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ENVELOPE
CDSN = CFS723  MCN = 96120/29395  TOR = 961202304
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HEADER
R 2923042 APR 96
FM DIA WASHINGTON DC
INFO RUEADWD/OCSA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAAA/CNO WASHINGTON DC
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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SUMMARY: THE 17TH COLOMBIAN ARMY BRIGADE IS LOCATED IN THE URABA ANTIOQUIA REGION AND IS SUBORDINATE TO THE 1ST COLAR DIVISION. IT INCLUDES TWO INFANTRY, TWO COUNTERTERRORIST, AND ONE MILITARY POLICE BATTALIONS.

TEXT: 1. THE 17TH COLOMBIAN ARMY (COLAR) BRIGADE (BDE) IS LOCATED IN THE URABA ANTIOQUIA REGION AND IS SUBORDINATE TO THE 1ST COLAR DIVISION. IT IS HEADQUARTERED IN CAREPA (ANTIOQUIA) AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NORTHERN ANTIOQUIA URABA REGION AS WELL AS THE NORTHERN CHOCO REGION THAT BORDERS PANAMA.

2. THE 17TH BDE HAS TWO INFANTRY, TWO COUNTERTERRORIST, AND ONE MILITARY POLICE BATTALIONS ASSIGNED TO IT. IT ALSO HAS AN ENGINEER COMPANY, A CAVALRY SQUADRON, AN ANTIKIDNAPPING AND EXTORTION UNIT (UNASE), AND AN ADMINISTRATIVE AND SERVICES COMPANY.


4. THE CAVALRY SQUADRON IS PART OF RONDON CAVALRY GROUP NO. 2, WHICH IS ASSIGNED TO THE 2D DIVISION. THIS CAVALRY GROUP PATROLS THE EXISTING ROAD NETWORK ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE GULF OF URABA, WHICH IS THE MOST DEVELOPED AREA AND WHERE THE BANANA PLANTATIONS ARE LOCATED. THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE GULF HAS NO ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE. MOVEMENT ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE GULF IS BY RIVER, HELICOPTER, OR FOOT. THE BDE HAS NO
HELIICOPTERS ORGANIC TO IT AND RELY ON AN MI-8 FROM THE
1ST DIVISION, WHICH IS USED FOR RESUPPLY.
5. BDE UNITS ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT ITS
JURISDICTION IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC ORDER IN
THE AREA. REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC),
THROUGH ITS POLITICAL ARM, THE "UNION PATRICTICA"
(PATRIOTIC UNION OR UP) PARTY, AND EX-POPULAR LIBERATION
ARMY (EPL) GUERRILLAS, WHO MAKE UP THE "ESPERANZA, PAZ, Y
LIBERTAD" (HOPE, PEACE, AND LIBERTY) PARTY, ARE FIGHTING
EACH OTHER FOR CONTROL OF UNIONS AND POLITICS IN THE
BANANA AREA.
6. PLANTATIONS AND AREAS ARE DIVIDED BY POLITICAL
FOLLOWINGS. THE "UP" HAD CONTROLLED THE UNIONS, BUT THE
NEW EPL PARTY HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT GAINS. ABOUT 50
PERCENT OF BANANA PLANTATIONS NORTH OF APARTADO
HAVE "UP" PARTY MEMBERS AS
WORKERS AND THE EPL HAS THE OTHER 50 PERCENT. THIS HAS
RESULTED IN FARC MASSACRES AGAINST EPL PARTY MEMBERS TO
INTIMIDATE THEM INTO NOT SUPPORTING THE EPL PARTY.
WORKERS FROM ONE PARTY CANNOT WORK WITH WORKERS FROM THE
OPPOSITION. BANANA WORKERS MAKE APPROXIMATELY 400,000
PESOS (USD 400.00) PER MONTH, WHICH IS A VERY GOOD SALARY
FOR UNEDUCATED PEASANTS IN COLOMBIA. FAMILIES IN THE
AREA NORMALLY HAVE 5-6 CHILDREN.
7. ANOTHER GROUP THAT THE ARMY HAS TO CONTEND WITH
ARE "PRIVATE JUSTICE" OR "PARAMILITARY" GROUPS. THESE
GROUPS FIGHT SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS IN THE AREA. THE
STRUGGLE BETWEEN PARAMILITARY AND SUBVERSIVE GROUPS IS TO
THE DEATH. THE BDE COMMANDER, BG RITO ALEJO ((DEL RIO))
ROJAS, STATED THAT PARAMILITARIES ARE THE ONLY
INDIVIDUALS THAT SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS FEAR. HOWEVER, THE
ARMY DOES NOT SUPPORT PARAMILITARIES.
8. BG DEL RIO ATTEMPTS TO KEEP ALL FACTIONS FROM
KILLING EACH OTHER. HOWEVER, HIS TASK IS VERY DIFFICULT
SINCE HE MUST TRY TO KEEP UNIONS, WORKERS, AND OWNERS ALL
WORKING TOGETHER. FIVE BANANA PLANTATIONS RECENTLY WENT
BANKRUPT DUE TO UNION WORKER STRIKES. WORKERS THREATENED
TO INVADE THESE PLANTATIONS AND COLONIZE THE LAND. DEL
RIO WAS CURRENTLY TRYING TO PREVENT THIS SINCE IT WOULD
CAUSE A SOCIAL NIGHTMARE FOR THE ARMY.
9. THE BDE AND UNIT INSTALLATIONS WERE NOT WELL
KEPT AS UNIT SOLDIERS WERE DEPLOYED IN THE AREA
ATTEMPTING TO MAINTAIN PEACE. UNITS ARE DEPLOYED IN PLATOON OR COMPANY SIZE ELEMENTS AT STRATEGIC POINTS FROM WHICH THEY OPERATE. THE WESTERN PART OF THE SECTOR ON THE BORDER WITH PANAMA HAS VERY LITTLE ARMY PRESENCE. THE PANAMA-COLOMBIA BORDER IS COMPLETELY OPEN. ONLY RECENTLY DID THE ARMY DEPLOY A COMPANY SIZE ELEMENT TO ACANDI TO ATTEMPT TO DENY FARC ELEMENTS TOTAL ACCESS TO THIS AREA.

10. CAPURAGANA, LOCATED ON THE GULF COAST, IS REPORTEDLY A LOCAL REGIONAL TOURIST AREA WHERE TRAFFICKERS, NARCOTERRORISTS, AND OTHER ANTIOQUIA BUSINESSMEN GO FOR REST AND RELAXATION. THIS COASTAL VILLAGE HAS A GOOD TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE WITH NICE BEACHES AND IS ACCESSIBLE BY BOAT OR AIR ONLY.

11. VELAZ INFANTRY BATTALION TROOPS DEPLOY INTO THE NORTHERN CHOCO REGION ONLY TO ATTACK SUSPECTED OBJECTIVES AND ONLY WHEN HELICOPTER SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE. BG DEL RIO STATED THAT UNITS DO NOT STAY IN THE AREA SINCE TO DO SO WOULD MEAN DEATH FOR HIS TROOPS. TROOPS HAVE TO FIGHT SUSTAINABLE ELEMENTS AS WELL AS NATURE. A PREVALENT DISEASE IN THE AREA IS "PITO OR "LEISMANIASIS".

12. VELEZ INFANTRY BATTALION TROOPS AVOID THE PANAMA-COLOMBIA BORDER SINCE IT IS NOT CLEARLY MARKED. PATROLS AVOID CONTACT WITH PANAMA UNITS TO NOT CAUSE ANY TYPE OF BORDER INCIDENT. THE VELEZ BATTALION COMMANDER STATED THAT AN INCURSION INTO PANAMA, EVEN IF ACCIDENTAL, WOULD GIVE THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT MORE JUSTIFICATION FOR "HOT PURSUIT," WHICH VIOLATES COLOMBIAN SOVEREIGNTY.

COMMENTS: 1. (U)
ADMIN

INSTR: (U) U.S. NO.

WARNING: (U) REPORT CLASSIFIED S E C R E T.
DRV FROM: DIA/DHD MSG 291302 JAN 96
DECL ON: X1
ST
#1150
NNNN