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Panama: Grenade Attack On Disco

by Deborah Tyroler

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March 3: Southern Command spokesperson Lt.Cmdr. Peggy Black said a bomb tossed through the window of a discotheque on Friday night exploded and wounded 16 US soldiers and 11 Panamanians. "My Place" is located on the Via Espana in downtown Panama City. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney told CNN two grenades may have been thrown into the building from passing cars. Cheney said no group had claimed responsibility. Six of the injured Panamanians were treated and released at Panama City hospitals. One was undergoing surgery and four were kept for observation. Most received injuries in the legs and feet, hospital records indicated. The wounded soldiers were taken to the US military's Gorgas Hospital. One was in serious condition, 13 were hospitalized in stable condition, and two were released by Saturday. AFP cited unidentified police sources who said that the attack may have been the work of the December 20 Movement (M-20) or the Movement for the Liberation of Panama (MLP), two subversive groups which surfaced a few weeks ago, but whose members are unknown. March 4: A statement from the US Southern Command said Army Spec. Anthony B. Ward, 21, of Houston, died at 5:15 p.m. Saturday of injuries to the chest and abdomen at the Gorgas Hospital. On Sunday, Southern Command sources said that 12 Panamanians had been injured in the attack, rather than 11. The disco was known to have been frequented by US military personnel and other US citizens. Three of the injured Panamanians were in intensive care, but in stable condition. March 5: Four soldiers were released from Gorgas Hospital, and two others remain hospitalized, according to Southern Command spokespersons. On Monday evening, CBS News reported that a cocaine smuggling ring involving US soldiers and Colombian suppliers was recently broken up in Panama. "Senior American commanders say one American serviceman has confessed to recruiting returning GI's to work as 'mules,' or couriers, to carry cocaine to the United States on military flights," the network said. Citing unidentified military sources, CBS said seven Colombians and two US citizens have been arrested. The network reported that officials investigating the attack on the discotheque are looking into the possibility that the bombing was connected to the smuggling ring breakup. One US serviceman had confessed to recruiting soldiers to smuggle cocaine on the US-bound military planes, CBS said. The soldiers were paid up to \$10,000 each, it added. Both AFP and AP reported that the US Southern Command in Panama said it had no information on the report. (Basic data from AP, AFP, 03/03-05/90; CBS News, 03/05/90)

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