

SOA Graduates in the News 2000/2001

COLOMBIA

SOA Graduates Cited for Recent Human Rights Atrocities and Paramilitary Ties

According to the 2000 State Department Report on Human Rights in Colombia, SOA graduates **Major David Hernandez Rojas** and **Captain Diego Fino Rodriguez** are being prosecuted in civilian courts for the March 1999 murders of Antiqua peace commissioner Alex Lopera and two others. Both men are members of the Colombian Military's 4th Brigade, which has been extensively linked to paramilitary groups.

SOA graduate **Colonel Jorge Plazas Acevedo** is being tried by the Prosecutor General of Colombia for the 1998 kidnapping and murder of Jewish business leader Benjamin Khoudari. Plazas is the former chief of intelligence for the Colombian Military's 13th Brigade.

The State Department reports that **Colonel Jesus Maria Clavijo**, a graduate of the SOA, is currently under investigation for collusion with paramilitary forces in 160 social cleansing murders from 1995-1998. In addition to the information provided by the State Department Report, a 2001 Reuters article reports that Clavijo has been accused of ties to a paramilitary death squad responsible for the massacre of at least 100 people in 1996 and 1997. Clavijo is currently in prison awaiting his trial.

Finally, the report states that SOA graduate **Commander Mauricio Llorente Chavez** was indicted by the Prosecutor General for complicity in a massacre that took place in Tibu, July 1999.

"The Ties that Bind", a report issued by Human Rights Watch in February 2000, cited at least seven SOA graduates for involvement with paramilitary groups. SOA graduate **Brigadier General Jaime Ernesto Canal Alban**, commander of the 3rd Brigade, was involved in helping to establish a paramilitary group known as the "Calima Front". Canal's brigade was found to have supplied the front with weapons and intelligence. In 1999, the Calima Front seized and executed community leader Noralba Gaviria Piedrahita. The following month, authorities discovered the mutilated and dismembered bodies of seven men near Tulu, also killed by members of the Calima Front. The front has been found responsible for 2,000 forced disappearances and at least 40 executions since 1999. In addition to his involvement with the Calima Front, Canal was in command of soldiers who entered a home and killed five civilians during the birthday party of a 15-year-old child in 1998.

The report cited **General Carlos Ospina Ovalle**, graduate of the SOA and former commander of the 4th Brigade, for "extensive evidence of pervasive ties" to paramilitary groups involved in human rights abuses throughout 1999. Ospina was the commander of the 4th Brigade in 1998 when troops massacred at least 11 people and burned down 47 homes in El Aro.

Major Alvaro Cortes Morillo and **Major Jesus Maria Clavijo**, both SOA grads, were linked to paramilitary groups in 1999 through extensive cell phone and beeper communications as well as regular meetings on military bases.

In February 2001, SOA graduate **Hernan Orozco** was sent to prison by a military tribunal for complicity in the Maripan torture and massacre of 30 peasants by a paramilitary group. **General Mario Montoya Uribe**, an SOA graduate with a history of ties to paramilitary violence, commands the Joint Task Force South, which includes the 24th Brigade. The 24th Brigade is ineligible for U.S. military aid due to its complicity in paramilitary violence. A leading Colombian newspaper identifies General Montoya as "the military official responsible for Plan Colombia".

A December 2000 AP article brought attention to the death of SOA-trained **Lieutenant Carlos Acosta**, who was killed for "disobedience" after escaping prison to join a Colombian death squad. According to the article, Acosta had taken a month-long infantry course at the SOA in which he learned to fire M-16 assault rifles and M-60 machine guns, and was trained in battlefield tactics. Acosta was a member of the Colombian military's 5th brigade, which has one of the worst human rights records as well as ties to paramilitary groups.

Acosta was arrested when in 1994 he and his men intercepted a group of federal prosecutors, tied them up, shot them, and dumped their bodies into a river. According to Acosta's brother, "He [Acosta] used to say that a soldier in Colombia has to fight not only guerrillas, but also the human rights groups and prosecutors".

GUATEMALA

Gerardi Trial

SOA graduate **Byron Lima Estrada** is currently on trial for the brutal 1998 assassination of Guatemalan Bishop Juan Gerardi. Gerardi was bludgeoned to death two days after he released the REMHI report, linking the Guatemalan army to most of the atrocities committed during the country's civil war. Lima Estrada headed the infamous D-2 intelligence Agency that was heavily cited in Gerardi's report.

The night before the trial began, the home of the presiding judge, Iris Yasmin Barrios, was attacked with grenades. The attack occurred despite the presence of police guards stationed at her house.

Genocide Cases

The year 2000 brought genocide cases against two former Guatemalan dictators trained at the SOA. In March, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Nobel Peace Prize winner, filed suit in a Spanish court against SOA graduate **General Efraim Rios Montt**, who took power through a coup and governed Guatemala at the height of a counter-insurgency campaign that wiped hundreds of Mayan villages off the map, left thousands dead and forced hundreds of thousands into refuge or exile. The case also cites SOA graduates **General Angel Anibal Guevara Rodriguez**, the Minister of Defense and **Colonel German Chupina Barahona**, Director of the National Police.

In a parallel case, a group of Mayan survivors is suing former dictator **Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia** as well as former Army Chief of Staff **Benedicto Lucas Garcia** and former Defense Minister **Luis Rene Mendoza**, all graduates of the SOA. According to a recently declassified CIA document, Benedicto Lucas Garcia was key in strategizing the scorched earth policy that aimed to annihilate the civilian Mayan population. The plaintiffs are suing the former chiefs for ordering the rape, torture and massacre of their families and fellow community members. Their association represents eight communities that lost 800 people to massacres during the Lucas Garcia regime from 1981 to 1982.

Corruption Scandal

In addition, On March 21, 2001, Guatemala's highest court ordered **General Rios Montt** and five other lawmakers to resign from their congressional posts in order to face impeachment charges. The six were involved in a corruption scandal in which they are accused of altering a law passed by the legislature in June of 2000, which placed a 20% tax on alcoholic beverages. Mysteriously, the legislation was passed into law as a tax of only 10%. It is expected that Rios Montt will ignore the order to resign his congressional post.

BOLIVIA

Last year the Bolivian government sold the public water system of Cochamba to a private corporation, resulting in skyrocketing water rates for the people of Bolivia. As thousands took to the streets, Bolivian president and former military dictator, SOA graduate **Hugo Banzer** sent out the armed forces to attack civilians. In April 2000, after four days of anti-privatization protests, Banzer declared a "state of siege", sending soldiers into the street with live bullets. 17-year-old Victor Hugo Daza was killed by a shot through his face and at least seven others were killed. The number of injuries resulting from military violence totaled over 100.

PERU

SOA honors graduate **General Nicolas Hermoza Rios** is currently serving time in a Peruvian prison, after pleading guilty to taking \$14 million in arms deal gains. Hermoza is also under fire for allegedly taking protection money from Peruvian drug lords, whom the Peruvian military, along with military aid from the U.S., claimed to be fighting. In 1993, a witness who had worked with Demetrio "El Vaticano" Chavez, Peru's most notorious drug trafficker, claimed that Hermoza had been receiving between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in protection money per month. The witness stated that "Montesinos is the one who is making the most from 'El Vaticano'".

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