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El Salvador: Rebels Accuse Army Of Assassinating Officers As Part Of Cover-up In Jesuit Murder Case

by Deborah Tyroler

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In a communique released Dec. 8 in San Salvador, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) accused the army of assassinating or disappearing soldiers possessing information on the intellectual authors of the Nov. 16, 1989, murders of six Jesuit priests and two women. Capt. Carlos Herrera Carranza served in the Atlacatl Battalion at the time of the massacre, and had provided testimony in the case. Members of the elite battalion carried out the murders. According to military sources, Herrera died in combat on Nov. 20 in Morazan department. At the time, the captain was serving as intelligence chief for the 4th military detachment. The FMLN communique said Herrera Carranza was shot at close range from behind, and that the bullet exited his body near the mouth. The rebels added that FMLN units in the area were not shooting at the captain at the time he was reportedly killed in combat. The FMLN called on Defense Minister Col. Emilio Ponce to permit autopsies of Herrera Carranza's body, and that of Capt. Alfonso Chavez Garcia. According to the army, Chavez Garcia, also a witness in the Jesuit murder case, was killed in combat in early May. The rebel communique asserted that Chavez Garcia's death was also part of a military cover-up. In previous statements, the FMLN has charged that Col. Carlos Camilo Hernandez and Pvt. Jorge Sierra Ascencio died or disappeared under suspicious circumstances. Hernandez was accused of ordering the destruction of logbooks at the Military Academy. On Aug. 25, the colonel was reportedly wounded by shrapnel from a mine explosion while on patrol in Chalatenango department. Sierra Ascencio, accused of participating in the murders, disappeared before he could be arrested. He was reported to have deserted in December, 1989. (Basic data from AFP, 12/08/90; 12/07/90 news summary by Salpress)

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