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Interview with Manny Chavez

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Manny Chavez interview, 15 January 1986

I met [EGU] in regard to intelligence meetings and briefings at the Pentagon. . . . I was then assigned as the US Air Attache to the Dominican Republic in about February 1960; the first resident Air Attache to the Dominican Republic. . . . A crisis situation developed in the Dominican Republic which General Lansdale became quite interested. . . . he would call me in to talk about the situation. . . . Sure enuf, in August 1960, Trujillo broke relations with the US. I was the first person from the embassy back to the US.

. . . He considered me an individual [with] good insights into Latin American developments and political situations, so he would call me [in Miami where Chavez was seconded to the CIA on a temporary assignment on Air Force interests, which actually lasted 4 years] and talk about Latin America.

On 7 March 1963 . . . we went to the Canal Zone and to Caracas, Venezuela. According to the orders . . . dated 1 March 1963, it was for a 14 day temporary duty assignment. He came to Miami . . . commercial air; went down to Panama and we met with General Andrew P. Omeara. We had briefings . . . and then we went to Venezuela [by] commercial air. It was quite an experience. . . . It was . . . a clunker Mexican aircraft and the damned thing took off late because the damned engine caught on fire.

. . . we finally got to . . . Maiquita Airport down on the coast . . . where you land and then drive up to Caracas. We stayed at the military club, which is called Circular Militar. . . . The hotel is part of the club, they have very nice suites. . . . About 3 o'clock in the morning there was a guard in front of the Circular Militar--we were on the second floor--was killed.

. . . Guerrilla activity was very bad . . . in the mountain areas and a lot of urban terrorist activities. . . . we couldn't have been more than 50-60 feet [away] right near the entrance to the club. . . . they drove up in a car and raced their engine--it woke me up--and the reason . . . was to try to drown out any shooting . . . you could hear . . . about 3-4 shots. They killed the guard, removed his sidearm, that is what they were after, not necessarily to penetrate the club.

. . . We went down there immediately to see; of course we couldn't do anything. And he immediately sent his sympathy to the Minister of Defense and arranged that flowers be sent to the family and arranged that we attend the funeral. . . . There they bury their dead within 24 hours.

We met with several military officials of the govt on an informal basis. After a few days there we went to Lagunillas, in the lake area, Lake Maracaibo, where the Creole Petroleum Company, which was then Standard Oil of NJ and later Exxon, where they had drilling operations out on the lake, multi-billions of dollars of operations.

. . . there was a great danger of sabotage to the oil fields . . . most of that oil [was] coming to the US; US companies there, Sinclair,

Texaco, Standard Oil, other foreign companies [like] Shell. The major oil fields [had] the highest degree of security . . . the US Southern Command spent a great deal of time teaching their National Guard, which is a constabulary type of organization, counter-guerrilla activities.

He was interested in that We were met by an old and very close friend of mine, A. Lewis Russell, director of security for Creole, probably one of the finest security men in the US, affectionately known as Lew. He showed us everything that had been done; what kind of cooperation they had with the National Guard; what kind of training they were getting from the armed forces. That was where [EGL] wanted the emphasis--what are we doing to help people help themselves. That was his motto. Not what can we do for you, but what can we do to teach you to help yourself.

We stayed there for a day; went out in the interior along the pipe line to see where just 3 days before they used a shaped charge to blow up one of the pipelines, an 18" pipeline which pumped crude oil into an area out to the beach many miles away for cargo ships to pick up.

. . . Creole had just gotten a beautiful fire truck of the finest quality They went to try to put the fire out, got caught in the mire and burned up. We got to see the shell of it. Brand spanking new.

Shaped charges are used for oil exploration soundings. They are placed way down low in the ground in pipes; then exploded so they can read the seismic readings. Such explosive devices are very commonly used in all oil field operations. They stole these and placed them on one of the 18" steel pipelines and . . . fired it. . . . Then the oil gushed out and made a little lake They placed several candles in it and lit them. The candles were enough to slowly light that heavy crude oil so it would catch fire. Several hundred yards of pipeline burned and twisted once the oil caught fire. It was in a remote area and wouldn't be detected until they saw the smoke from a distance, because you can't patrol the entire area for hundreds and hundreds of miles. That was the extent of our trip.