

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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MEMORANDUM FOR: CHIEF OF PROJECT

SUBJECT: Report of Trip to El Salvador, 28-30 April 1954

FROM: Mr. Philip C. Roettinger

1. Purpose of trip:

A. Determine the most practicable method of arms ingress into Guatemala.

B. Set up that method so that such ingress could be initiated at a suitable time with a minimum of further arranging.

2. Upon arrival in San Salvador contact was made with JUNCTURE 1 with whom the problem was discussed in more or less general terms. He was found to be most interested in accomplishing the task and was most cooperative. In the conversation several methods of arms ingress were mentioned and discussed. It was his opinion, based upon both his experience as a railroad man and also his experience in operations of this type in which he had taken part in the past, that the use of the railroad for arms ingress in the usual manner was not suitable in this case. He was sure that any attempt to hide arms and equipment in a shipment of any kind would be extremely risky. A number of commodities were brought up and all were deemed ineffective and dangerous. At this particular time such things as feed and grains are not shipped to Guatemala as they are in the dry season. It was pointed out that the only shipment which would not arouse too much suspicion would be either salt or cotton. The former is sometimes shipped to the Zacapa area and the latter to Puerto Barrios. Neither of these is shipped in large quantities at this time of year, however, and he added that the only safe way to ship arms in this manner is by a carload lot. Less than carload lots are subject to much more rigid inspections at the border. All this led to a decision not to use this method. It had been suggested that packages of arms be tied under the railroad cars, being removed at some isolated stop across the border. JUNCTURE 1 vetoed this plan as being impracticable due to the fact that each car is given a thorough inspection at the border which would surely reveal these packages. This discussion lasted for the better part of the afternoon.

3. The following morning contact was made with [] at which time a meeting was requested with JUBATE. It was reported that JUBATE was not in town and would not return until the following week. Upon a little questioning it was determined that JUBATE would probably be unable to help in this problem as his company has very little traffic to and from Guatemala. A suggestion had been made relative to the possibility of placing packages of arms within gasoline tank cars which go to and from Guatemala. It was this suggestion that led to the requested meeting with JUBATE. It was determined, however, that JUBATE's company does little of this sort of traffic, obtaining its bulk gasoline from the southwestern part of El Salvador at the terminal town of Cutuco. It developed that most of the aviation gas comes to Salvador from Guatemala [] while most of the motor gas comes from either San Jose or Cutuco. The aviation gas is loaded into tank cars at Puerto Barrios and is hauled through Guatemala on down to El Salvador where it is delivered at Ilopango Airport. The cars are then taken back to Puerto Barrios, empty. All this was learned from a second meeting with JUNCTURE 1 on the following day. When the suggestion was made to utilize these empty tank cars for the transportation of arms, JUNCTURE 1 immediately concurred. He had not thought of this method and added that for this very reason it might be by far the best method. He felt that very few people would ever think of such a method and believed that it would be successful. These tank cars never have been subjected to an inspection at the border. When JUNCTURE 1 agreed with the method, a detailed plan of operation was worked out.

4. The plan for the utilization of empty tank cars follows:

A. Arms are brought into El Salvador, either with or without the consent of OSORIO, preferably with his consent. Immediate plans are in progress at this time to gain that consent. These arms ideally will be flown into Ilopango Airport just before dark (no scheduled activity takes place at that time, as all flights must leave during the daylight hours). The arms will be unloaded at a reasonably concealed spot.

B. After dark the arms packages will be taken across the road (Pan American Highway) to a railroad siding which is located far enough from the airport to permit activity without much danger of detection. They will be placed in any one or all of two or three tank cars which are left on the siding two or three times a week. The cars are left there overnight after the aviation gas has been unloaded.

C. The following morning the cars are picked up and shipped back towards Puerto Barrios. The serial number of the cars into which the arms have been placed will be sent to our representative in Guatemala City. Tentatively this man is one []

[] (recommended by JUNCTURE 1 as being just the man for this job, as he has been engaged in this type of work before). [] will send word to either Zacapa or Ipala (whichever spot is more desirable at the time) for a few cars to be spotted on a siding. He can give a very plausible reason for this, such as a routine tonnage reduction on the line from those points to Puerto Barrios. Included in this group of cars will be the tank cars bearing the numbers sent to [] and which will be carrying arms.

D. Our people in either Zacapa or Ipala will remove the arms under cover of darkness. The cars will continue to Puerto Barrios the following day.

5. In the event that our people are prevented from removing the arms from the cars for one reason or other before they are picked up for the trip to Puerto Barrios, two things can be done: (A) Our representatives in Puerto Barrios [] can see that they are unloaded there, or (B) the cars can be loaded with gasoline with the arms remaining in the tanks. This will not harm the arms and it might be better than trying to unload the tank cars at Puerto Barrios where conditions such as restricted yards (which condition does not exist at Zacapa or Ipala) might cause undue attention to be drawn to the operation. Then the arms can be returned all the way back to Ilopango, if necessary, of [] having been informed of the slip, can have that particular tank car brought to Guatemala City and spotted on a siding there after the gasoline has been unloaded for the airport.

6. NOTE: The packages of arms have to be prepared with two things in mind:

A. They have to be of such nature that the movement of the train will not cause jangling inside the tank car which would draw attention to that car, and

B. They have to be of such nature that gasoline sludge will not cause them to come apart. It is believed that neither the sludge or the gasoline will do any harm to the arms. It may have some effect upon ammunition, although if the latter is packed carefully the gas should not penetrate to a serious extent.

7. The pitfalls of this operation are:

A. Security: The plan must be guarded carefully and a minimum of people must know of it. So far only JUNCTURE 1 and the [] are aware of the plan. This is already too many, but unavoidable. It is believed that the gasoline company should be kept out of the plan unless it becomes absolutely necessary to inform it. The man in charge of [] in Salvador is [] a personal friend of JUNCTURE 1, but he did not recommend informing him of the plan.

B. Communication: The numbers of the tank cars must be sent to [] promptly as the cars are picked up the day after the arms are placed within and are usually in the Zacapa area by the following night. [] must have the numbers in time to relay them to Zacapa so that the cars may be cut out of the train and spotted in Zacapa.

8. A few technical details remain to be ironed out. Some of these are: the exact size of the packages to insure that they can be inserted and removed from the manholes in the top of the tank cars. Upon leaving Salvador, the undersigned went to Ilopango Airport about an hour early. While waiting for his plane he made extensive photos of the field and environs including the siding across the road and the tank cars.

9. Finally, in the event that these shipments are apprehended by the Guatemalan authorities, no implication of our government will result, as the nature of the arms (majority of Soviet manufacture) will tend to incriminate Guatemala itself as bringing in arms for its own Communists. JUNCTURE 1 agreed to the suggestion that his company would play the injured party and would issue loud protests to the Guatemalan government should arms be discovered.

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