

U.S. Advisers Saw 'Torture Class,' Salvadoran Says

By RAYMOND BONNER
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MEXICO CITY— A 21-year-old who asserts that he is a former Salvadoran soldier says that United States military advisers were present at two "training sessions" early last year when two suspected guerrillas were tortured by Salvadoran Army instructors.

In a series of interviews, the young man, Carlos Antonio Gómez Montano, said the men that he described as Americans attended the sessions as observers and did not take part in the torture. But he said they made no apparent effort to stop or protest the activity, in which a 17-year-old youth and a 13-year-old girl were tortured. He said they were subsequently killed, but not in the presence of the American advisers. Their bodies, he said, were dumped on a street in San Salvador.

Mr. Gómez, who asserted that he fled from his paratroop unit at the Ilopango Air Force Base outside San Salvador in May, said he had recognized the Americans as part of a group of United States military advisers who arrived in El Salvador a few days earlier.

The sessions, which he said were known as "torture classes," took place late last January, he added.

U.S. Officials Deny Account

Mr. Gómez, a short, wiry youth who lives in exile in Mexico, also charged that the Salvadoran Army routinely mutilated the bodies of suspected guerrilla sympathizers and dropped others in the sea from helicopters.

A senior Defense Department official and a former commander of the United States military group in El Salvador denied that American military personnel in El Salvador had witnessed any torture sessions.

They also said that American soldiers sent to El Salvador were specifically instructed beforehand to discourage the practice of torture when talking to their Salvadoran counterparts. Each is under instructions to report any incident of torture that he sees or learns about, they said.

Mr. Gómez's account could not be independently corroborated. He was also unable to provide documentary evidence that he had belonged to the Salvadoran armed forces — he said he discarded all proof of identity when he deserted — but in seven hours of conversations he revealed a knowledge of military life in El Salvador that lent credibility to his story.

Additional Details Provided

And, in a second interview, after the Defense Department denial, he provided additional details to support his assertion that United States military advisers attended the so-called torture class.

He noted, for example, that he was soldier No. 97 of the first section of the Second Parachute Squadron at Ilopango and said he was able to recall the serial number of his G-3 automatic rifle, No. 83781. He also recited the names of the officers and noncommissioned officers who belonged to his squadron, including a Lieut. Félix Ayala Martínez with whom he claimed to have particularly poor relations.

Col. Rafael Bustillo, commander of the Salvadoran Air Force, said that Mr. Gómez's name did not appear in any military records and that "therefore this man has no basis for his accusations since he was not a soldier here at the time."

But other military sources said that



Some of the 60 Salvadoran soldiers who arrived yesterday at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., to begin 10 weeks of training at Fort Bragg. An infantry battalion of 1,000 enlisted men and more than 500 junior officers will be trained there.

official files confirmed that Mr. Gómez was recruited Nov. 1, 1980, and deserted in the "early spring."

In private, United States officials have expressed concern about undisciplined violence by the Salvadoran security forces, although under the Reagan Administration they have not publicly accused the Salvadoran military of torturing prisoners.

According to Mr. Gómez, eight United States military advisers, some in uniforms of solid green and others in jungle camouflage fatigues, stood in the shade with the Salvadoran Air Force commander and several other senior Salvadoran officers during the torture sessions.

260 Soldiers at Session

Mr. Gómez said that the American advisers, who were about 30 feet in front of where he and some 260 other soldiers were lined up to watch the session, were not wearing name tags. He said he did not know their ranks.

Before the Americans arrived in mid-January, he said, his paratroop battalion was told by Salvadoran officers that, in addition to the rifles and other weapons being provided by the United States, members of the "famous Green Berets" were being sent as "new instructors."

There was a military ceremony to welcome the advisers, Mr. Gómez said, adding that some wore green berets when they arrived. But he said they did not wear their berets when they watched the torture session.

In addition to the soldiers who were introduced as Green Berets, Mr. Gómez went on, there were other United States military personnel at the Ilopango Air Force Base who wore solid green flight suits. Those known to the Salvadoran soldiers as Green Berets did not sleep at the base, he said.

The Defense Department spokesmen said that at the time of the reported incidents there were 14 American advisers stationed at Ilopango, all helicopter technicians and pilots. They said there were also five communications specialists in El Salvador last January, but they were not stationed at the air force base.

A United States Embassy spokesman in San Salvador said that these five sol-

diers were officers from the Special Forces — Green Berets — unit of the United States Southern Command in Panama. They were sent to El Salvador in response to a military offensive begun last Jan. 10 by the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, the spokesman added.

Soldiers Cautioned Against Pity

Mr. Gómez said that before one of the torture sessions the assembled troops were told by a Salvadoran officer that watching "will make you feel more like a man." He said that the officer added that the soldiers should "not feel pity of anyone," but only "hate for those who are enemies of our country."

At the first torture session, Mr. Gómez said, a masked Salvadoran soldier jabbed the tip of his bayonet into the chest and rib cage of a 17-year-old youth. Mr. Gómez said he recognized the youth as one of a group of nine captured the previous night in a raid on a house in the capital in which he himself took part.

He said that the masked soldier, applying his boot as leverage, broke the youth's arm at the elbow. After further tortures, he said, the youth was killed.

During the second session, which Mr. Gómez said was held after Sunday mass, a 13-year-old girl who had also been captured in the raid was similarly tortured and killed.

Unit Trained by Americans

According to Mr. Gómez, many guerrillas or people suspected of being guerrilla sympathizers were dropped alive into the sea from helicopters. On other occasions, he said, bodies were discarded along roads after the faces had been slashed so they could not be identified.

"What happens here, what you see here, what you hear here, stays here," Mr. Gómez said soldiers were told before they were allowed on leave. They were reminded that if they talked to anyone "we will find out and you know what will happen to you," Mr. Gómez said.

Mr. Gómez said that his paratroop unit received training from two United States advisers, but that the Americans did not accompany them on any combat missions.

During those missions, according to Mr. Gómez, soldiers were instructed by their officers and senior enlisted men to kill anyone, including old people, women and children, "who put themselves in front of you." He said that some younger officers talked about the importance of friendship with the Salvadoran people, but the soldiers were told that "the majority of the peasants are guerrillas."

Mr. Gómez said that his father, mother, older brother and sister were killed in May by National Guard soldiers because his brother was a member of a guerrilla unit. His brother had long tried to persuade him to join the guerrillas, Mr. Gómez said.

Soldier Kills His Family

In November 1980, when he was working as a watch repairer, Mr. Gómez said, he was drafted. One of those conscripted with him was promoted to sergeant a few months later after he had killed his own parents and two siblings because they were guerrilla sympathizers, Mr. Gómez recalled. During a military ceremony, he added, an air force colonel pointed to the sergeant's act and his promotion as demonstrations of "bravery" and the "hope for progress in a military career."

On April 8, 1981, Mr. Gómez was jailed. The previous night, while he was on guard duty, a lieutenant and two soldiers stole 5,000 rounds of ammunition, grenades and other weapons, he said.

While Mr. Gómez was in jail, he said, the same lieutenant sent him food and soda and on May 3, 1981, helped him and eight other soldiers escape. Two fleeing soldiers were killed and two were wounded so seriously that they could not continue. Pulling up his blue jeans, Mr. Gómez showed a wound he received in his left calf.

After walking for three days, usually at night, Mr. Gómez said, he and four others reached a guerrilla camp near Chalatenango, about 35 miles north of the capital. His companions elected to stay with the guerrillas, he said. After trading his automatic rifle and uniform for a .45-caliber automatic pistol and civilian clothes, including a cap that would cover his military haircut, Mr. Gómez continued his escape to Mexico.