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El Salvador: Two Mexican Citizens Killed By Soldiers

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General
Published: Friday, May 26, 1989

On May 11, Col. Emilio Ponce, head of the Salvadoran joint chiefs of staff, announced that the bodies of Mexican citizens Efrain Flores Mendez and Miguel Hernandez Toledo would be delivered to the Mexican Embassy as requested by Ambassador Federico Urruchua. Ponce said the two men were killed May 4 in a clash between government troops and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). Exhumation of the corpses, he added, would take place May 12 or May 13. The bodies of Mendez and Hernandez were identified on May 5 by justice of the peace Jose German Nieto, and later buried at the La Bemeja public cemetery in San Salvador. In response to questions by Notimex, Ponce said the two died "with weapons in hand," identified as AK-47s, Soviet-made rifles, received by the rebels in recent shipments from Cuba. The armed forces press office said that on May 5 government troops encountered and attacked a guerrilla column in San Alfredo, La Libertad department. The two Mexicans, said the press office, were part of the rebel unit. Unidentified unofficial sources quoted by Notimex said that Mexican passports found in the pockets of the two men indicated they had entered El Salvador on April 8, 1989. Spokespersons for the Universidad Autonoma de Puebla (Puebla, Mexico) dismissed statements about the men's participation in rebel units and their alleged arrival in El Salvador on April 8. The spokespersons said Efrain Flores Mendez and Miguel Hernandez Toledo were law students in good standing. Ponce told foreign journalists that Flores and Hernandez were "no more than internationalists or mercenaries participating in military operations with the FMLN...Nonetheless, for humanitarian reasons we are coordinating with the Mexican Embassy the delivery of the corpses." Thus far in 1989, said Notimex, Salvadoran troops have killed three Mexican citizens. On Feb. 13, Mexican physician Alejandra Bravo Betancurt was killed when the army attacked a rebel field hospital. According to Tutela Legal, her body showed signs of torture. Staff members at the Mexican Embassy said the process of having the bodies shipped to Mexico was turning out to be a very delayed and complicated one, regardless of Ponce's announcement. (Basic data from Notimex, 05/11/89)

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