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Panama: U.S. Soldier Killed By Police

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Nov. 6, US Ambassador Deane Hinton presented a formal complaint to the Panamanian Foreign Ministry for the "excessive use of force" by police in a Nov. 5 shooting incident in the El Chorrillo neighborhood of Panama City which resulted in the death of a US soldier. The soldier, Chield Jaile Mikael, died from gunshot wounds inflicted by Sgt. Juan Arauz of the Judicial Technical Police (PTJ). According to police spokespersons, Mikael and three other US soldiers were driving the wrong way down a one-way street when the incident occurred. Other reports indicated that the shooting took place after the vehicle refused to stop at a police checkpoint. Deputy PTJ director Carlos Landeros said that a joint PTJ-US Army investigation would be carried out. Arauz is currently in custody. [Attorney General Rogelio Cruz told reporters that 25 police officers are currently being investigated for suspected misuse of firearms while on duty since January 1990.] In a statement to reporters on Nov. 7, President Guillermo Endara said, "The police were right to stop a vehicle with its headlights off in a suspicious situation, and above all, in an area of [concentrated] anti-drug trafficking efforts." About 10,000 US soldiers are stationed in the Panama Canal Zone. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 11/06/91; Agence France-Presse, 11/05-07/91)

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