

1-25-1989

Guatemala: Evidence Of Army Responsibility For November Massacre Of 22 Civilians

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Guatemala: Evidence Of Army Responsibility For November Massacre Of 22 Civilians." (1989).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/2688>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Guatemala: Evidence Of Army Responsibility For November Massacre Of 22 Civilians

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, January 25, 1989

In late November, the Guatemalan army reported the discovery of 21 bodies of civilians, residents of the village of El Aguacate, Chimaltenango department. Shortly before the massacre, the corpse of another man, who had been abducted and later killed, was taken to El Aguacate by soldiers who claimed a Guatemalan rebel group was responsible for the man's fate. The rebels were also blamed for the massacre in statements by the military and the government of President Vinicio Cerezo. Since then, residents of El Aguacate have prepared a chronology of events surrounding the massacre which indicates army responsibility. The army is also blamed for the massacre in an article published in the December edition of the monthly magazine, Noticias de Guatemala. The news magazine is edited by a group of Guatemalan exiles in Costa Rica. According to Noticias, military intelligence chief Luis Francisco Ortega masterminded the multiple killings in an effort to discredit the guerrillas, and to "create an environment of confusion and terror" as justification toward launching a major offensive against the rebels. Ortega's plan was approved by the military high command, according to the magazine, in order to defame the guerrillas within and outside Guatemala. The massacre was considered an effective means of deflecting attention from the government and the military at a time when the rising incidence of politically-motivated murders, kidnappings, torture and other human rights abuses have once again focused "undesirable attention" on Guatemala. The report by El Aguacate residents on events of Nov. 22-29 was prepared in order to counter statements "by the army which served only to confuse people and give appearances of a false democracy." According to the residents' chronology, on Nov. 24, 30 peasants searching for a disappeared friend in the El Aguacate area were captured and held by a group of armed men, several of whom were recognized as soldiers. Some of the abducted managed to escape. One of them went directly to the local evangelical pastor for help. Later, this man and the pastor were also kidnapped. On Nov. 25, the corpse of the first peasant who had disappeared was taken to El Aguacate by soldiers. On the following day, after the funeral, a soldier told the relatives of the deceased that 22 relatives and friends had been detained at a nearby military base. When the wives of the alleged detained went to the base, they were informed no one knew of their whereabouts. After returning home, they were informed by authorities in the village that they had received a radio message indicating that the women's "husbands are dead on the mountain." Four days later, the army delivered the 22 bodies to El Aguacate for burial. Meanwhile, the army conducted aerial bombings with planes and helicopters, reportedly as part of their pursuit of the guerrillas. The military and the government issued statements blaming the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), member of the National Revolutionary Unity of Guatemala (URNNG). The El Aguacate residents' report stated they a soldier confided to villagers that the 22 victims had been tortured at the nearby military base. Another soldier told them that he had heard the screams of several people detained there, and had recognized the voice of the evangelical pastor. The report by the villagers said that the widows of the massacre victims had been threatened numerous times by soldiers, who told them: "If you do not say it was the guerrillas, you will pay." The women also noted that armed men in civilian clothes had them under observation. Fr. Andres Giron, a

well-known leader of the Guatemalan peasant movement, expressed his doubts regarding the official version of the events of late November. He said, "I have never seen guerrillas who massacre people." [Basic data from 01/19/89 report by the Regional Coordinator of Economic and Social Research for the Caribbean and Central America (CRIES, Managua)]

-- End --