

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Mendez

CIA is training Guatemalan guerrillas

Were two Mexican journalists killed to prevent exposure of CIA ties to narcotics chiefs and Guatemalan guerrillas?

A series of devastating exposés of CIA collaboration with Mexican drug capos, published in Mexico in the past weeks, took a new twist in early July with revelations that the CIA had trained Guatemalan guerrillas on a Mexican ranch owned by drug chief-tain Rafael Caro Quintero in the early 1980s.

The exposés center around the on-going Los Angeles trial of the accused murderers of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent Enrique Camarena in 1985. Department of Justice prosecutors now rue their decision to put Lawrence Harrison on the stand to testify on corruption of Mexican officialdom by drug traffickers. That opened the door to publicity for Harrison's reports of CIA involvement in the drug trade, which the U.S. government is now trying madly to discredit.

Over several years, Harrison reported to the DEA that the CIA worked with Caro Quintero under cover provided by the Mexican Federal Security Directorate (DFS), the equivalent of the FBI. Part of the CIA-DFS operation, according to Harrison, included using the Mexican narco apparatus for arms-for-drugs exchanges with the Nicaraguan Contras (see *EIR*, June 29, 1990). He also reported that sometime between 1981 and 1984, the CIA ran a training camp for Guatemalan guerrillas on Caro Quintero's ranch in Veracruz, Mexico.

Harrison testified in court that Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo, another drug chief, "told him that he thought his narcotics trafficking operation was secure because he was supplying arms

to the Contras," according to the *Los Angeles Times* of July 6.

A CIA spokesman quickly denied that they had trained Guatemalan guerrillas "on that ranch or anywhere else," and sputtered that "the CIA does not engage in drug-running activities." In the trial, the prosecutor suddenly began ridiculing Harrison's testimony as "hearsay" and asked the judge not to allow the defense to cross-examine him. The judge obliged, and Harrison's testimony was dismissed.

The problem the CIA faces, however, is that, whether or not every detail is true, Harrison's story coheres with a broad pattern of criminal activity on the part of the CIA which is fully documented. According to the *Washington Post*, someone in the Justice Department has now requested Iran-Contra Special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh to open an investigation into the charges.

On July 9, Guatemala's former President, Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, jumped into the fray as well. Ríos Montt, who himself came to power in 1982 in a coup backed by Israeli and U.S. intelligence, told the Mexican daily *Excelsior* that, during his rule from 1982-83, "I learned that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency trained Guatemalan guerrillas on Mexican territory. . . . Our military intelligence had that information; and we knew the subversives' bases were on the other side of the border; all this happened in 1982-1983."

Others who knew the Guatemala story are now dead. A Mexican reporter named Velasco from the state of Veracruz uncovered the CIA training

of guerrillas there, Harrison told the DEA. Velasco gave his data to the intrepid investigative journalist Manuel Buendía. Both were murdered, mysteriously, in 1984.

The Los Angeles daily *La Opinion* reported on July 6 that before his assassination, Velasco "had been gathering information on clandestine CIA landing strips protected by the DFS, which were used to refuel planes loaded with arms destined for Honduras and Nicaragua; and the pilots of those planes loaded them with cocaine in Barranquilla, Colombia, and flew over Cuba after refueling in Mexico."

Harrison had told the DEA that "the murder of Mexican journalist Manuel Buendía is linked to organized drug trafficking in Mexico," *La Opinion* noted. The paper added that the Minister of Government at the time, responsible for control of the DFS, was Manuel Bartlett Díaz, today secretary of education in the government of President Salinas de Gortari. "Bartlett is responsible for the assassination of a Veracruz journalist who sent information to Buendía," when Buendía was investigating the complicity of Bartlett and other top Mexican police officials with the narcotics traffickers, *La Opinion* wrote.

The director of the DFS at the time, José Antonio Zorrilla Pérez, sits today in jail, accused of ordering the murder of Buendía. The Mexican daily *El Universal* reported July 7 that Buendía had gone to Zorrilla and told him everything he knew on official involvement in drug trafficking. "Zorrilla reportedly told Buendía that the CIA's relationship with narcotics trafficking was a very delicate question which must not be spoken of. . . . Approximately 41 days later, Buendía was murdered by DFS agents. One hour later, journalist Velasco . . . was assassinated in Veracruz," *El Universal* noted.