

U.S. adviser comes under fire in El Salvador

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"I'm bailing out of here," said the U.S. officer via radio as rebels closed in on the government troops. He apparently wasn't injured.

BY FRANK SMYTH
Special to the Star-Telegram

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — A U.S. military adviser at a Salvadoran army base came under fire yesterday in an early morning rebel attack that killed three Salvadoran soldiers, but he apparently managed to escape unharmed.

It is at least the fourth reported attack involving U.S. advisers since they were deployed in El Salvador in 1980.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Barry Jacobs confirmed that a U.S. operations, planning and training officer was present at the army engineering base in Zacatecoluca, 35 miles southeast of the capital. But Jacobs denied that the adviser came under fire or was in any immediate danger.

A tape-recording of the adviser's radio report to military superiors in San Salvador paints a different picture, however. The report indicates that the adviser considered himself to be in immediate danger. A tape of the transmission was obtained by a correspondent for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.

The unidentified adviser, using the code name Commando Two Zero, contacted a U.S. Special Forces officer identified at Rotelo at headquarters in San Salvador about 4:30 a.m.

"Hello, Commando Two Zero" reporting.

"Go ahead, over."

"Listen in. The — hitting the fan pretty bad out here. . . . I'm . . . I'm bailing out of here. I'm getting out of here. . . . I'm breaking through. So if I can make. . . . Don't worry about it. I'll get out of here. . . . and, ah. . . . I'll rendezvous with whoever comes out tomorrow, over."

"Roger, I understand. . . . S.D.O. (staff duty officer) is on the way. Stand by."

The U.S. adviser said the rebels were using automatic weapons, *rampas*, or homemade catapult bombs, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

Salvadoran guerrillas offer peace for military changes

New York Times News Service

OAXTEPEC, Mexico — Salvadoran guerrilla leaders yesterday said they would lay down their arms permanently and incorporate themselves into Salvadoran political life if the government made fundamental military changes.

The proposal came on the second day of negotiations between the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front and representatives of El Salvador's political parties on an earlier rebel proposal to postpone the presidential elections scheduled for March 19.

The development coincided with stepped-up rebel attacks on Salvadoran army bases in the capital in El Salvador.

The peace talks, held on neutral ground in a Mexican government resort in Oaxtepec, are the first between the two sets of political forces.

No immediate response from the Salvadoran government was expected. Neither the government nor the military is taking part in the talks; nor is the United States, which has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in aid each year to keep the rebels from overthrowing President Jose Napoleon Duarte.

Representatives of many of the 13 political parties taking part in the negotiations, said they had not had sufficient time to digest the new proposal and

therefore could not comment on it.

But others said they regarded the initiative as an important and encouraging development.

The new rebel document, made public yesterday morning, apparently is intended to move discussions beyond the narrow question of the election and into the much broader terrain of how to bring an end to the nine-year civil war that has cost the lives of 70,000 Salvadorans.

The rebels said they would be willing "to recognize the existence of a single army." But in return they want "judgment and the application of penalties (upon) those responsible for massacres and political crimes."

Cases specifically mentioned include the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980 and the killing of four American nuns later that year.

It was not immediately clear whether the offer by the rebels to halt hostilities would still stand if the parties reject their demand, made publicly last month, to postpone the elections for six months.

Yesterday's statement described the January document as merely "a first step toward seeking agreement and generating conditions that make the road to peace irreversible," indicating that there was room for compromise.

And we got two other wounded, over."

"This is Rotelo. Roger, I understand, anything else? Over."

"Commando Two Zero out."

The guerrillas and soldiers battled for three hours, according to officials there, including base commander Col. Benjamin Canjura.

Canjura said three soldiers were killed, including a major. Two soldiers died when a rocket-propelled grenade hit the truck in which they were traveling; 13 others were

wounded in the fighting, Canjura said.

There is no indication that the U.S. adviser sustained injury.

The guerrillas also attacked an important army base in the capital, killing two civilians who lived nearby, officials said.

The early morning attack on the 4,000-member 1st Brigade's headquarters was the fifth on a major military installation in San Salvador since November. With jurisdiction over the capital and its environs, the brigade headquarters is considered the country's most important military installation.

Col. Orlando Zepeda, commander of the 1st Army Brigade, said there were no casualties inside the downtown base and that damage was negligible, but he refused to allow journalists inside.

The rebels used two pickups fitted with catapults. The detonation of one explosive charge launches the bombs and simultaneously blows up the vehicle.

The explosion of one of the vehicles killed Pedro Martinez, about 70 years old, and his wife, Maria Teresa, about 65, who lived in a house near the headquarters.

A Western official said he knew of only three occasions when U.S. advisers have engaged in combat in El Salvador.

In March 1987, Army Sgt. Gregory Froenius was killed during a rebel assault against the Army's 4th Brigade at El Paraiso.

U.S. advisers also came under attack during rebel assaults against Salvadoran military bases at Usulután in February 1988 and again at El Paraiso in September.

A U.S. official said that any time U.S. military personnel engage in combat it must be reported to Congress. After the latest attack at El Paraiso, the Defense Department waited two weeks before announcing that U.S. military personnel had come under fire.

U.S. military advisers are widely believed to have found themselves in combat situations more frequently than has been reported.

One Western diplomat said, "I would presume that every time a military base is attacked, a U.S. adviser comes under attack."

In recent weeks, rebel attacks have become more frequent. Yesterday, the rebels attacked two other military installations at the same time they assaulted the Zacatecoluca base and on the base of the 1st Brigade in San Salvador, they said.