any event, Lansdale was persuaded to have Magsaysay privately meet Hunt's labor leader, presumably to instill anti-Communist sentiments in him. It should be noted, however, that Magsaysay was riding a wave of popularity in the Philippines because of his new land reform and was considered to be quite progressive by Asian standards.

A time was set for the meeting at a CIA "safe house" in Mexico, but Lansdale had the good sense to arrive an hour or so ahead of time to check out the house and take a

look at the Mexican labor leader. A few minutes later, the Mexican secret police

raided the "safe house" to arrest the leader on charges ranging from pro-Communist conspiracies to criminal activities.

Furious, Lansdale telephoned Hunt at the embassy and chewed him out for creating a situation which could have been of enormous embarrassment to the Filipino President.

Toward the end of his stay in Mexico, Hunt was pulled into the CIA's preparations for the overthrow of the Guatemalan President, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, a left-wing figure whose policies and inclinations troubled Washington.



Late in 1953, a special CIA team for Guatemala was organized in Washington under Tracy Barnes—Harvard Law School graduate, OSS hero, and then a key man in the Agency's clandestine division. Barnes selected Hunt as chief of political action for the operation.

Hunt's responsibility was to maintain contact with exiled anti-Arbenz leaders. Three of them, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, Colonel Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, and Doctor Juan Cordova Cerna, were spending most of their time in neighboring Honduras. Hunt, working out of the Mexican station, kept in touch with them in Tegucigalpa, though he also held secret meetings at the Mexico City YMCA with Doctor Cordova, who was his candidate for provisional President when the Arbenz regime was overthrown.

From the outset, the CIA plan was to support and equip a band of rebels whom Colonel Castillo Armas had concentrated in Honduras. That little country and El Salvador were increasingly concerned with Arbenz's politics, and they made it clear to Washington that they feared the spread of Guatemalan influence in their countries.

But the single fact that determined U. S. action against Arbenz was the information, transmitted by CIA agents in East Germany, that a Swedish freighter, the *Alfhem*, was sailing for Guatemala with 15,000 crates of what was believed to be Czechoslovak arms for Arbenz. As the *Alfhem* sailed from the East German port of Stettin toward the Caribbean, CIA stations along the route kept Agency headquarters in Washington informed about her circuitous movements. All the messages went directly in to Allen Dulles, then CIA Director.

The Swedish freighter reached the Guatemalan port of Puerto Barrios on May 13, 1954. The following day, the CIA station in Guatemala City advised headquarters that

the crates being unloaded from the *Alfhem* contained around 2000 tons of small arms and ammunition as well as light artillery pieces. The immediate conclusion at the CIA was that Arbenz, now disposing of a considerable arsenal of arms, could dominate all of Central America and even endanger Panama and the Canal. The interpretation at the CIA was that with the arrival of the arms, the Soviet Union had secured a foothold in the Western Hemisphere.

On May 14, Allen Dulles summoned an emergency meeting of the Intelligence Advisory Committee, composed of himself as Director of Central Intelligence, the heads of the Army, Navy, and Air Force Intelligence, intelligence representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the State Dept. The Committee concluded that Arbenz was virtually certain to start an aggressive war in Central America.

It was never made clear on what basis this conclusion was reached, but the intelligence community felt that the arrival of the Czechoslovak arms in Guatemala gave it the long-awaited excuse to move against Arbenz. On May 15, the National Security Council met at the White House, and Allen Dulles urged U. S. assistance to the rebels in Honduras. The National Security Council decided to act. The American Ambassador in Guatemala City, the late John E. Peurifoy, took command of political operations. CIA paramilitary advisers as well as political operatives led by Howard Hunt set up operations in Tegucigalpa and in the Honduras jungles near the Guatemalan border where Colonel Castillo Armas had his rebel detachment.

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As Hunt wrote later, it was the arrival of the Swedish freighter in Guatemala that made the CIA set a date for the anti-Arbenz operation. On May 17, Secretary of State Dulles announced publicly that the U. S. had hard information that Communist arms had been delivered to Guatemala. This shipment was viewed by Washington with great concern, he said, because of its size and because it had come from a Communist country.

The following week, the Pentagon dispatched to Honduras and Nicaragua—this time without public announcements—two Air Force Globemasters with over 25 tons of rifles, machineguns, small arms, and ammunition. These arms were destined for Colonel Castillo's little army. The U. S. also quietly made available to the Colonel three old B-26 bombers.

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On June 16, the CIA's proteges launched the attack on Guatemala. The B-26s bombed and strafed Guatemala City, and Colonel Castillo's rebel band moved across the border into Guatemala. It was what Hunt would call a clean, surgical operation. Within five days, Arbenz was overthrown and fled the country. Many years later, he found refuge in Castro's Cuba.

The new Guatemalan President was now Colonel Castillo Armas. Hunt's candidate, Dr. Cordova, was no longer in the running because of a cancer operation he had undergone in Mexico. Hunt's own view was that in Cordova's absence the Presidency should have gone to Colonel Ydigoras Fuentes, whom he thought to be a better man, but according to Hunt the CIA paramilitary people from the clandestine division preferred Colonel Castillo. A few years later, Colonel Castillo was assassinated, and Ydigoras took over as President. He was to show his gratitude to the U. S. in 1960 when he made Guatemalan territory available for the training of the Cuban exiles who embarked on the Bay of Pigs invasion.

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The CIA made no particular secret of its involvement in Guatemala. Faithful to its policy, it made no formal statements on the subject, but it never contradicted the widely circulating reports that it had played a central role in Arbenz's ouster. In fact, the Agency was quite proud of this operation, as Allen Dulles was to point out in his book nine years later.

Andrew Tully, a rather sympathetic observer of the Agency, wrote in his book "CIA—the Inside Story," that "the Guatemala story shows CIA at its very best—in the gathering of information worldwide, in the communication of that information to headquarters and in its speedy evaluation for the guidance of policy-makers. In other cases there is little doubt that CIA has violated its mandate by trespassing on policy-making, but in the Guatemala case—except for necessary inferences—it merely told its story to the National Security Council and from there the Defense Department took over."

This, of course, is not accurate. As Hunt himself has written, the CIA had been preparing the Guatemalan operation long before the Swedish freighter sailed from Stettin for Puerto Barrios.

Guatemala also served to intoxicate the CIA with an overwhelming sense of power. Because Guatemala worked in 1954, it was decided six years later that a similar, though larger, operation would likewise triumph in Cuba. Thus, the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs was born from the victory in Guatemala.

Howard Hunt, his Guatemalan mission accomplished, returned to Washington to wait for a new assignment. That same year the Hunt's third child, St. John, was born. For Hunt, the Guatemalan operation had been a personal as well as a professional achievement. For the first time, he had tasted power, real power, and a sense of personal participation in destroying the demons of communism that he saw encroaching upon the Americas.

his experience taught him conclusively that any operation conducted under the "proper authority" was valid even if it meant infringing on the sovereignty of a foreign country or, as it was to occur later, on the civil rights and privacy of individuals at home.

Tomorrow: Living High.

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