

# U. S. Helps Train an Anti-Castro Force At Secret Guatemalan Air-Ground Base

## Clash With Cuba Feared — Installations Built With American Aid

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 Special to The New York Times.

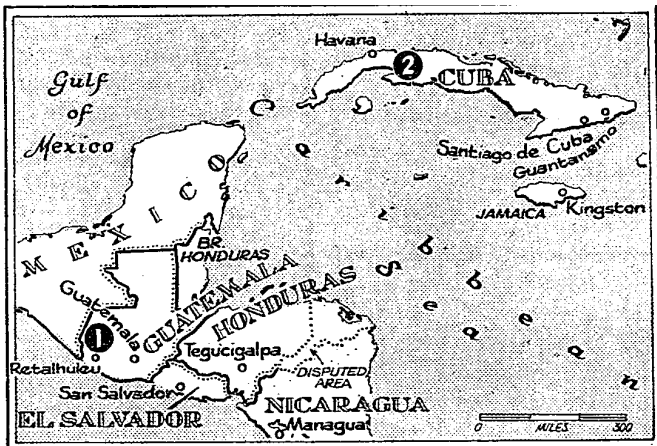
RETALHULEU, Guatemala, Jan. 9—This area is the focal point of Guatemala's military preparations for what Guatemalans consider will be an almost inevitable clash with Cuba.

There is intensive daily air training here from a partly hidden airfield. In the Cordillera foothills a few miles back from the Pacific, commando-like forces are being drilled in guerrilla warfare tactics by foreign personnel, mostly from the United States.

The United States is assisting this effort not only in personnel but in matériel and the construction of ground and air facilities.

Guatemalan authorities from President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes down insist that the military effort is designed to meet an assault, expected almost any day, from Cuba.

Opponents of the Ydigoras



The New York Times

Jan. 10, 1961

Guatemala is building her military strength at a U. S.-equipped base at Retalhuleu (1) in anticipation of an eventual clash with the Castro Government of Cuba (2).

Administration have insisted that the preparations are for an offensive against the Cuban regime of Premier Fidel Castro and that they are being planned and directed, and to a great extent being paid for, by the United States.

The United States Embassy is maintaining complete silence on the subject. Guatemalan authorities will speak only guardedly about it.

One authority who has negotiated with the United States

for assistance in the Retalhuleu land and air operations said that application for certain amounts of war materials over the amount already received had been turned down by the United States.

The reason, he said, was that Washington considered that the amount and type of materials applied for went beyond the needs of defensive operations.

This source showed concern

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on two counts. First, he maintained that the materials desired were demonstrably of a defensive nature. Second, he said there were "loads of Czechoslovak military equipment stored in Guatemala but without ammunition. The equipment had been purchased by the Communist-infiltrated regime of Col. Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, who was overthrown in 1954.

"We still have the equipment and it is usable," the informant said, but he added: "The only way we can get ammunition for this equipment is to go into a commercial transaction with Czechoslovakia and we do not want to do that."

President Ydigoras agreed in an interview that training in guerrilla warfare tactics was being carried out in the foothills of the large plantation named Helvetia. This plantation is situated a few miles from the provincial capital.

The President also said that the air base about three miles west of the capital toward the Pacific was being used for military purposes. However, he added that he hoped it would be transformed to a commercial base in the foreseeable future.

The airfield is partly fenced in by a corrugated metal wall. The present airstrip was constructed last summer over an already established base that had been used in the 1954 revolution by fighter planes with American pilots who attacked military objectives in Guatemala, the country's capital.

The present installation was constructed in an around-the-clock operation by a North American construction company. The name given here was Cornwall-Thompson.

[Officials of Thompson-Cornwall, Inc., contractors

with offices in the Chrysler Building, could not be reached for comment Monday night.]

According to a Guatemalan authority who helped arrange the details of the construction, it was paid for partly by subscriptions from land owners in the Fourth Military Zone, in which the State of Retalhuleu is situated, and partly by the United States. The latter was by far the heavier contributor.

The concrete strip, more than 5,000 feet long, is used by two B-26 planes and two DC-4's or 6's. A third B-26 on the field is inoperable because of some damage apparently caused in a landing. None of the craft bore any identification letters or numbers.

Besides a large civilian-like terminal building, the field has several buildings that look like barracks as well as a radio shack and other minor installations.

The field is not a military installation in the true sense. It could not possibly serve in its present state as a large-scale offensive base. It has no dispersal areas, hardstands for plane parking or lateral exiting and entering runways.

According to persons assisting in directing the construction of the base, the strip will take four-engine planes up to the C-54 type. It was agreed that in an emergency the present strip could handle jet fighters, but only in limited operational scope and with an element of danger.

Although the air operation is about ten miles from the commando-training area, the two are geared for quick cooperative action.

This was shown in early November during an abortive barracks revolt in which the rebels had captured three important garrison cities before they were



Associated Press

**DEFENDS BUILD-UP:**  
President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes of Guatemala. He maintains that military effort in country is designed only for defense.

defeated by a combination of air power and ground troops.

The commando troops, who are divided into separate groups, one from each of Guatemala's eight military zones, were flown immediately to their respective military zone units and were swiftly integrated. The groups were returned to the Helvetia training center after limited combat.

The Helvetia finca, or plantation, lies high in the foothills about five miles east of the road to the port of Champerico on the Pacific coast.

Its nearly 3,000 acres are operated and largely owned by Roberto Alejo Arzu, president of the National Association of Coffee Planters and probably the largest independent coffee producer in the country. He is a close friend and adviser of President Ydigoras, who spent last week-end at the Alejo Helvetia home.

At the entrance of the Helvetia estate the visitor is chal-

lenged by armed guards. He is challenged again five miles beyond the entrance by many more guards. Here, and in the plantation village, there is a relatively heavy detachment of troops and stored munitions.

This writer, because of a momentary lapse in security, proceeded nearly two miles farther up into the mountains before being stopped and sent back down to the plantation village.

Only plantation workers with special passes were supposed to reach that point. Except for a few lounging troops in green commando garb, there was nothing at that point to suggest any unusual activity.

A Guatemalan authority at the Helvetia plantation village said the secret activities were taking place considerably above that point. He added that the guerrilla operations, which he repeatedly referred to as "anti-guerrilla" tactics, had been hindered by "snoopers" and that several nights the guards had used rifle fire to repel intruders.

The authority said the guerrilla training originally had been assigned to Guatemalans who themselves had been thoroughly trained, presumably in the United States or by United States personnel.

However, he said, the project had grown so rapidly that foreign trainers had been brought in. Most of these, he said, were North American guerrilla-tactic experts. Experts from several other nations also were brought in, he said.

He indicated that the latter group included Cubans, but he denied that Cubans were being trained now in Helvetia. He said that among the trainers were two Russian-speaking persons who were used primarily for shouting orders in Russian so that the trainees could become acquainted with the language.

Residents of the quiet, tree-shaded city of Retalhuleu appear to be increasingly restive over the mystery surrounding the air base and the Helvetia installation.

There appears to be a step-

ping up of formation training flight activity from the air base. The planes, usually four in formation, sweep over the plantations daily.

An informant said there were a number of United States military personnel and other foreigners at the air base for training purposes.

Officers appearing to wear United States Air Force uniforms have been seen in downtown Retalhuleu driving automobiles, but none thus dressed have been seen walking on the streets.

Some speculation has arisen over the feasibility of the air base, whose site near the Pacific coast is across the country from the scene of any possible Caribbean invasion.

However, it has been explained in Retalhuleu that the field's inland site affords it greater defensive preparation and that it is the best site available in mountainous Guatemala for obstructionless take-offs and approaches.