CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 07935

E.O. 12356: DECL: 10/21/88
TAGS: PINS, PINR, SHUM, GT
SUBJECT: (C) EMBASSY ATTEMPT TO VERIFY ALLEGED
- MASSACRES IN HUEHUETENANGO

REFS: (A) GUATEMALA 7790
- (B) GUATEMALA 7741

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: THREE MISSION OFFICERS VISITED
THE DEPARTMENT OF HUEHUETENANGO BY AIR ON
OCTOBER 20 IN AN ATTEMPT TO CHECK THE VILLAGES
OF FINCA SAN FRANCISCO AND PETANAC, SITES OF
ALLEGED LARGE-SCALE MASSACRES PURPORTEDLY
CARRIED OUT BY THE GUATEMALAN ARMY. BAD WEATHER

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FORCED US TO TURN BACK FROM THE HIGHEST
ELEVATIONS OF NORTHERN HUEHUETENANGO; WE
WERE UNABLE TO REACH EITHER VILLAGE. EMBOFF
DID, HOWEVER, REACH THE CONCLUSION THAT THE ARMY IS COMPLETELY UP FRONT ABOUT ALLOWING US TO CHECK ALLEGED MASSACRE SITES AND TO SPEAK WITH WHOMEVER WE WISH. END SUMMARY.

3. THE PURPOSE OF THIS VISIT WAS TO CHECK FIRST-HAND TWO SITES OF ALLEGED GOG MASSACRES. REF B, PARA 14, OUTLINED THE BASIC FACTS OF BOTH CASES: PETANAC, WHERE THE ARMY IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE KILLED 89 PEOPLE ON JULY 14; AND FINCA SAN FRANCISCO (ACTUALLY A SMALL VILLAGE), WHERE THE ARMY ALLEGEDLY SLAUGHTERED SOME 300 PEOPLE ON JULY 18. BOTH VILLAGES ARE LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF SAN MATEO IXTATAN. THE ARMY HAS DENIED THAT EITHER INCIDENT TOOK PLACE.

4. WE FLEW TO THE ARMY BASE AT HUEHUETENANGO PROPER ON OCTOBER 20. REF A REPORTED THE BASIC MILITARY, ECONOMIC AND REFUGEE SITUATION IN HUEHUETENANGO. WE WERE AGAIN INFORMED THAT THE MILITARY SITUATION IN HUEHUETENANGO IS FAIRLY WELL IN HAND. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE AREAS THAT THE GOG DOES NOT CONTROL, MOSTLY THE FRINGE AREAS OF THE DEPARTMENT THAT BORDER MEXICO. GUERRILLAS APPARENTLY CROSS THE BORDER WITH SOME FREQUENCY, SPREADING MAYHEM, PROPAGANDA AND TERROR. SAN FRANCISCO AND PETANAC ARE IN SUCH AN AREA, FAR NORTH CENTRAL HUEHUETENANGO. WE WERE TOLD THAT SAN FRANCISCO AND NEIGHBORING

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YALAMBOJOCH HAD BEEN ABANDONED BECAUSE OF GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN THE AREA. PETANAC WAS SAID TO HAVE FEW PEOPLE STILL LIVING THERE, BUT NO CIVIL DEFENSE PATROL. WE WERE INVITED BY THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES IN HUEHUETENANGO TO TRAVEL WHEREVER WE MIGHT WISH, WITH THE CAVEAT THAT WE WERE ON OUR OWN IF WE TOUCHED DOWN OUTSIDE OF THE AREA SECURED BY THE ARMY. SUITABLY ADVISED, WE LEFT FOR SAN FRANCISCO. THE WEATHER WAS BAD WHEN WE LEFT AND WORSE WHEN WE ATTEMPTED TO RISE YET HIGHER IN NORTHERN HUEHUETENANGO. THE PILOT ADVISED US HE COULD NOT REACH THE
5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH WE WERE UNABLE TO REACH SAN FRANCISCO AND PETANAC, THERE ARE SEVERAL POINTS WORTH NOTING ABOUT THE ATTITUDE OF THE ARMY. EMBOFF KNOWS THAT THE RANKING OFFICERS AT THE HUEHUETENANGO BASE WERE PERFECTLY AWARE OF THE PURPOSE OF OUR VISIT. YET, THE COMMANDING, CIVIC ACTION, OPERATIONS AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS ALL OFFERED US THE RUN OF THE DEPARTMENT, AND THIS WITHOUT AN ARMY ESCORT. IF THESE OFFICERS HAVE SOMETHING TO HIDE, THEY DO NOT SEEM OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT US FINDING IT. THEN AGAIN, IF SAN FRANCISCO IS NOW ABANDONED -- AND EMBOFF BELIEVES THAT IT IS -- WE WOULD HAVE FOUND NOTHING TO CONFIRM OR DENY THE MASSACRE REPORTS. PETANAC, HOWEVER, IS APPARENTLY STILL INHABITED. IF THE WEATHER WAS CLEAR, WE COULD HAVE EASILY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1561
INFO AMBASSADORS BELIZE
AMBASSADORS MANAGUA
AMBASSADORS MEXICO
AMBASSADORS PANAMA
AMBASSADORS SAN JOSE
AMBASSADORS SAN SALVADOR
AMBASSADORS TEGUCIGALPA
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REACHED EITHER VILLAGE. IN SUM, WE CANNOT
AT THIS TIME CONFIRM OR DENY THE REPORTS OF
MASSACRES IN THIS AREA; WE CAN, HOWEVER,
AFFIRM THAT THE ARMY HAS NO OBJECTION
TO OUR CRUSSCROSSING THEIR COMBAT ZONES IN
SEARCH OF INFORMATION WE DEEM NECESSARY TO
POSSESS.

6. THIS TRIP, AT A COST OF APPROXIMATELY $1,600,
HAS EXHAUSTED EMBASSY TRAVEL MONEY. WE SHOULD LIKE
TO ATTEMPT TO CHECK THESE SITES AGAIN IN BETTER
WEATHER. WE WILL NEED, HOWEVER, ADDITIONAL
FUNDING FROM ARA. END COMMENT. CHAPIN

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a
*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL