

5-18-1988

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Honduran Official Detained In Miami On Drug Charges

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, May 18, 1988

On May 15, Honduran Ambassador to Panama, Gen. Rigoberto Regalado Lara, was arrested at the Miami international airport after Customs agents reported finding about 11.3 kilos of cocaine in his luggage. The drug was reportedly covered in coffee to prevent specially trained dogs from detecting it. Regalado was arrested after arriving from Tegucigalpa aboard a regular passenger flight. A federal judge ordered that he be held without bond on charges of drug possession and intent to distribute the cocaine. According to an affidavit submitted in federal court, a Customs agent who examined Regalado's luggage "discovered a white powdery substance secreted inside 10 packages surrounded by coffee and wrapped in plastic concealed inside pants legs and other clothing in his suitcase." Regalado Lara, 49, is a step-brother to Honduran Armed Forces Commander in Chief Gen. Humberto Regalado Hernandez. On May 16, the Honduran Foreign Ministry released a communique informing Washington that his diplomatic immunity and his appointment as ambassador to Panama had been suspended. The US, said the communique, was free to prosecute Regalado under US law. Ana T. Barnett, the Executive Assistant US Attorney in Miami, said the suspension of immunity was only symbolic because Regalado would not have been entitled to immunity in the US because he is the Ambassador to a third country. Regalado, who is being detained at the Metropolitan Correction Center in southern Miami, is a retired army colonel. According to Honduran military sources, Regalado Lara is a former commander of the military tactical group (ATM), president of the National Emergency Committee, and head of the Armed Forces public Relations Office. While serving in the military, he gained a reputation as a skilled parachutist, having logged more than 350 jumps of all kinds. Regalado Lara had been ambassador to Panama since 1986. (Basic data from AP, 05/16/88; New York Times, 05/17/88)

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