

## **Ep. 13 – Juan del Castillo – SPAN** **“The Chicken Farmer from Brooklyn”**

Soy The OG Fact Checker, dándoles un delicioso sabor de la historia verificada.

¿Se han dado cuenta de que estoy hablando esta introducción en español? Lo hago en honor al hombre del que hablaré en este episodio. Si mi español suena horrible, es porque todavía estoy aprendiendo este idioma. Todavía no lo hablo con fluidez, pero espero dominarlo algún día. ¡Hablo español con gusto gracias a Walter Mercado!

Para este episodio, les contaré la historia de Juan Jose del Castillo, de Brooklyn, Nueva York, ¡no, no del pintor barroco español! Castillo, veterano de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, fue el primer hispano de la Guardia Costera de Estados Unidos en completar lo que más tarde se conocería como Escuela de Aspirantes a Oficiales, y el segundo hispano en ser comisionado como oficial. Si se preguntan quién fue el primer hispano en convertirse en oficial, ese honor corresponde a Henry García, de Puerto Rico, pero contaré su historia en otro episodio.

Lo que hace especial a del Castillo son sus 44 años de servicio en la Reserva de la Guardia Costera y su trabajo en la ayuda contra la hambruna, la ciencia y la distribución de alimentos. Inventó varios sustitutos alimentarios de alto valor proteínico para países en vías de desarrollo a través de asociaciones entre su empresa y el Departamento de Agricultura y U.S. AID. Y sus conocimientos sobre ciencia y distribución de alimentos fueron autodidactas.

Ahora paso al inglés! Gracias por escuchame! (USE AS TRAILER)

Let me start this episode by saying there is very little information about Juan del Castillo as far as his parents, his family or his early years. Articles I found don't even mention his family's country of origin. But persistent person I am, I found his family tree online and del Castillo, born in 1926 in Brooklyn, New York, was the middle child of three to parents Rafael Carlos and Ruth Maxwell del Castillo. Del Castillo's paternal line can be traced back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Cartagena, Columbia where Juan's grandfather started a successful import business in 1861 still in operation today as Three Castillos.  
([https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Del\\_Castillo-169](https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Del_Castillo-169))

Del Castillo attended La Salle Military Academy, which was a Catholic-based boarding school located in Oakdale, New York...basically Long Island (The Long Blue Line [[mycg.uscg.mil](http://mycg.uscg.mil)]). And apparently, sons of some the richest Catholic families in the northeast attended this top-rated preparatory school as well as international students from Latin America (La Salle Military Academy Alumni Assoc [[lsmaalumni.org](http://lsmaalumni.org)]).

Anyone who graduated from La Salle was college bound, and this included del Castillo who graduated from Manhattan College in 1942 with a degree in political science. In June of that year, he was appointed to Reserve Officer Training at the Coast Guard Academy in New

London, Connecticut for the Coast Guard Reserves. This training was later renamed Officer Candidate School. He graduated from the course in December, making him the first Hispanic to complete officer's training and the second Hispanic Coast Guard officer. (mycg.uscg.mil)

During World War II, he was activated and served aboard Coast Guard vessels before he was selected for Naval Communications School at Harvard University where he gained the skills to become an expert in shipboard communications. He used that training aboard the USS Albuquerque while in the Aleutian Islands and when the war ended, he returned to Reserve duty and went to work for the family business, Rafael del Castillo & Company, which at the time was an importer of wheat and grain with offices in Long Island. He retired from the Coast Guard Reserves after 40 years of service in 1981.

It was his work in the family business that sparked his interest in famine relief, teaching himself "... food science, famine relief and large-scale food aid distribution" to eventually become an authority on the subjects (mycy.uscg.mil) He used this new knowledge to create in the 1960s a "pre-blended food component" called CSM, which stands for corn, soy, milk. When mixed with boiling water, you can use it to create "...polenta, tortillas, empanadas and soups". Relief agencies, like the U.S. Agency for International Development's or U.S. AID's Food for Peace program, didn't hesitate to ship this food source to regions in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

He also created a similar product while living in Panama between 1958 and 1963 running chicken farms, a product that decreased the time it takes to make arepas. If you've ever watched Disney's Encanto, then you know what they are... little, fried corn cakes that are popular in Columbia, Venezuela and Central America. Because of the increased cost of milk, CSM would eventually be replaced with another product, CBS, which stands for corn soy blend ("Obituaries" The Washington Post. 23 Aug 2009).

Even more impressive, in the 1970s he created a rice substitute out of sorghum with no staff and no laboratory (mycg.uscg.mil) while working at the U.S. Department of Agriculture or USDA, which was used for its food programs ("Obituaries" The Washington Post). Sorghum is a cereal crop, one of the top five in the world actually, and the U.S. is the largest producer of this grain, although current events with our federal government might be affecting this output.

The thing that puts sorghum in the top five of grains is its efficient conversion of solar energy and use of water; it's a "high-energy, drought-tolerant, resource conserving grain" and "is one of the really indispensable crops required for the survival of humankind" (sorghumcheckoff.com) Because del Castillo put his self-taught knowledge of farming and food science to good use, over four million men, women and children consumed his products to fight against malnutrition and starvation.

While working at the USDA as the director of Food and Nutrition Service, he oversaw domestic food distribution programs, including the school lunch and elderly feeding programs, and food for American Indigenous reservations. He was the first director of the country's food stamp program and the Women, Infants, and Children program also known as WIC. And he served as special assistant to the Office of the Inspector General. He retired from the USDA in 1994. (mycg.uscg.mil; "Obituaries")

Before passing away at the age of 87 in 2009, del Castillo was given a lifetime achievement award from U.S. AID for his invention of CSM. He and his wife of 58 years have six daughters all living in the DC, Maryland, Virginia area (locally known as the DMV) and 19 grandchildren.

Normally I would wrap this up with my closing line, "I love history. The more you know." But I've been finding these young whippersnappers stealing Gen X material from our childhood. So, I'm rolling out a new closing line. Here it is:

I love history. You came for the truth; thank you for staying for the story.