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Salvadoran Army Deserter Says U.S. Military Advisers Aware His Unit Murdered Dozens Of Salvadorans

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Oct. 27, a Salvadoran army deserter, Cesar Vielman Joya Martinez, met with members of the US Congress to explain that US military advisers were aware his unit had murdered dozens of Salvadorans on orders of top Salvadoran military officers. Joya Martinez told reporters he was personally involved in eight killings, and that his seven-member unit in the 1st Infantry Brigade (San Salvador), known as GC-2, performed some 72 murders between April and July this year. He said two US advisers were assigned to his unit to analyze intelligence data and pay for weapons and other supplies. "Obviously they had to know what was going on," he said. Joya Martinez fled El Salvador in July and is seeking asylum in the US. Joya Martinez said his unit's orders came in reports from the Salvadoran Joint Chiefs of Staff which listed the names of suspected leftist guerrillas and said to "bring them to justice' which in simple terms means to kill them." He said he was making his experiences public in an attempt to stop the killings. Next, Joya Martinez said he left El Salvador after colleagues were given orders to kill him as punishment for fouling up an army anti-guerrilla operation. On Oct. 25, Amnesty International reported that despite numerous denials by the Salvadoran government, there was "persuasive evidence" that the Salvadoran army and police there were responsible for many deaths attributed to rightist death squads. In its annual report on human rights around the world, Amnesty International said the governments of El Salvador and other Latin American countries had closed their eyes to abuses committed by troops or paramilitary groups. On Friday, State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher said, "We reject in the strongest terms any allegation that US officials knew about or countenanced the abuse of the rights of Salvadoran citizens." He added that US Ambassador in El Salvador, William Walker, had verified that "no mission officer in contact with the Salvadoran Armed Forces is aware of the sorts of abuses that Joya Martinez alleges." Boucher described Joya Martinez as "a self-professed torturer and murderer who is the prime suspect in the murders of two civilians." Two weeks ago, one of the GC-2 commanding officers allegedly involved in the death squad killings, Col. Francisco Elena Fuentes, said Joya Martinez was a deserter wanted for the murder of two civilians. Boucher said the "Salvadoran Army has made important strides in encouraging proper treatment of the civilian population and of suspected terrorists. We believe it needs to continue this momentum by following up on allegations of abuses." (Basic data from AFP, 10/27/89)