

Peace brings boredom for fighting women of El Salvador

Urban commandos:

Women often led guerrilla groups in cities, because they attracted less attention.

By Fiona Neill

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San Jose Las Flores, El Salvador — Two years ago, Ana Ayala was charting minefields and infiltrating enemy barracks. Now the 28-year-old tends her babies, enjoys the peace, but itches for the security — and respect — that an M-16 once brought.

Her second husband, also a former rebel, is attending a government-sponsored training school that soon will land him a manufacturing job. But Ms. Ayala stays home.

"I'm bored of living in the same place all the time without being with lots of people," she said. "I feel isolated. I'm bored of doing the same thing every day, of cooking and looking after children."

Last month, women in the United States were given the opportunity to fly into combat. But in El Salvador, women have already come marching home. Women made up 30 percent of the 8,000 leftist rebels demobilized under peace agreements last year.

They served as combatants, radio operators, nurses and cooks. Guerrilla snipers often were women, and many urban commando groups were led by women, who attracted less suspicion and were more easily disguised than their male counterparts.

A taste of equality

Twelve years of bitter war gave these women a taste of equality that now is being denied them. Ms. Ayala complains that her husband, who used to wash his own clothes and cook, now leaves all domestic chores to her.

Her dissatisfaction, multiplied by several thousand, has the makings of a new kind of revolution in El Salvador, with women's rights groups springing up in a country that emphasizes machismo.

"The role of women was not discussed during the war," said Rebecca Palacios, 38. "There was no profound questioning. It's only now that women are beginning to get themselves together again."

Unfortunately, female former rebels are finding it difficult even to work with their male comrades in arms in the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, the Marxist rebel group that has become a political party.

"Marxism doesn't provide the theoretical mechanisms to address the issue of women," said Ms. Palacios, one of the few women among the rebels to rise to the rank of commander.

From 1981 to 1985, she led 1,400 guerrillas in the eastern area of San Vicente, where she introduced new ambushing techniques and the practice of hiding land mines in the bodies of dead dogs. Both were tactics she learned from reading about the Vietnam War.

Ms. Palacios now runs a women's group that has 4,000 members and deals with the plight of retired female combatants. Her family, delighted to see her return from the mountains, has helped her make a smooth

re-entry into civilian life.

"I'm now the head of the family," she said. "This is more complicated than directing troops, because children don't obey orders."

Rebels rejected by families

But other former fighters have been rejected by their families. And some lost all members of their families during the war.

From age 17 until peace agreements between the Salvadoran government and the rebels brought an end to civil war early last year, Ana Ayala carried a gun and assisted in crude field amputations. "No one was worth any more or any less than anyone else," she said.

Beginning in 1988, she was one of the few women in a brigade responsible for intelligence work. Her job was to identify areas that had been mined and to enter military barracks to report on the number of soldiers and the location of weapons.

Her only rest from battle was three months of maternity leave in 1983 after the birth of her first child by her first husband, who was killed a year later. She fought until she was eight months pregnant, and she didn't see her daughter for six years.

Ms. Ayala now spends her days cooking and taking care of her and her second husband's two children, an 8-month-old and a 2-year-old. They live in a two-room house in a small northern village.

There is no day care, and she has no relatives. Her family was killed by government soldiers in 1982. Instruction in sewing and cooking has little appeal for women such as Ms. Ayala. She hopes to find a job when her youngest child gets older. "I do not want to be a housewife," she said.

The former female guerrillas

are fighting a second battle for respect. Life among the rebels was no egalitarian utopia for Salvadoran women, who were encouraged to be cooks and nurses rather than combatants.

In the city, opportunities were better.

The uneven male-female ra-

tio in guerrilla camps, which averaged 50 fighters, often led to sexual jealousy. But rather than removing love-struck male combatants, Ms. Palacios says women more often were expelled from a unit after being charged with "prostituting the atmosphere."

Ms. Ayala said male combat-

ants often pressured their girlfriends to get pregnant so there would be someone to replace them if they were killed. According to Ms. Ayala, that meant that women, after taking a town, gave priority to raiding the local pharmacy to stock up on supplies of condoms and birth control pills.

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Losses Add to Japan's Tension in Cambodia

By William Branigin
Washington Post Foreign Service

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, May 6—Japan's first casualties in a peace-keeping operation have stirred bad blood between a Japanese civilian police contingent and the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia and raised questions about future Japanese participation.

At least 10 members of the Japanese police contingent assigned to Cambodia have abandoned their posts in apparent violation of local U.N. directives, according to officials of the peace-keeping mission, known as UNTAC.

In the Japanese ranks, there is anger and resentment over the treatment of compatriots who survived an ambush Tuesday in northwestern Cambodia that killed a Japanese police officer.

The dispute comes as the security situation continues to deteriorate. In the latest incident, at least 12 Cambodians were killed and dozens wounded Wednesday night when armed men attacked a train in Battambang province.

U.N. military observers who visited the scene blamed the Khmer Rouge, a radical Maoist group that has reneged on a 1991 peace accord and is mounting a violent campaign to disrupt a U.N.-supervised election, scheduled for May 23-27. However, UNTAC officials said the possibility that bandits were responsible could not be ruled out.

Estimates of the number of attackers ranged from 50 to more than 100. The gunmen reportedly blew up the train, then opened fire on it and robbed it. Khmer Rouge repeatedly have attacked the train that links northwestern Cambodia with Phnom Penh as part of an insurgency they launched after being driven from power in 1979.

The Khmer Rouge refused to attend a meeting in Beijing today with Cambodia's three other parties to the 1991 peace accord. The conference, chaired by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the nominal



Reiko Takata, widow of Japanese policeman Haruyuki Takata, attends rituals in Bangkok.

head of state, agreed to hold the election as scheduled despite the violent Khmer Rouge campaign. The group charges that the election has become a mere ploy to keep the Vietnamese-installed Phnom Penh government in power.

An attack on an UNTAC convoy by suspected Khmer Rouge guerrillas on Tuesday killed Japanese police inspector Haruyuki Takata and threw the rest of the 74-member contingent into turmoil. His death came a month after a Japanese U.N. volunteer was killed in an ambush.

Of the four other unarmed Japanese police traveling with Takata in the six-vehicle Dutch-led convoy near Ampil in Banteay Meanchey province, two were seriously wounded and evacuated to a hospital in Bangkok. Five armed Dutch soldiers were also wounded, two of them seriously.

According to Japanese sources, the two police

who were left in the area wanted to be evacuated to Phnom Penh and were promised seats on a helicopter. But the Dutch refused to let them board and instead ferried out personal equipment on the flight, the sources said.

The reason for the alleged Dutch refusal was not immediately clear, but one angry Japanese attributed it to "a kind of racism." The two Japanese police then drove to the Thai border today on their way to Bangkok, the sources said.

According to UNTAC sources, at least six Japanese police have abandoned their posts near Ampil and gone to Thailand, and at least four others have left assignments elsewhere in the provinces and made their way to Phnom Penh. Even the Japanese contingent commander made an unauthorized trip to Bangkok, possibly to meet survivors of the ambush, an UNTAC official said.

Some of the Japanese may have left their posts on orders from Tokyo to regroup in Phnom Penh, UNTAC officials said. But these moves conflicted with specific instructions from Brig. Gen. Klaas Roos, the director of UNTAC's 3,500-member civilian police component, that they should stay where they were, the officials said.

"The [Japanese] contingent commander had been told specifically before these people left to keep his people in line and have them stay in their districts," an UNTAC official said. By contrast, when a police officer from Colombia was killed April 30 in an ambush by suspected bandits, none of his 146 colleagues in the Colombian contingent abandoned posts, the official said.

Japan's support for the Cambodian mission, which is headed by Japanese U.N. official Yasushi Akashi, is considered crucial to its success. Tokyo is expected to provide major portions of the mission's \$1.7 billion budget and of an additional \$880 million pledged by the international community for rehabilitation aid.