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Panama: U.S. Soldiers Conduct Maneuver, Disarm Panamanian Policeman

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Aug. 10, US soldiers stationed at the Southern Command conducted an exercise called "Operation Alice." US troops deployed on the Amador Highway confronted and disarmed a Panamanian military police officer and surrounded a truck of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF) as well as a traffic police station. Panamanian soldiers armed with bazookas and light weapons observed the US actions from a hill overlooking the thoroughfare but did not intervene. (See CAU 08/09/89 for account of recent incidents.) The exercises lasted two hours and included the deployment of seven military helicopters, 50 small tanks, two OA-37 aircraft, and a dozen armored and amphibious vehicles. According to Southern Command spokesperson Col. Ronald Sconyers, the maneuvers were meant to "test the troops' readiness and mobility," in their duty to defend and protect the Panama Canal Zone, as well as to "reaffirm rights under the (Panama Canal) treaty, including freedom of transit." Sconyers added that US forces have so far conducted 20 military exercises in response to "over 750 incidents and 1,300 treaty violations in the past 18 months." On Aug. 11, the UN Security Council was to commence discussion of the Panamanian government's formal complaints against US troop maneuvers, which it considers acts of "provocation." (Basic data from AFP, 08/10/89)

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