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Arbenz Guzman's Strange Death

Mexico City

Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, whose Communist-leaning Guatemalan regime was overthrown by invasion in 1954 after increasing conflict with U.S. interests, was found dead in his bathtub yesterday. He was 57.

Mexican officials said the cause of death was drowning.

Servants said they saw steam coming from the bathroom and called police when Arbenz did not respond to a knock on the door. Police found the body in the tub with the hot water still running.

A doctor said the body was badly burned by the hot water and steam. Authorities were investigating the circumstances.

Arbenz, son of a Swiss-born druggist and a Guatemalan mother, lived in exile in Europe and Cuba before moving here six months ago.

He was hospitalized with a gastrointestinal condition last October, but his daughter said he had not been ill recently.

SCENE

Tall and lean, Arbenz first appeared on the Guatemalan political scene as a young army colonel in 1944 when he joined a revolutionary junta that overthrew long-time dictator Jorge Ubico. The junta handed power soon after to a constitutionally-elected government.

Arbenz served in that government under President Juan Jose Arevalo as Defense Minister, and was elected President himself in 1951.

Arbenz embarked on a sweeping land reform program, including redistribution of large plantations to the peasantry.

The United Fruit Co. charged that its compensation for seized holdings was inadequate, and the U.S. government backed the company.

Because of his expropriations Arbenz became known in America as the "red colonel."

CLASH

He also clashed with powerful economic interests in Guatemala with his plan to build a railroad to the coun-



AP Wirephoto

ARBENZ GUZMAN
Death in exile

try's Caribbean coast from the capital city on the western side of the central American Isthmus which would have deprived private companies of huge earnings.

Arbenz denied he was under Communist influence, but Washington's concern heightened in May, 1954, when the State Department announced a shipload of arms from Communist Poland had landed in Guatemala.

The United States countered by reinforcing Honduras and Nicaragua, the Central American nations immediately to the south of Guatemala, and sending them arms.

Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas led an invasion force into Guatemala from Honduras on June 18, ousted Arbenz and was elected president the following month.

Arbenz' supporters later charged the invasion was masterminded by the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Arbenz fled Guatemala after his overthrow.

Reuters & U.P.