

3-20-1992

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Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "El Salvador: Military Officers Linked To Illegal Weapons Deal In Plot To Kill Colombian Drug Lord Pablo Escobar." (1992). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/7218>

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El Salvador: Military Officers Linked To Illegal Weapons Deal In Plot To Kill Colombian Drug Lord Pablo Escobar

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, March 20, 1992

On March 10, armed forces spokesperson Col. Hector Lovo told reporters that Lt. Col. Roberto Antonio Leiva, second in command at the Comalapa air force base, Sgt. Jose Luz Parada, Salvadoran Air Force warehouse guard, and Leiva's driver, Pvt. Pablo Menjivar were accused of selling weapons to Colombian drug traffickers plotting to kill Pablo Escobar Gaviria. According to the report, Leiva received US\$450,000 from Colombia's Cali drug cartel for his role in arranging the delivery of four high-potency bombs, stolen from a storage facility at the Comalapa air base. The bombs were to have been transported to Colombia and dropped by helicopter on the prison where Escobar is awaiting trial. Also arrested in connection with the plot to kill Escobar were Cuban Wilfredo Larrazabal; Guatemalans Edwin Roberto Castellanos and Luis Mario Franco; and Salvadorans Rolando Vinicio Fuentes, Cesar Augusto Carrillo, Edi Nelson Comandari and Dora Dorath de Comandari. Two of the four stolen bombs were transported to Colombia March 4 via a clandestine airstrip in El Zapote, Ahuachapan. Police were able to recover the other two bombs. March 11: In statements before a judge in San Salvador, Leiva denied the charges against him. Deputy defense minister Gen. Orlando Zepeda denied any link between the armed forces and the plot to kill Escobar. March 12: The presiding judge issued a provisional arrest order against Leiva, Parada and civilians Comandari, Larrazabal, Fuentes, Franco, Erwin Roberto Castellanos and Cesar Augusto Carrillo. The eight are accused of acting as accomplices in the scheme to assassinate Escobar, in addition to various counts of terrorism and conspiracy. Pvt. Menjivar was not mentioned in reports of the provisional arrest orders. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 03/10-12/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 03/11/92)

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