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## 18 Nicaraguan Troops Killed In Contra Ambush

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On the evening of Oct. 21, near the village of Cerro del Mono, Matagalpa department, contras ambushed two trucks carrying reserve troops. A Defense Ministry report released Oct. 22 said 18 soldiers were killed, and eight wounded. The report stated that the troops were taken by surprise and could not return fire. A news release said the soldiers were en route to their homes in order to register to vote in the February 1990 elections. The Ministry said the attack was part of a contra campaign to "disrupt the electoral process." On Oct. 23, following a meeting with Elliot Richardson, UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar's personal representative in the UN electoral process monitoring project, President Daniel Ortega told reporters, "We must demand that the US government clarify, once and for all, if it favors elections or war." Ortega asserted that the US is busy creating obstacles to the electoral process. "They continue opposing demobilization of the contras in Honduran territory, they continue promoting a policy of strangulation against Nicaragua and maintain financing of the contra armed mercenaries and now have approved financing of the disarmed mercenaries," he said. In February 1988, Congress cut off military aid to the contras, and continued non-lethal support, including \$49 million approved earlier this year. The most recent aid bill contains a clause that would permit an aid cutoff if the contras launch attacks within Nicaraguan territory. The Nicaraguan government, some news agencies, and human rights groups have documented ongoing contra attacks. Richardson told reporters, "Regrettably, the electoral process is still marred in some places by the continuing armed actions of some groups." Supreme Electoral Council president Mariano Fiallos said at least 60 registration sites had not opened during the registration period because of actual or threatened contra attacks. Voter registration took place on the first four Sundays of October. (Basic data from AP, AFP, 10/22/89, 10/23/89)

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