

# A CGSC International Hall of Fame Member and the *CIA's Covert Action in 1954*

**by John G. Breen**

The International Hall of Fame at the Army's Command and General Staff College (CGSC), Fort Leavenworth, KS, was established in 1973 to recognize prominent, international military officer graduates. Inductees have included those who rose through the ranks to become their nations' senior military officers. A small number had become heads of state. Seventy-seven foreign military officers were inducted together in 1973 to establish the program.<sup>1</sup> As of January 2017, there were 266 inductees from 71 countries.<sup>2</sup> Currently, with the formal concurrence of the relevant U.S. Ambassador, nominees must go through a rigorous vetting process; the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Defense Exports and Cooperation manages vetting, and final approval rests with the Chief of Staff of the Army. Nomination packages are vetted through the Department of Defense and by the Department of State. The process can take as long as six months.

To now be eligible, the international CGSC graduate must have accomplished "through merit" one of the following:

- a. Served as the senior military officer, by rank seniority, in one of his nation's service components.
- b. Been appointed to the highest command position in a national service component or the nation's armed forces (i.e., Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Staff when such position entails service component command, Commanding General-Gendarmerie, Commanding General-Service Component, Commanding General-National Guard).
- c. Been appointed commander of an operational combined command while holding a rank equal or senior to the highest rank held in his nation's service component.
- d. Been internationally recognized as having made a significant and enduring military or humanitarian contribution to international peace and stability (i.e., Commanding General of humanitarian relief or peace-keeping forces) while holding a rank equal or senior to the highest rank held in his nation's service components.<sup>3</sup>

**John Breen, Ph.D., was formerly the Commandant's Distinguished Chair for National Intelligence Studies at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Dr. Breen earned his Ph.D. from the University of Rochester.**



**Figure 1. The twenty-sixth General Staff Class, Service Section, October 1945–February 1946. Interestingly, the only student not present for the photograph that day was Major Castillo.**  
*Source: Photograph from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College archives, retrieved on January 12, 2017.*

Notably, current requirements also state: “Individuals who have attained a qualifying position through means other than military merit are not eligible. Exceptions may be considered in rare circumstances on case-by-case basis.”<sup>74</sup> It is unclear if there exists any mechanism to review those officers already inducted who later are shown not to have gained their status through merit or whose later actions caused their suitability to be questioned.

One of the 77 officers inducted in 1973 was Carlos Castillo Armas, a Guatemalan major who graduated as an “allied officer” from the CGSC program in 1946 and went on to become his nation’s head of state. He did not get to that lofty position on his own, however. In 1954, the CIA orchestrated the overthrow of the democratically-elected government of Guatemala—Operation PBSUCCESS, a covert-action program. Castillo’s ensuing term

as the President of Guatemala was marked by significant human rights abuses. He was assassinated in 1957. “Military merit” may not be the most accurate term to describe Castillo’s rise to power.

### Operation PBSUCCESS

The story of the 1954 coup in Guatemala has been well told inside CIA as a case study and publicly through a limited number of declassified, historical documents and several books. As the Cold War kicked into high gear and the Eisenhower administration took power in 1953, the U.S. sought to ensure that at least its own neighborhood was secure, preventing communist expansion into Latin America. Coups were certainly one way to accomplish this goal, emplacing and propping up compliant leaders who would follow the lead of the U.S. Critics, of course, have reasonably pointed out the

hypocrisy of undermining democratic systems to preserve democracy.

By 1951, the newly elected government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala City had initiated reforms that from the U.S. perspective could be construed as, at best, socialist and, at worst, communist. Arbenz sought to redistribute land from Spanish-speaking land owners and businesspeople—*ladinos*—to the native, ethnic-Indian, poor laborers—the *finqueros*. In this mix was an American company, United Fruit, which harvested bananas from Guatemalan land, employed tens of thousands of low-wage *finqueros*, and benefited from quite favorable financial and regulatory arrangements inherited from past Guatemalan governments. Arbenz sought better terms.

So on one side, there were the poor masses supported by a progressive government and most of the military and on the other side, rich land owners and American business interests. Upon his election in 1952, Eisenhower had filled his cabinet with pragmatic businessmen and the former head of the Plumbers and Steamfitters Union— “nine millionaires and a plumber.”<sup>5</sup> This collection of successful capitalists was perhaps overly keen to interpret Guatemalan assertiveness as a threat to American business interests.

Indeed, as oil and protection of British commercial interests appeared to be motivations for the CIA’s 1953 TPAJAX overthrow of the Iranian government, so too the close ties between United Fruit and the Eisenhower administration seem to have inspired the 1954 PBSUCCESS campaign. While fear of communism was genuine, the commercial conflicts of interest of the Eisenhower administration were, in retrospect, astounding:

- The U.S. law firm that represented United Fruit was Sullivan and Cromwell; a lawyer from the firm who had previously negotiated on the company’s behalf was John Foster Dulles, now Eisenhower’s Secretary of

State.<sup>6</sup>

- His brother, Allen Dulles, also a former lawyer at Sullivan and Cromwell was Eisenhower’s Director of Central Intelligence.
- Thomas Dudley Cabot, who had been a director for United Fruit and president of the U.S. registrar bank for United Fruit, was the State Department’s Director of Security Affairs.
- Another former director of this same bank was Eisenhower’s Secretary of Commerce.
- The Special Assistant to the president for national security affairs had been the board chairman for United Fruit’s transfer agent.
- A future director of United Fruit was Eisenhower’s U.S. Representative to the United Nations.
- Eisenhower’s Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, John Moors Cabot (Thomas Dudley’s brother), held significant stock in United Fruit.<sup>7</sup>
- Cabot’s predecessor as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Edward G. Miller (1949-1952), had been a partner at Sullivan and Cromwell right before and then again right after PBSUCCESS (1947–1949 and 1953–1958). This was again the same law firm representing United Fruit and the former employer of the Dulles brothers.<sup>8</sup>

It was Edward G. Miller and Thomas Mann of the State Department who told then Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Allen Dulles in July of 1952 that they wanted “a new government in Guatemala imposed by force if necessary”; DCI Walter Bedell Smith confirmed State Department approval and ordered that efforts to topple the Guatemalan government

should begin.<sup>9</sup> After leaving government service, Bedell Smith accepted a membership on the board of United Fruit.<sup>10</sup> In the declassified version of Cullather's *Secret History of PBSUCCESS*, it is Thomas G. Corocoran, United Fruit's "purveyor of concentrated influence" who is said to have arranged for former DCI Smith to join the board. As early as 1950, Corocoran had also met with Thomas Mann (among others) from the State Department to urge action be taken in Guatemala to oust the elected president.<sup>11,12</sup>

Once the CIA received its orders, it needed someone to lead the insurgency. And by 1952, Carlos Castillo Armas had already been attempting to foment rebellion in Guatemala for some time. Following his graduation from the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College program in 1946, Castillo rose quickly through the ranks, at one point directing the Guatemalan military academy. He was on the wrong side of a 1949 power struggle in Guatemala and called for a military coup. Castillo "believed Army officers, inspired by the spectacle of his bravery, would overthrow the government and install him as president. Instead, they threw him in jail."<sup>13</sup>

**Castillo "believed Army officers, inspired by the spectacle of his bravery, would overthrow the government and install him as president. Instead, they threw him in jail."**

He later mounted a feckless assault, was again arrested, and eventually bribed his way out of prison, fleeing to Honduras. Castillo was in some contact with the CIA as early as 1950 and engaged with surrounding foreign leaders, seeking their support for his insurgent overthrow of the Arbenz government.<sup>14</sup> United Fruit privately fortified Castillo with money and arms and initiated its own public relations/propaganda

operation against the Arbenz government.<sup>15</sup> The CIA's PBSUCCESS planners believed a buildup of diplomatic and economic pressure, along with political agitation, sabotage, and rumor campaigns would lead to a popular uprising and the downfall of the Arbenz government. Castillo would invade with an insurgent force, the *coup de grace*.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, Castillo's military leadership was soon in doubt. "The rebel army never impressed officials at CIA headquarters (Bissell [CIA Special Assistant and Deputy Director of Plans] later remembered it as "extremely small and ill-trained"), and in the months before the invasion, some in the PBSUCCESS hierarchy were beginning to have doubts about Castillo Armas's suitability for command."<sup>17</sup> These doubts were apparently well-founded as, after the first three days of military action, a significant portion of his invasion force had been turned back, with much of the resistance mounted by local police and a small loyalist garrison with a courageous leader.<sup>18</sup> Castillo had unwisely attempted to take and hold territory and had significant challenges with logistics.<sup>19</sup>

Luckily for PBSUCCESS, Castillo's insurgent force, ineffectual as it was, served at least as an effective psychological add-on to the ongoing diplomatic, economic, and highly-effective propaganda pressure exerted by the rest of PBSUCCESS and the U.S. government. Along with some last minute, limited air power approved by Eisenhower, these elements combined to tip the balance, and Arbenz was removed from power by his own military leadership. After some opposition by the deposed generals, Castillo was placed in power. He did not distinguish himself. Until his assassination in 1957, Castillo's rule was marked by human rights abuses and corruption. As Cullather notes in his secret history:

Case officers found him malleable and receptive to suggestions. But, as the State

Department soon learned, Castillo Armas's relationship to CIA had been dictated by his circumstances. As president of Guatemala, he was in a better position to press the demands of his primary constituency, conservative land barons and political opportunists. When the United States failed to provide enough aid to satisfy these groups, Castillo Armas was forced to appease them in other ways, through graft and preferment. The United States' heavy stake in Castillo Armas's success reduced its leverage in dealing with him. State Department officials were unable to bargain with the junta on a quid pro quo basis because they knew—and the Guatemalans knew—the United States would never allow Castillo Armas to fail. In Guatemala, U.S. officials learned a lesson they would relearn in Vietnam, Iran, [redacted] and other countries: intervention usually produces “allies” that are stubborn, aid-hungry, and corrupt.<sup>20</sup>

The obvious parallels to more recent U.S. interventions are striking.

### **Castillo's Early Exposure to Intelligence**

The twenty-sixth General Staff Class Program and Schedule for the Army's Command and General Staff College (October 1945–February 1946) notes Castillo and his classmates received briefings on basic and advanced general staff and command duties and military doctrine. Given his eventual involvement with the CIA, it is noteworthy that he was also provided instruction in intelligence. His coursework included: Sources of Information, including captured documents and prisoners of war, technical intelligence, reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance, visual aerial reconnaissance, espionage, underground forces and guerrillas, signal communications, and photo interpretation; Combat Intelligence, including operational use of intelligence including

psychological warfare; Counterintelligence, including internal security and censorship; Strategic Intelligence; and additional intelligence activities, such as public relations.<sup>21</sup>

One of Castillo's Intelligence instructors was Lieutenant Colonel Jules Dubois, a Military Intelligence officer and head of the Language Training section. He also served as Class Director for the Latin American military students.<sup>22</sup> This likely gave Dubois and Castillo significant contact time throughout the year. Castillo would likely have been in the audience for lectures from Dubois on Army Service Forces Intelligence, Public Relations, Captured Documents and Prisoners of War, Technical Intelligence, and interestingly enough, Censorship.<sup>23</sup>

**There is no indication that the CIA had any connection to Dubois (nor to Castillo) during his time in the Army and specifically at CGSC...**

Dubois would later leave the Army to become an accomplished journalist, working most conspicuously in Latin America. According to a scathing 1977 article in *The New York Times* about CIA involvement with the U.S. press, Dubois, asserted but never otherwise confirmed to have had at least vaguely defined connections to the CIA, was described by one former official as “well and favorably known” to the agency, though never on its payroll.”<sup>24</sup>

There is no indication that the CIA had any connection to Dubois (nor to Castillo) during his time in the Army and specifically at CGSC, though at least one of Dubois' contemporary military intelligence instructors at CGSC had at least some interaction with the CIA's predecessor organization, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). From the 1946 CGSC archives, Intelligence instructor Lieutenant Colonel H.G.V. Hart noted in the bibliography for a class



**Figure 2. The portrait of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas as it currently appears in the displayed gallery of the CGSC International Hall of Fame inside the Lewis and Clark Center on Fort Leavenworth, KS. The engraving reads, "Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, Commander in Chief of the Army, Guatemala, USACGSC 1946." The gold star at the top right of the portrait signifies he became the Head of State of his home country.**

**Source: Photograph taken by the author on January 12, 2017.**

he was teaching on “Espionage, Underground Forces and Guerillas” that his lectures would be based on “ten days at OSS, Washington, D.C. during which time I studied reports and records of espionage and U/G activities and had numerous conferences with agents from the various theaters of operation and with chief of sections.”<sup>25</sup> Undoubtedly, Castillo was also in Hart’s audience. The only question is perhaps to what extent he absorbed the material.

## **Conclusions**

It appears Eisenhower and successive presidents may actually have been misled by the perceived accomplishments of both PBSUCCESS and its predecessor, the 1953 TPAJAX overthrow of the Iranian government. They were both seen as exemplars for how best to meet U.S. security goals without the attendant risks associated with overt military intervention, especially with the menace of nuclear and then thermonuclear annihilation from a seemingly ever expansive Soviet Communist threat. The President, with relatively little “skin in

the game,” could direct the CIA to foment revolution and emplace a compliant figurehead to ensure U.S. regional influence. TPAJAX and PBSUCCESS, both at the start of Eisenhower’s Cold War administration, seemed to suggest such efforts could be accomplished easily. In hindsight, these two operations seem to have been more relevantly exemplars of beginner’s luck. And as with all luck, it tends to run out. Over time, “regression toward the mean” took over, and considerable failures and blow-back from revelations of nefarious CIA operations brought a more sober assessment of what covert action could and could not accomplish. It was not until the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion that this sort of intervention convincingly revealed at least its potential for large-scale, short term failure. It can take decades to see the longer-term, unintended consequences (good and bad) of these and other CIA covert-action programs.

While this particular covert action may have been a success for the U.S. in the short-term, Guatemala certainly suffered decades of, at a minimum, brutal autocratic leadership that

favored minority rich landowners and American business at the expense of the poor majority of its citizens. One can attempt to argue that policymakers and covert-action planners at CIA were not malicious in pursuing these covert initiatives, and offer that they had little understanding or experience with the potential for unforeseen, negative, long-term consequences. Alternatively, in the afterword to Cullather's declassified PBSUCCESS history, Piero Gleijeses points out:

I disagree that the men who engineered PBSUCCESS were well-intentioned. Their intentions were as old as international relations: they believed they were acting in the U.S. national interest. Any impact on the Guatemalan people was incidental: if they did not suffer in the process, so much the better, but if they did, *tant pis*. My own study of PBSUCCESS, which has been confirmed by the documents that the CIA has declassified and by Cullather's history, showed that the Eisenhower administration acted with supreme indifference toward the fate of the Guatemalan people. This cannot be described as being well-intentioned. It is, rather, wanton criminal negligence.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, and although regional challenges remain, as of this writing there are no military *juntas* in Latin America, none of the countries is at war, and no major insurgencies remain (assuming continued progress between the government of Colombia and the FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army]).<sup>27</sup> "Only time will tell" can certainly be used to dodge culpability. However, one might not unreasonably argue that decades of U.S. covert action, overt military, and other whole-of-government intervention and leadership has helped make lasting peace in the Western Hemisphere a possibility.

How does all of this reflect on Carlos Castillo Armas and his continued presence in CGSC's International Hall of Fame? His photograph is displayed prominently with all other inductees; it has a gold star in the top right corner that signifies he was at one point his country's head of state. Today, the vetting process is quite rigorous, and one can, of course, be much more comfortable with the quality of the officers more recently placed into the Hall, certainly those inducted after 1973. This is because CGSC simply did not have all available information on hand when Castillo was inducted. Remember that 77 officers were inducted together in 1973 to establish the Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, it was not until 1975—the "Year of Intelligence"—that the Church Committee hearings laid bare the CIA wrong doing in, among other locales, Latin America. It is unclear that a mechanism exists to re-evaluate the suitability of inductees. If a need exists to do so, Castillo Armas might serve as a useful case in point. **IAJ**

*All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official positions or views of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) or any other U.S. government agency. Nothing in the contents should be construed as asserting or implying U.S. government authentication of information or CIA endorsement of the author's views. This material has been reviewed by the CIA to prevent the disclosure of classified information.*

## NOTES

- 1 “Establishment of the International Hall of Fame | US Army ...” <<http://usacac.army.mil/organizations/cace/cgsc/imsd/ihof>>, accessed on March 2, 2017.
- 2 Personal correspondence, Director of the IHOF Program, January 2017.
- 3 “Criteria for IHOF Induction, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center,” <<http://usacac.army.mil/organizations/cace/cgsc/imsd/induction>>, accessed on March 2, 2017.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 “Eisenhower Administration 1953–1961,” United States Department of Labor, February 18, 2016, Chapter 5, <<http://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/dolchp05>>, accessed on March 2, 2017.
- 6 Stephen E. Ambrose, *Ike’s Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment*, Anchor Books, New York, 2012, p. 218.
- 7 Ibid., p. 223.
- 8 “Edward G. Miller, Jr., 56, Dies; Acheson’s Latin America Aide,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 1968, <<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1968/04/16/88940380.html?pageNumber=47>>, accessed on March 2, 2017.
- 9 Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala 1952–1954*, Stanford University Press, California, 1999, p. 29.
- 10 Ambrose, p. 223.
- 11 Nick Cullather, “Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala 1952–1954” in *CIA and Assassinations: The Guatemala 1954 Documents*, The National Security Archive, <<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/docs/doc05.pdf>, 14/120>, accessed on March 1, 2017.
- 12 Cullather, “Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala 1952–1954,” Appendix A.
- 13 Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala 1952–1954*, p. 12.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., p. 18.
- 16 Ibid., p. 43.
- 17 Ibid., p. 72.
- 18 Ibid., p. 90.
- 19 Ibid., p. 96.
- 20 Ibid., p. 117.
- 21 CGSC archives, *1946 Intelligence Handbook: Ground*, file 5450 (99–99), document received 1947.
- 22 “Military Review, January 1946,” *Military Review*, <<http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p124201coll1/id/1003>>, accessed on March 2, 2017.

- 23 CGSC Archives, Class 26, 1945–46, bibliographies to “Army Service Forces Intelligence,” “Public Relations,” “Captured Documents and Prisoners of War,” “Technical Intelligence,” and “Censorship,” signed by J. Dubois, November 27, 1945.
- 24 John M. Crewdson and Joseph B. Treaster, “C.I.A. Established Many Links to Journalists in U.S. and Abroad,” *The New York Times*, December 27, 1977, <[http://www.nytimes.com/1977/12/27/archives/cia-established-many-links-to-journalists-in-us-and-abroad-cias.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/1977/12/27/archives/cia-established-many-links-to-journalists-in-us-and-abroad-cias.html?_r=0)>, accessed on March 2, 2017.
- 25 CGSC Archives, Class 26, 1945–46, bibliography to “Espionage, Underground Forces & Guerillas,” signed by H.G.V. Hart, November 29, 1945.
- 26 Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala 1952–1954*, Afterword, p. xxix.
- 27 Steven Pinker and Juan Manuel Santos, “Colombia’s Milestone in World Peace,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 2016, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/26/opinion/colombias-milestone-in-world-peace.html>>, accessed on March 2, 2017.

## Join the Alumni Association!

The Alumni Association program allows graduates and friends of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College to stay connected and support the College through the CGSC Foundation’s programs and activities.

For more information contact the CGSC Foundation:



100 Stimson Ave., Suite 1149, Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027

ph: 913-651-0624

email: [office@cgscf.org](mailto:office@cgscf.org)

or join online at [www.cgscfoundation.org](http://www.cgscfoundation.org)