10-20-1989

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Honduran Armed Forces Chief Of Staff Accused Of Misappropriating U.S. Military Aid

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General
Published: Friday, October 20, 1989

In its Oct. 14 edition, the New York Times reported that unidentified senior military officers claim armed forces commander Gen. Humberto Regalado Hernandez treated millions of dollars in US military equipment as a personal gift, and sold it to units under his command. The officers said Regalado deposited the money into a special bank account he personally controlled. An unidentified commander of one major unit said he was required to pay for fuel, batteries and tires provided by the US under its military assistance program. The gasoline acquired under the program was generally sold for about 5 cents a gallon less than the market rate, said the officer. He added that units with severe budgetary problems were given much greater discounts, sometimes equivalent to 50%. The commander said, "We never got any invoices. We just signed a paper, a requisition chit." Senior military officers say the army then took the money owed from the units' budget and deposited it in Regalado's special account. The officers say the scheme has been in operation for several years, and the general has made millions of dollars. The Times said the officers' allegations had not been made public. The Honduran government has requested the US Defense Department to investigate, said an unidentified spokesperson for the Honduran embassy in Washington, and unidentified senior aides to Gen. Regalado. The Honduran army officers, who requested anonymity, said their allegations were grounded on information from trusted friends who assisted in creating false records for the scheme. The officers are part of a faction seeking to replace Regalado as chief of staff, and to prevent him from extending his tenure after his three-year tour of duty. In fiscal year 1989, which ended Sept. 30, Honduras received $41.1 million in military aid from the US and $74 million in economic aid. A total of $70 million in economic aid was withheld because Tegucigalpa did not implement US policy recommendations. For FY1990, the Bush administration proposed $61.25 million in military aid and $146 million in economic assistance. Unidentified Honduran military investigators cited by the Times say that the general's half-brother, Rigoberto Regalado Lara recently sentenced to a 10-year prison term in the US for cocaine trafficking, told them his supplier was a close friend of Gen. Regalado's. They say that at least one other convicted drug trafficker, also incarcerated in the US, told them of having discussed drug deals with the general. On Oct. 17 in a statement to reporters in Tegucigalpa, Gen. Regalado denied any involvement in misappropriations of US military assistance. (Basic data from New York Times, 10/14/89; Notimex, 10/17/89)

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