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El Salvador: Report On Fighting, Dec. 1-5

by Deborah Tyroler

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Dec. 1: At a news conference, President Alfredo Cristiani said that the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) had begun to use sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles against government planes for the first time in the war. He said at least two Soviet-made SAM-7 missiles had been fired unsuccessfully in battle against government helicopters during recent fighting near the town of Zacatecoluca, southeast of the capital. In an interview with the New York Times in the rebel occupied area of the capital, guerrilla field commanders said rebel forces had not used anti-aircraft weapons. The FMLN has said the rebels have obtained surface-to-air missiles, but pledged not to use them if the army would cease bombing and strafing densely populated areas. AFP reported that hundreds of residents fled Soyapango as fighting broke out between rebels and government troops. Powerful explosions and exchanges of gunfire could be heard as guerrillas sought to advance toward the center of Soyapango. AP reported that downtown San Salvador was calm, but sporadic fighting took place outside Zacatecoluca, and in two poor neighborhoods of the capital. Two O-2 observation planes fired several rockets at suspected guerrilla positions outside Zacatecoluca. The armed forces press office reported fighting overnight in the Ciudad Delgado and Soyapango neighborhoods. Military officials said nine soldiers and nine guerrillas had been killed in fighting near Zacatecoluca, and that one soldier and one guerrilla were reported wounded at Tonacatepeque, 10 miles north of San Salvador. Radio Venceremos reported that rebels damaged two helicopters in Usulután department. The rebels also reported heavy fighting in several areas of the capital, in Chalatenango department, and in the city of San Miguel. Gen. Maxwell Thurman, commander of the US Southern Command based in Panama, visited El Salvador on Friday. US Embassy spokesperson Jeff Brown said "the purpose of the visit was to reaffirm US support and his personal commitment to the Salvadoran armed forces." Dec. 2: Military sources reported heavy fighting with the rebels late Friday and early Saturday on the northern and eastern outskirts of San Salvador. The statement said four rebels were killed in Soyapango to the east, and two civilians died in the northern neighborhood of Mejicanos. Later, the military press office said 19 guerrillas and 10 soldiers were killed in clashes Friday in Mejicanos and the eastern Soyapango district. AFP reported that helicopter gunships strafed rebel positions outside Zacatecoluca. Clashes were also reported in the departments of Chalatenango and San Miguel. Many communities in central El Salvador had no electricity or drinking water due to guerrilla sabotage. Dec. 4: A report by the armed forces said 1,853 rebels and 457 soldiers had died since the FMLN launched its offensive on Nov. 11. Another 1,183 rebels and 1,341 soldiers had been wounded, said the report. The military reported confiscation of 900 guns, including 300 AK-47s and Dragonov rifles, 147 grenade launchers, and an abundance of materiel used to make explosives. Radio Venceremos reported that the FMLN had destroyed an army tank in San Miguel department. FMLN rebels attacked a coffee processing plant in the western department of Santa Ana, destroying 1.4 tons of coffee, employees of the plant said. Effective Monday evening, the government said the overnight curfew would begin at 11:00 p.m., instead of 6:00 p.m., and continue as before until 5:00 a.m. The government also lifted a ban on independent news reporting by private radio stations. According to the New York Times, statistics kept by the Salvadoran Red Cross show that 580 wounded people were evacuated by that organization in the first two weeks of fighting. Figures kept by the Rescue commandos, whose yellow uniformed

volunteers are perhaps the most easily recognized of the rescue specialists, show that in the same period it evacuated 2,517 wounded people and helped 28,908 people flee the scene of fighting. The army reported that rebels had attacked soldiers in Zacatelouca, but mentioned no casualties. The statement said that outside the capital and in central El Salvador, seven guerrillas and one soldier were killed in combat during the past 24 hours. On Monday evening, El Salvador's organization of bus line owners said that 76 intra- and inter-urban buses had been destroyed throughout the country in the past 24 days. Dec. 5: Rebels took over San Antonio Abad and Colonia Escalon Norte briefly on Monday night, and then departed early Tuesday. Homes and businesses were damaged in the fighting, and the rebels ransacked a supermarket. Military sources reported that one soldier was killed and five were wounded in the fighting. Rebels dynamited a Shell gasoline station in northern San Salvador. No one was injured. According to the military press office, rebels downed a twin-engine Cessna Skymaster (known as the 0-2 by the US Air Force) with rifle fire while it was flying a reconnaissance mission for the 6th Infantry Brigade in Usulután department. Radio Venceremos said it was the third plane rebels had downed since the offensive began. The rebels also reported they had damaged a government helicopter Tuesday in San Miguel department. (Basic data from AP, 12/01/89, 12/02/89, 12/04/89, 12/05/89; AFP, 12/01-05/89; Notimex, 12/05/89; New York Times, 12/02/89, 12/04/89; Radio Venceremos, 12/04/89, 12/05/89)

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