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COUNTRY: Guatemala

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Source or Clarifying Statement:

US citizen. []

Source was expelled from Guatemala [] for alleged action against the Government.

1. The day I arrived in the sleepy town of Asuncion Mita in southeastern Guatemala two and one-half years ago, the nightmare of Communist persecution seemed a million miles away.
2. [] I had come to this village of 3000 people in the lush valley of the extinct volcano, Suchitan. It was a piece of the past, a typical Central American village complete with sun-baked plaza where the people came to gossip at the communal well.
3. The Iron Curtain was 6000 miles away, in a part of the world these simple people had never hear of. It didn't seem possible that the odious influence of Georgi Malenkov could reach into this republic of coffee and colorful Indians only two hours by air from the Panama Canal and 1000 miles from New Orleans.
4. Yet during the next two years, with my own eyes, I saw it happen here on the American continent. I watched a mere handful of power-mad men in Asuncion Mita execute a clever Communist plan and take our town -- and the country -- away from its citizens.
5. Most often I watched with my hands tied. My mouth was sealed by a pledge not to interfere in politics. But when as an indignant individual [] I was silenced by the local Red-led police.
6. Just as if I had been behind Europe's Iron Curtain, I was arrested, interrogated, and insulted. And on Feb 3 54, a day after the arrest of two American reporters, I was put on a plane bound for New York and forcibly expelled from a country [] I had become one of the first victims of Communist persecution on the American continent.

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7. When I came to Mita in October 1951, I found it as I had pictured it -- hot, colorful, and poverty-ridden. Three-quarters of the 35,000 Spanish-Indian ladinos I administered to in the area were landless and illiterate. They worked their meager strips of rented soil with crude hoes much as their ancestors, the Mayans, had done. They had little use for politics. Governments came and went without stirring these honest, simple people.
8. Asuncion Mita itself was small. [] the town boasted a police station, town hall, post office, and some 25 shops. We had no newspaper or radio station and only one telephone.
9. Once a month I [] toured my district in our jeep. I visited Catholics who had never before heard a radio or seen a car. They are a warm-hearted people []
10. Things were relatively quiet my first eight months in Mita. Our local political situation was typical of the nation as a whole. The government bloc, which most people considered pro-Communist, controlled the town. The mayor, David Medina, was a member of the PAR, the Party of Revolutionary Action, the majority party of President Jacobo Arbenz.
11. There were less than a handful of outright Communists in Mita. They had infiltrated some of the important positions -- Chief of Police and leadership of the Peasants Union, the Campesino Federation -- but they were still too weak to show their true hand.
12. Then in June, 1952, our town was shaken from its slumber. What happened in Mita took place simultaneously throughout Guatemala. The National Congress passed the Agrarian Reform Law and before long, I was witnessing the almost complete Communization of Asuncion Mita. The law had supposedly been passed to answer the peasant's crying need for land. But I saw it used as a ruthless political tool that accomplished a bloodless Red revolution.
13. A semi-illiterate Communist, Isabel Vivar, was brought in as "agrarian Reformer" for Mita. He was a surly-faced, cocky man who knew how to use his new-found power. His five man committee, required by law, were members of the Communist labor unions.
14. Vivar worked swiftly. He expropriated uncultivated land from the finqueros and payed them in worthless 25 year bonds. Armed with land the peasants have dreamt of for centuries, he and his cohorts went into the interior, where they were warmly greeted by the impoverished tenant farmers.
15. To get free land, Vivar told them, all they had to do was join the Red-controlled campesino Federation and support his choice in the elections. He would tell them which of the candidates really wanted land reform.
16. I viewed the whole diabolical scheme with horror. Only about 750 peasants of more than 10,000 around Mita received land. But in an area where only 2000 people normally vote, they became a formidable political bloc that Vivar was later to prove he could produce at will.
17. [] I felt closer to these people than the Communists could hope to. I felt the horrible inequality of their society and the need for land distribution, but I also knew the Communists were duping these peasants into exchanging the rich finqueros for a harder and crueler master.
18. The clever law, in most cases, even kept title to the land out of the hands of the campesinos. The government gave them use of about 5 manzanas (9 acres) during their lifetime, at a nominal crop rental. They cannot sell or rent the land or pass it to their heirs.
19. The Communist bribe was still tempting []

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21. I had done nothing political, but Vivar was infuriated. He greeted me in stony silence when we met at an official function. As I was later to learn, he had a memo sent to the National Police asking for my arrest. I realized that as [] American I was doubly vulnerable.
 22. Soon after, I curiously approached one of the campesinos who had accepted Vivar's offer. "I know nothing of politics [] but if getting land is Communism, I guess I am one too."
 23. I couldn't explain how the ruthless Red minority were using land reform to steal Guatemala out from under him. But what he couldn't understand was obvious to most of the literate Guatemalans.
 24. Presidente Jacobo Arbenz denies that his government is controlled by the Reds. He insists the Communists are only part of the bloc that overthrew Dictator Ubico in 1944. But everything I heard and saw refuted him.
 25. In many ways Guatemala was indistinguishable from a Soviet satellite. Occasionally, I picked up a copy of the government newspaper, Nuestro Diario. Both it and the official government radio echo the Kremlin line, including glowing accounts of the progress in Eastern Europe and Red China.
 26. Last May Day I saw Arbenz embrace Red Labor leader Gutierrez while 20,000 workers waved posters denouncing Uncle Sam as a cruel "Mr. Moneybags."
 27. Even rumors that the Congressional leaders are secretly Reds was recently substantiated. Francisco Fernandez, then head of the supposedly non-Communist majority PAR, told his shocked colleagues in Congress they were only a party of "transition", destined to disappear into the great world Communist Party!
 28. The day Stalin died, Congress observed a moment of silent tribute. In fact, former Congressional president Alonso Fuentes, attended the Cominform's Peace Conference in Vienna and then signed a germ warfare charge against US.
 29. All the Kremlin's charges get a wide airing in Guatemala. The Reds even used government trucks and projectors to show Chinese films of our boys "confessing" to germ warfare in Korea.
 30. At first I was shocked by the entire picture. The thought that a Soviet satellite is growing so close to home seemed incredible. But any doubts I may have had were erased this November during our elections for Mayor in Ascusion Mita.
 31. Vivar himself was the PAR candidate for Mayor. The opposition, the United Anti-Communist Party, PUA, was backing one man in each town for the first time. Vivar could count on the government employees and his campesinos. The anti-Communists counted on the literate people [] As always, the great majority of the people would not vote at all, some because of no interest, others because they lived in the inaccessible interior.
 32. Both sides put on a heated campaign. []
 33. I took no part in the campaign, but the annoyed Reds checked on me anyway. [] They heard nothing incriminating.
 34. On the election days, November 21-23, Mita was a busy little town. Vivar was delivering his vote. Government trucks had been sent into the interior to pick up campesinos anxious to vote for their "benefactor". But when the PUA tried to hire private trucks to pick up their supporters, they were stopped by police.

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35. Everything considered I was pleased when the results came in. The anti-Reds had lost to Viquez by only 73 votes. And in nearby Santa Catarina, [] had trounced the government candidate. A Protestant anti-Communist also won in Jutiapa, the department seat, but the frightened Reds stole the ballots and declared the victory invalid.
36. The Reds of course are much stronger in some areas. While they saw fit to throw their Campesinos to the PRR in Mita, they ran their own Communist (Labor) Party candidates in other towns and won. In Escuintla, the Red candidate was elected mayor even though he was in Moscow at the time.
37. I was arrested for the first time [] I had just returned from another tour when I was told the police had been looking for me. The next morning before breakfast, I went to the police station. I didn't return until a few days later.
38. The Indian police chief questioned me for hours, trying to put words in my mouth, before he finally told me had orders for my deportation. It seems the local Reds had charged me with four "crimes": 1. I had entered Guatemala illegally. 2. I had distributed anti-Communist leaflets [] 3. I didn't have proper documents. 4. I had ferried anti-Red voters to the polls in my jeep.
39. I almost turned blue with anger. [] But it was such a blatant frame-up. I had entered Guatemala legally on a U. S. passport and was visiting in Guatemala City the day I was supposed to have been electioneering.
40. At the last minute I was saved by the Governor at Jutiapa [] but not until the Red police had insulted me and driven me in a bumpy jeep to police headquarters in Guatemala City 100 miles away. I was finally released with a warning and a three month extension of my visa.
41. Less than a month later, on January 29, I was arrested again — This time, [] succeeded in convincing the Minister of Exterior Affairs to release me from my virtual imprisonment at the El Salvador border, but the Communists pressed the government for my deportation.
42. I left the country by plane []
43. Since my return, I have been asked: "What can the Anti-Communists do in Guatemala?" It is true that with the exception of Guatemala City (which sent all of the 5 anti-Red deputies to Congress), they are floundering and confused — without a positive program to attract the peasant vote. But it is not entirely their fault. The peasants are illiterate and often difficult to reach. The PUA has also been savagely attacked and recently the Red legislators asked for suppression of the anti-Communist press and radio. Then this January, most of their leaders were arrested for planning a mythical putsch.
44. There is still hope. The people of Guatemala are basically anti-Communist. Even the deluded Campesinos are not real Marxists but simple people seeking a champion. And the great mass of Guatemala's 3,000,000 people who belong to neither side is the free world's greatest weapon. []
45. We too can help. Not by landing Marines or instituting a vengeful coffee embargo that would impoverish the nation and strengthen the Reds. We can help by understanding the situation, by giving economic aid to the non-Communist Latin American republics, and by exposing the Communist for what they are to the world and the Guatemalan people.
46. The situation is urgent. So urgent that unless Guatemala's moderate, liberal citizens wake up to the danger and act, we will one day soon see an Iron Curtain rise on the American continent.