

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAN SA 00773 01 OF 03 312111Z
ACTION ARA-16RELEASE IN FULLINFO OCT-00 ADS-00 INR-10 SS-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSCE-00
NSAE-00 SSO-00 SY-05 HA-06 PM-09 MCT-02 INRE-00
SYE-00 SP-02 /060 W

-----253717 312138Z /62

O 312020Z JAN 82 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 7665

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 3 SAN SALVADOR 0773

E. O. 12065: GDS 1/31/88 (HINTON, DEANE R.) OR-M
TAGS: PINS, ES
SUBJECT: REPORT ON ALLEGED MASSACRE

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT.
2. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO RELEASE PORTIONS OF THIS REPORT AS APPROPRIATE.
3. SUMMARY: EMBASSY INVESTIGATION OF REPORTED MASSACRE AT EL MOZOTE INCLUDING VISIT TO THE AREA BY ASSISTANT DATT AND EMBOFF CONCLUDES FOLLOWING: ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO PROVE OR DISPROVE EXCESSES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULATION OF EL MOZOTE BY GOVERNMENT TROOPS, IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE GUERRILLA FORCES WHO ESTABLISHED DEFENSIVE POSITIONS IN EL MOZOTE DID NOTHING TO REMOVE THEM FROM THE PATH OF BATTLE WHICH THEY WERE AWARE WAS COMING AND HAD PREPARED FOR, NOR IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT THOSE WHO REMAINED ATTEMPTED TO LEAVE. CIVILIANS DID DIE DURING OPERATION RESCATE BUT NO EVIDENCE COULD BE FOUND TO CONFIRM THAT GOVERNMENT FORCES SYSTEMATICALLY MASSACRED CIVILIANS IN THE OPERATION ZONE, NOR THAT THE NUMBER OF CIVILIANS KILLED EVEN REMOTELY APPROACHED NUMBER BEING CITED IN OTHER REPORTS CIRCULATING INTERNATIONALLY. WE ARE STILL PURSUING QUESTION AS TO WHICH ARMY UNITS WERE PRESENT IN EL MOZOTE. END SUMMARY.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior Reviewer

PAGE 02 SAN SA 00773 01 OF 03 312111Z

3. THE SETTING: MORAZAN DEPARTMENT
MORAZAN, LOCATED IN NORTHEASTERN EL SALVADOR, IS A SPARCELY POPULATED MOUNTAINOUS DEPARTMENT OF SMALL TOWNS AND WIDELY SCATTERED COMMUNITIES OF SUBSISTENCE FARMERS. TODAY THE DEPARTMENT IS IN A STATE OF WAR. MOST OF THE COUNTRYSIDE IS GUERRILLA DOMINATED. GOVERNMENT FORCES MAINTAIN POSTS IN SAN FRANCISCO GOTERA, THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL, AND ABOUT A DOZEN SMALL TOWNS, MOST OF THEM STRUNG ALONG THE NORTH-SOUTH HIGHWAY THAT RUNS THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT. IN MOST TOWNS,

THE CIVILIAN POPULATION CONSISTS LARGELY OF FAMILIES DISPLACED FROM THEIR SMALL PLOTS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE BY THE WAR. THEY OCCUPY HOUSES OF FORMER TOWN DWELLERS, WHO IN TURN HAVE FLED THE VIOLENCE FOR THE RELATIVE SAFETY OF THE LARGER CITIES. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL, WITH SMALL BRIGADE, LOCATED IN THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL, WITH SMALL DETACHMENTS ROUGHLY EQUALLY DIVIDED BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES AND CIVIL DEFENSE POSTED IN THE SMALL TOWNS.

EL MOZOTE IS A TYPICAL RURAL CANTON (COMMUNITY) LOCATED APPROXIMATELY 25 KILOMETERS NORTH OF THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL. ACCESSIBLE BY DIRT ROAD, IT CONSISTS OF A SMALL CLUSTER OF BUILDINGS, INCLUDING A CHAPEL AND A STORE, SURROUNDED BY SCATTERED SINGLE FAMILY ADOBE HOUSES. MANY HAVE FLED THE VIOLENCE IN THE AREA IN RECENT YEARS, AND THE POPULATION OF EL MOZOTE AT THE TIME OF THE DECEMBER OPERATION WAS ESTIMATED AT NO MORE THAN 300, PRIMARILY CAMPESIONS (SUBSISTENCE FARMERS). RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES IN THE AREA HAVE BEEN WEAK FOR SEVERAL YEARS, BUT BOTH CATHOLICS AND EVANGELISTS LIVED IN EL MOZOTE.

EL MOZOTE IS IN THE HEART OF GUERRILLA TERRITORY AND ITS INHABITANTS HAVE SPENT MOST OF THE PAST THREE YEARS WILLINGLY OR UNWILLINGLY COOPERATING WITH INSURGENTS. GOVERNMENT FORCES HAVE NOT BEEN POSTED IN EL MOZOTE SINCE AUGUST 1981. CONSEQUENTLY GUERRILLAS HAVE BEEN FREE TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAN SA 00773 01 OF 03 312111Z

IN THE AREA

4. OPERATION RESCATE AND EL MOZOTE

REGULAR GOVERNMENT FORCES HAVE MOUNTED PERIODIC OPERATIONS IN MORAZAN TO DECREASE INFLUENCE OF INSURGENT ELEMENTS AND TO ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A DEGREE OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL IN CONTESTED AREAS. COMBINED ARMY UNITS, INCLUDING THE ATLCATL BATTALION, CONDUCTED SUCH AN OPERATION, CALLED OPERATION RESCATE IN CENTRAL MORAZAN FROM DECEMBER 6 THROUGH DECEMBER 17, 1981. THE SPECIFIC DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES IS UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME

THE DECEMBER MILITARY OPERATION UTILIZED A BLOCK FORCE STRETCHED FROM EAST TO WEST ABOUT 30 KILOMETERS NORTH OF EL MOZOTE. MANEUVERING UNITS WERE SENT NORTH FROM THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL, SWEEPING THE TERRITORY BETWEEN THEM AND THE BLOCKING FORCES. GUERRILLAS HAD KNOWN ABOUT THIS OPERATION SINCE AT LEAST NOVEMBER 15, AND HAD MOBILIZED THEIR FORCES, INCLUDING CIVILIAN SUPPORTERS TO HARRASS GOVERNMENT TROOPS WHILE WITHDRAWING LARGE NUMBERS FROM THE OPERATION ZONE.

BOTH GUERRILLAS AND CIVILIANS WERE PRESENT THERE WHEN GOVERNMENT FORCES APPROACHED EL MOZOTE FROM THE SOUTH DURING MID-OPERATION ON ABOUT DECEMBER 11. ATTACKING TROOPS ENCOUNTERED STIFF GUERRILLA RESISTENCE FROM A TRENCH LINE SOUTH OF THE SETTLEMENT. FIGHTING THERE LASTED ABOUT FOUR HOURS UNTIL TROOPS WERE ABLE TO PENETRATE THE LINE WITH 90MM RECOILLESS RIFLE FIRE. SOLDIERS THEN MOVED FORWARD INTO THE SETTLEMENT WHERE THEY AGAIN CAME UNDER FIRE AND TOOK CASUALTIES.

FIGHTING CONTINUED AND THE TOWN WAS PARTIALLY DESTROYED. CIVILIANS REMAINING IN ANY PART OF THE CANTON COULD HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO INJURY AS A RESULT OF THE COMBAT.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAN SA 00773 02 OF 03 312126Z
ACTION ARA-16

INFO OCT-00 ADS-00 INR-10 SS-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSCE-00
NSAE-00 SSO-00 SY-05 HA-06 PM-09 MCT-02 INRE-00
SYE-00 SP-02 /060 W

-----253742 312138Z /62

O 312020Z JAN 82 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 7666

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 2 OF 3 SAN SALVADOR 0773

AN AMRY COMPANY WHICH DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE OPERATION RELIEVED TROOPS IN EL MOZOTE ON DECEMBER 19 AND REMAINED THERE UNTIL GUERRILLAS OVERRAN THEM AND RE-TOOK EL MOZOTE ON DECEMBER 29 KILLING THEM AND TAKING PRISONERS. THE CANTON REMAINS IN INSURGENT HANDS TODAY.

5. DISPLACED PERSONS FROM THE OPERATION ZONE
THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES HAVE CONGREGATED IN THE TOWNS MAKING UP THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION EVERYWHERE EXCEPT FOR PERQUIN AND SAN FRANCISCO GOTERA. THOUSANDS OF DISPLACED PERSONS UNABLE TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE HAVE OVERWHELMED THE CAPACITY OF THESE TOWNS AND SUPPORT THEM AND HAVE MOVED EN MASSE ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS SEARCHING FOR SEMI-PERMANENT REFUGE.

AN UNDETERMINED NUMBER OF REFUGEES FROM EL MOZOTE ARE LOCATED IN THE TOWNS OF SAN FRANCISCO GOTERA, PERQUIN AND JOCOAITIQUE. IN JOCOAISE, AN AGED COUPLE WHO LEFT EL MOZOTE DURING THE ATTACK, SPOKE FRANKLY OF THEIR EXPERIENCE.

ACCORDING TO THEM, GUERRILLAS HAD TOLD THEM TO LEAVE IN EARLY DECEMBER BECAUSE THEY WERE SO OLD. BUT THEY DID NOT WANT TO BECAUSE THEY HAD SPENT THEIR WHOLE LIVES THERE AND HAD NEVER BEEN OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY. THEIR ADOBE HOUSE LOCATED TO THE SOUTH OF THE MAIN SETTLEMENT WAS DESTROYED BY ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT, PROBABLY ON THE MORNING OF DECEMBER 11. BY THE TIME THEY REACHED THE MAIN CLUSTER OF HOUSES LATER IN THE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN SA 00773 02 OF 03 312126Z

DAY, THE FIGHTING HAD ENDED AND SOLDIERS WERE IN CONTROL. THEY CLAIMED THEY SAW DOZENS OF BODIES. SOLDIERS DID NOT MOLEST THEM, AND THE NEXT DAY THEY WALKED EIGHT KILOMETERS TO TAKE REFUGE IN JOCOAITIQUE.

THE MAYOR OF JOCOAITIQUE INTIMATED THAT HE KNEW OF VIOLENT FIGHTING IN EL MOZOTE AND OTHER NEARBY CANTONES. AT THAT TIME AS MANY AS A THOUSAND PEOPLE TOOK REFUGE UNDER MILITARY PROTECTION IN THE TOWN WHERE ALMOST ALL OF THE 3,500 INHABITANTS ARE REFUGEES FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE. HE WAS UNWILLING TO DISCUSS COMPORIMENT OF GOVERNMENT FORCES SAYING, "THIS IS SOMETHING ONE SHOULD TALK ABOUT IN ANOTHER TIME, IN ANOTHER COUNTRY."

ONE OF THE FEW PRIESTS REMAINING IN NORTH MORAZAN, TRAVELS FREELY ALONG THE MAIN ROAD BUT STATED HE IS UNWILLING TO GO THROUGH GUERRILLA TERRITORY TO REACH THE SMALL SETTLEMENTS OFF THE ROAD. ACCORDING TO THE PRIEST, EL MOZOTE AND SURROUNDING CANTONS HAVE BEEN POLITICIZED BY THE LEFT FOR SEVERAL YEARS AND PROVIDE A WILLING SUPPORT BASE. HE AGREED WITH THE MAYOR OF JOCOAITIQUE THAT MANY OF THE REFLGEEES IN THAT TOWN WERE FROM GUERRILLA FAMILIES.

DISPLACED CAMPESONO FAMILIES FROM THE CANTONES OF ARAMBALA, TIERRA COLORADA, AND GUACAMAYA TO THE NORTH AND SOUTH OF EL MOZOTE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THEY LEFT THESE AREAS FOR THE TOWNS IN EARLY DECEMBER TO AVOID THE IMPENDING OPERATION, OR IN LATE DECEMBER TO AVOID THE IMPENDING GUERRILLA COUNTEROFFENSIVE.

6. ATTACK ON JOCOAITIQUE

IN LATE DECEMBER, FOLLOWING OPERATION RESCATE, INSURGENTS LAUNCHED A COUNTER OFFENSIVE WHICH SUCCESSFULLY DISPLACED GOVERNMENT TROOPS EAST OF THE NORTH-SOUTH HIGHWAY FROM THE RIO SAPO NEAR THE TOWN OF OSICALA NORTH TO ARAMBALA.

IN THE EARLY MORNING OF JANUARY 12 GUERRILLAS BEGAN TO FIRE ON THE TOWN OF JOCOAITIQUE FROM THE SURROUNDING HILLS.

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAN SA 00773 02 OF 03 312126Z

SIDES. THEY MOVED IN AND CONTINUED FIRING ON THE SMALL NATIONAL GUARD AND CIVIL DEFENSE POSITIONS IN AND AROUND THE TOWN UNTIL THE DEFENDERS RAN OUT OF AMMUNITION. GUERRILLAS MOVED QUICKLY INTO THE TOWN, KILLING FOUR NATIONAL GUARDSMEN

AND TWENTY SEVEN OTHER INHABITANTS, PRIMARILY CIVIL DEFENSE AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS. SOME OF THE LATTER DID NOT DIE DURING THE ASSAULT ON THE TOWN, BUT WERE SHOT AFTER BEING CAPTURED. TWO WOMEN AND FOUR CHILDREN WERE WOUNDED DURING THE FIGHTING. THE INSURGENTS TOOK TWENTY FIVE CAPTIVES AND KEPT THEM FOR EIGHT DAYS BEFORE RELEASING THEM. DURING THE OCCUPATION, THREE JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING AN AMERICAN MALE AND FEMALE ALLEGEDLY ACCOMPANIED GUERRILLAS IN JOCOATIQUE.

GUERRILLAS HELD THE TOWN FOR SIX DAYS UNTIL GOVERNMENT TROOPS ARRIVED ON THE 18TH, AT WHICH TIME THEY WITHDREW INTO THE HILLS WITHOUT A FIGHT. UPON DEPARTING, THEY TOOK WITH THEM ALL OF THE TYPEWRITERS AND MEDICINES IN THE TOWN, ALSO REMOVING THE TOWN HALL REGISTRIES LISTING THE NAMES OF ALL THE INHABITANTS OF SURROUNDING CANTONES. THEY DID NOT HARM THE TOWNSPEOPLE IN ANY OTHER WAY. SEVERAL REFUGEE FAMILIES WENT WITH THEIR HUSBANDS WHEN THE GROUP DEPARTED ON THE 18TH.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAN SA 00773 03 OF 03 312140Z
ACTION ARA-16

INFO OCT-00 ADS-00 INR-10 SS-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSCE-00
NSAE-00 SSO-00 SY-05 HA-06 PM-09 MCT-02 INRE-00
SYE-00 SP-02 /060 W
-----253760 312150Z /62
O 312020Z JAN 82 ZFF-4

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 7867

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 SAN SALVADOR 0773

THE TOWN IS CURRENTLY SURROUNDED BY GUERRILLAS. SOLDIERS REMAIN IN THE TOWN OR IN NEARBY FORTIFIED POSITIONS. PEOPLE ARE UNABLE TO LEAVE TO TEND CROPS. THERE IS INADEQUATE FOOD, AND NO MEDICINES. THE MAYOR OF THE TOWN SAID GUERRILLAS SPARED HIS LIFE ONLY BECAUSE HE ASKED THEM TO KILL HIS SEVEN CHILDREN FIRST. HE IS DOING HIS BEST TO MAINTAIN POLITICAL NEUTRALITY. AS SOON AS SOLDIERS DEPART, GUERRILLAS WILL RETURN. HE STATED THAT HIS MAJOR PROBLEM IS WHAT TO DO ABOUT "ALL OF THE WIDOWS AND THEIR CHILDREN."

7. CONCLUSION

J MORAZAN IS A WAR-RAVAGED DEPARTMENT. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IS SEVERELY DISRUPTED, LARGE AREAS ARE ENTIRELY ABANDONED, TOWNS CONSIST LARGELY OF REFUGEES AND THOUSANDS HAVE DIED AT THE HANDS OF BOTH GUERRILLAS AND THE MILITARY. MOST CIVILIANS ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN A TENUOUS NEUTRALITY, WITH THE GOVERNMENT CONTROLLING THE TOWNS AND THE GUERRILLAS DOMINATING THE COUNTRYSIDE. SMALL CLASHES ARE DAILY OCCURRENCES, AND LARGER CONFRONTATIONS A CONSTANT POSSIBILITY.

EXCEPT FOR BRIEF PERIOD IN DECEMBER WHEN IT WAS OCCUPIED BY GOVERNMENT FORCES, EL MOZOTE HAS BEEN IN GUERRILLA HAND CONTINUOUSLY SINCE AUGUST 1981. THE INHABITANTS WERE CERTAINLY PASSIVE AND PROBABLY ACTIVE GUERRILLA SUPPORTERS THROUGHOUT THE GUERRILLA DOMINATED COUNTRYSIDE. CIVILIANS REMAINING IN EL MOZOTE DURING THE ATTACK FOUND THEMSELVES

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN SA 00773 03 OF 03 312140Z

SUBJECTED TO COMBAT. ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO PROVE OR DISPROVE EXCESSES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULATION OF EL MOZOTE BY GOVERNMENT TROOPS, IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE GUERRILLA FORCES WHO ESTABLISHED DEFENSIVE POSITIONS IN EL MOZOTE DID NOTHING TO REMOVE THEM FROM THE PATH OF BATTLE WHICH THEY WERE AWARE WAS COMING AND HAD PREPARED FOR, NOR IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT THOSE WHO REMAINED ATTEMPTED TO LEAVE.

CIVILIANS DID DIE DURING THE OPERATION RESCATE, BUT NO EVIDENCE COULD BE FOUND TO CONFIRM THAT GOVERNMENT FORCES SYSTEMATICALLY MASSACRED CIVILIANS IN THE OPERATION ZONE. AS MANY AS ONE THOUSAND VOLUNTARILY DEPARTED FROM THE CANTONES TO SEEK RELATIVE SAFETY IN THE TOWNS PRIOR TO THE OPERATION.

FILE REVIEW INDICATES RADIO VENCEREMOS FIRST ISSUED REPORT OF MASSACRES ON DECEMBER 27, CLAIMING 192 HAD DIED IN EL MOZOTE. ON JANUARY 2 IT REPORTED 472 WERE MASSACRED. ON JANUARY 27 THE WASHINGTON POST REPORTED THAT THE NUMBER "IN AND AROUND" EL MOZOTE WAS 700. A DAY LATER THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORTED 482. BOTH US PRESS ACCOUNTS REPORT SEEING UNSPECIFIED "DOZENS OF BODIES" IN THREE DESTROYED STRUCTURES IN THE SETTLEMENT AND A PILE OF TEN TO FOURTEEN BODIES NEARBY, NOTHING NEAR THE TOTAL NUMBERS CLAIMED.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT NO MORE THAN 300 PEOPLE WERE IN THE ENTIRE CANTON PRIOR TO DECEMBER 1981. NAMES OF "VICTIMS" SUBSEQUENTLY REPORTED IN THE U.S. PRESS AND CIRCULATED WIDELY IN EUROPE MAY WELL HAVE BEEN EXTRACTS IN WHOLE OR PART FROM THE CIVIL REGISTRIES FOR THE AREA STOLEN FROM JOCOAITQUE BY SUBVERSIVES.

8. SOURCES

CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES, CHURCH OFFICIALS RELIEF WORKERS, AND SOCORRO JURIDICO REPRESENTATIVES WERE UNABLE TO PROVIDE FIRST-HAND INFORMATION ON EL MOZOTE.

INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS DELEGATES IN CHARGE OF RELIEF TO DISPLACED PFRSONS NORTH OF SAN FRANCISCO GOTERA WERE UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT, DEFERRING INSTEAD CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAN SA 00773 03 OF 03 312:40Z

TO SUPERIORS IN GENEVA. THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS IS THE ONLY RELIEF AGENCY PERMITTED TO MOVE FREELY IN MORAZAN DEPARTMENT, MAKING WEEKLY TRIPS WITH RELIEF SUPPLIES TO THE TOWNS ON THE NORTH-SOUTH ROAD AND IN OTHER AREAS. DELEGATES MIGHT BE ABLE TO PROVIDE MORE ACCURATE INFORMATION ON MASSACRES IN EL MOZOTE AND OTHER CANTONS DURING THE MID-DECEMBER OPERATION.

EMBOFF AND ASSISTANT DEFENSE ATTACHE VISITED LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT MORAZAN ON JANUARY 30. INTERVIEWING INHABITANTS AND OBSERVING CONDITIONS IN THE AREA. THEY CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS WITH REFUGEES FROM EL MOZOTE AND NEARBY CANTONES IN SAN FRANCISCO GOTERA, JOCOAITIQUE, AND PERQUIN. DAO IS ATTEMPTING TO DETERMINE WHICH ARMY UNITS WERE PRESENT IN EL MOZOTE DURING AND AFTER THE OPERATION.
HINTON

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN