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El Salvador: Notes On Recent Fighting, Dec. 10-13

by Deborah Tyroler

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Dec. 10: The armed forces press office (COPREFA) reported that rebels damaged a helicopter near Concepcion Batres, Usulután department, located 118 km. east of San Salvador. The pilot, in an attempt to evacuate wounded, was killed. Dec. 11: On Tuesday morning, COPREFA reported that in the Las Vueltas area of Chalatenango department, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) had killed a helicopter artillery officer, and wounded the pilot and co-pilot. On Tuesday evening, the rebels reported they had downed the helicopter with anti-aircraft fire, and confirmed the death and wounded pilots. Military sources said the helicopter had been damaged, but did not crash. -According to a report by the Agence France Presse, since Nov. 20, or the beginning of the FMLN's "limited offensive," four pilots have died and five others wounded in attacks on aircraft. The rebels, said AFP, destroyed a helicopter, one AC-37 fighter plane, and an AC-47 transport aircraft. The fighter and transport planes were downed with the use of Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles. If the helicopter incident in Chalatenango department on Tuesday is included, the toll of aircraft destroyed by rebels since Nov. 20 is four. (Note: The above four paragraphs are a corrected version of coverage on downed helicopters appearing in "El Salvador: Update on Recent Fighting," CAU 12/12/90. The report of a helicopter damaged by rebels occurring on Dec. 9 was in error.) Dec. 12: In San Salvador, four banks were bombed, presumably by rebels. Military sources reported that soldiers guarding an electricity sub-station were attacked by rebels. COPREFA said 50 soldiers and guerrillas were killed, and 49 wounded in fighting on Dec. 11-12. In a communique released in San Salvador, the FMLN warned the military that it would continue downing its planes: "Remember, the Americans may replace your warplanes, but not your lives." Three soldiers were killed in a mortar attack on the 3rd Infantry Brigade in San Miguel department. Military sources reported that rebel fire on a military garrison in Chalatenango department fell short, and caused no damage. In a rebel attack on a nearby military post, two soldiers were wounded. The armed forces reported that rebels blocked traffic on the outskirts of Santa Tecla by burning a city bus and puncturing the tires on dozens of vehicles. According to a report by the Associated Press, rebel Radio Venceremos reported guerrilla ground fire forced down a UH-1H helicopter early Wednesday near the Honduran border. COPREFA said the helicopter was only slightly damaged, but that one gunner was killed, and the pilot, co-pilot and a second gunner were wounded. COPREFA reported that a new wave of rebel attacks began with an assault Tuesday night on army positions on the outskirts of San Jorge, about 143 km. southeast of San Salvador. Eleven soldiers and 30 rebels died in the fighting. The military press office said the heaviest combat took place in San Miguel and Usulután departments. COPREFA also reported that three soldiers and three guerrillas were killed in Jiquilisco, 113 km. southeast of San Salvador. In San Vicente, 56 km. east of San Salvador, 10 soldiers and eight guerrillas were wounded. In a Radio Venceremos broadcast, the FMLN reported that rebels had captured 11 soldiers near Chalatenango, and gave the soldiers' names. The armed forces refused to comment. The FMLN also claimed that 69 soldiers were killed or wounded in heavy fighting in Usulután department. (Basic data from several reports by AP and AFP, 12/12/90)

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