

SAN MIGUEL:

The Attack on *El Bosque*



by Charles H. Briscoe

THE last Small Unit Tactical Training (SUTT) conducted by a Special Forces MTT (mobile training team) in El Salvador was done

by ODA-7, 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, TDY (temporary duty) from Panama. The training was provided to 3rd Brigade elements at San Miguel, El Salvador, from January to April 1984. The SUTT mission was well underway when Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III, the second U.S. Military Group (USMILGP) commander with considerable SF combat experience, expanded OPATT (Operational Planning and Assistance Training Team) coverage to meet guidance from Ambassador Thomas Pickering for the 1984 Salvadoran

The FMLN attack on San Miguel occurred on the night of 25–26 March 1984, not on 24–25 March as cited in most documents. The attack was a post-election, not a pre-election, endeavor. The election was held on Sunday, 25 March 1984. Since none of the presidential candidates received more than 50 percent of the vote, by law, a runoff election was set for 6 May 1984, between the PDC (*Partido Democrático Cristiano*) candidate José Napoleon Duarte and Roberto D'Aubuisson of ARENA (*Alianza Republicana Nacionalista*), who finished first and second, respectively.²

presidential election “watch.”¹

The purpose of this article is to explain the most significant single combat action involving American Special Forces during the thirteen-year counterinsurgency war in El Salvador. It is presented not to justify awards or highlight individual performances, rather to provide details of the defensive actions taken by members of ODA-7, when the 3rd Brigade *cuartel* at San Miguel was attacked by a 700-man guerrilla force the night following the 25 March presidential primary election in 1984.³ It is relevant because it serves to remind Special Forces soldiers tasked to train foreign militaries overseas that they are ultimately responsible for their own safety and survival. Self-protection measures should never be dis-

regarded. For these reasons, it merits presentation apart from the trilogy of *Veritas* articles that summarize the Salvadoran COIN (counterinsurgency) war begun in a previous issue (Vol. 3, No. 1).

ODA-7 (ODA 781 in today's numbering system), B Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (SFG), Fort Gulick, Panama was a team that had a good mix of Vietnam combat veterans, experienced and new SF soldiers with better than average language skills, and they had been training Latin Americans. ODA-7 had supported ODA-9 in the training of Salvadorans, Hondurans, Colombians, and Panamanians at the neighboring U.S. Army School of the Americas for a year when the team was alerted in the late fall of 1983 for a SUTT mission in El Salvador. In that year of training, ODA-7 conducted a RECONDO course for elements of BIRI (*Batallón de Infantería de Reacción Inmediata*) *Atlacatl* as well as a platoon of the newly created Salvadoran Air Force ground reconnaissance company, PRAL (*Patrulla de Reconocimiento de Alance Largo*). Small unit infantry patrolling, ambushes, and raids were taught at Fort Sherman and in the triple-canopy jungle along the Chagres River. In addition,



Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III, Commander, USMILGP—El Salvador, July 1983–November 1984, and Ambassador Thomas Pickering.



Sergeant Kenneth Beko, junior medic for ODA-7, explains emergency medical treatment to a Salvadoran soldier at Fort Sherman, Panama.



Staff Sergeant Peter Moosey, light weapons sergeant for ODA-7, evaluates a Salvadoran soldier on the Leader's Reaction Course at Fort Sherman, Panama.

ODA-7 assisted with the training of the BIRI *Arce* in Panama covering topics that ranged from individual soldier skills to advanced collective infantry tactics in the field.⁴

“Preparing lesson plans and training aids, rehearsals, presenting classes, critiquing the field performances, tailoring remedial training, and just chatting with Salvadorans raised the language proficiency of the DLI-trained [Defense Language Institute] SF soldiers to a much higher level. It also introduced our native speakers to Salvadoran Spanish idioms and cultural nuances. We couldn’t have had a better mission prep,” said former Sergeant Ken Beko, the ODA-7 medic (18D) cross-trained as an infantryman.⁵ Having worked together in the field for more than a year, this strongly-bonded ODA underwent some organizational changes shortly before deployment.

Several things happened in quick succession. Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Scruggs assigned Master Sergeant Rodney F. Dutton, a Vietnam veteran and school-trained

18Z (operations and intelligence sergeant) to fill the detachment operations sergeant position (18Z). He then became the new team sergeant. When the request for country clearance of the site survey team was submitted to San Salvador, the detachment commander was denied access by the MILGP commander, Colonel Joseph S. Stringham, based on a serious incident during a previous mission. Because B Company already had an officer, Captain Craig W. Leeker, at San Miguel, keeping him there to command ODA-7 was a natural fit. CPT Leeker accepted the position offered by LTC Scruggs and COL Stringham. Sergeant First Class LeRoy R. Sena, the heavy weapons NCO (non-commissioned officer), a native Spanish speaker from Las Vegas, New Mexico, and Staff Sergeant Peter J. Moosey, the light weapons sergeant and a highly proficient DLI-schooled linguist, replaced two SF soldiers on an MTT at San Miguel, in order to conduct a “working” site survey in mid-November 1983. COL Stringham was not going to exceed the Congressionally-mandated 55-man limit and he was adamant about not granting country access to the detachment commander.⁶

CPT Craig Leeker was already in charge of a composite SF team (four NCOs from two different ODAs) that had been dispatched to San Miguel by COL Stringham to help the 3rd Brigade organize its defenses after a disastrous FMLN attack in early November 1983. It would be the SF captain’s third of four consecutive TDY assignments (fifteen months) in El Salvador. He had become Stringham’s MTT “fireman,” fixing problems from Sonsonate to San Vicente to La Unión to San Miguel. CPT



Sergeant First Class LeRoy Sena trains Ponce Cazadores on the 90mm recoilless rifle in El Salvador.



BIRI Atlacatl shoulder patch



BIRI Arce shoulder patch



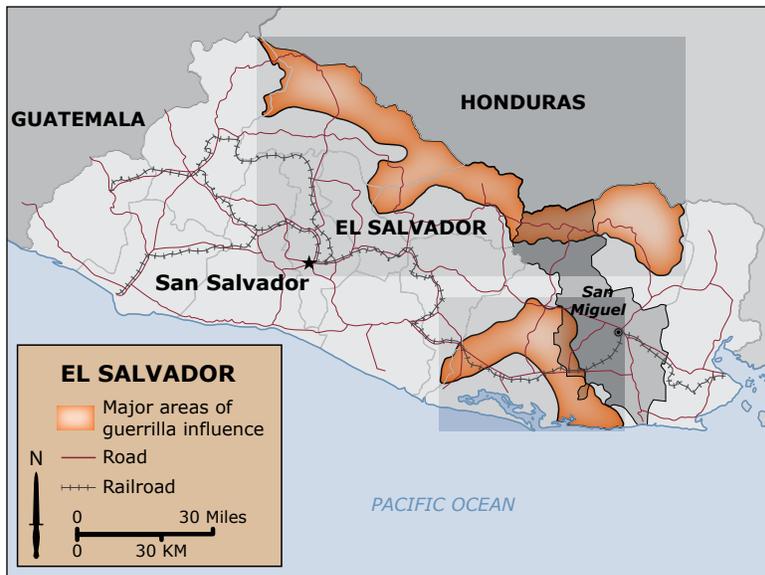
Fuerza Aérea PRAL shoulder patch

Leeker, told to “make sure that the 3rd Brigade was not overrun again,” had just gotten all the new conscripts armed after a short period of weapons familiarization and was working with Colonel Jaime Flores on the *cuartel* defenses when SFC Sena and SSG Moosey arrived from Panama.⁷

“The assignment of ODA-7 to an MTT mission in El Salvador—instead of the typical composite elements from 3/7th SFG—was an anomaly. It was a welcome change for me. An experienced, well-trained team knew how to work together and this paid big dividends,” said Leeker.⁸

SFC Sena, uncomfortable with the security at San Miguel, took SSG Moosey to walk the camp perimeter the next day. They assessed the security measures and Moosey made a detailed sketch of the defenses. Afterward, the two began setting fire to the high grass and bushes between the *cuartel* and the billeting area in *El Bosque* to improve their defensive posture. The primary FMLN avenue of approach for the attack a few weeks earlier had come through the *Bosque*. The fires angered COL Flores because they had revealed how inadequate the brigade defenses were. They blatantly exposed the holes under the fences and gaps in the wire used by the *iguaneros* [Salvadoran soldiers who sneaked out to hunt for food (iguanas) or to see their girlfriends in town]. CPT Leeker apologized to mollify COL Flores. The senior Mortar MTT sergeant read “the Riot Act” to the two recent arrivals.⁹

Since the last *Veritas* article on El Salvador focused on the central region of the country, a thumbnail area “sketch” of the San Miguel region follows. It describes the FMLN (*Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional*) *focos* and the state of the ESAF (El Salvadoran Armed Forces). An explanation of Salvadoran fixed base securi-



The San Miguel cuartel was located between two of the largest FMLN-dominated areas (focos) in the country. Since it prevented the guerrillas from controlling the eastern region of El Salvador, it was a lucrative and regular target for attack.

ty completes the description of the environment in which ODA-7 would work during the first four months of 1984.

El Salvador is the smallest and most populated of the Central American countries. The eastern of its three regions (west and central are the other two) consists of four departments: Morazán to the north borders Honduras, Usulután in the west is situated on the Pacific Ocean, La Unión to the east on Gulf of Fonseca and the Pacific borders Honduras and Nicaragua, and San Miguel in the center stretches from the Pacific Ocean north to the Honduran border. This eastern region, the most thinly populated in the country, contained three cities with more than 25,000 people in the 1980s: San Miguel, La Unión—the country’s second most important seaport, and Usulután. San Miguel, second largest city in the nation, contained more than 100,000 inhabitants. The 1968 population densities of the four eastern departments—Morazán, Usulután, La Unión, and San Miguel—were 285, 332, 209, and 365 persons per square mile respectively.¹⁰

The eastern region, predominantly agricultural, produced 12 percent of the country’s coffee and most of its cotton. Its industrial output accounted for only 16 percent of the gross national product.¹¹ Two distinct and fairly well-defined seasons—the dry summer season and the wet winter season are normal. The rainy season usually lasts from May to October, but sometimes extends into early December. Afternoon showers are typical and on average produce ten inches a month.¹² There are two main east–west highways that traverse the country. The Inter-American Highway, part of the Pan American Highway, crosses the central plateau from the Guatemalan border to La Unión and on to the eastern frontier with Honduras. The second major artery, the Coastal Highway, follows the Pacific coastal plain from the western frontier to the eastern border, ending at La Unión. It parallels a major railway. The country’s fourth north–south highway splits away from the Inter-American Highway at San Miguel, goes northeast to Santa Rosa de Lima,



Large FMLN flags were rarely carried by fighting columns. They were displayed by the political arm. Combatants wore unit scarves, campaign buttons, and armbands for identification.



The San Miguel volcano dominated the view to the east of the city and the *cuartel*.

and then rejoins the main highway east into Honduras.¹³ These lines of communication intersect in and around San Miguel, the largest city.

Though San Miguel was founded in 1530, cotton cultivation after World War II prompted its most rapid growth. Situated on the railroad and the cross-country highway to La Unión, it is an important distribution center for eastern cotton as well as coffee, agave fiber, and dairy products. The city is located at the foot of two inactive volcanoes and has a pleasant semitropical climate.¹⁴ It was situated between two of the largest FMLN *focos* in the country.

During the thirteen-year COIN war, the disputed, demilitarized areas along the southern border of Honduras, the *bolsones* (pockets) housed numerous refugee camps that dated to the 1969

war. These *bolsones* became *focos* for guerrilla training and cross-border supply distribution centers. Two of the largest *bolsones* were in northern Chalatenango department in the central region and Morazán department in the east. Usulután and San Miguel departments had major sections dominated by the guerrillas (see map highlighting areas dominated by the rebels in 1981). However, national defense was conventional war based. It centered on “nineteenth century fortress-like,” thick-walled *cuarteles* (quartels) dating to the early 1900s, in each military district, *destacamento militar* (DM) and six brigade *cuarteles*.

The brigade *cuarteles* were fortified camps ringed with barbed-wire fencing that enclosed perimeter bunkers and some cinder block guard towers. Neither had been constructed to be defended like the firebases were in Vietnam. The tactical security measures were more akin to industrial sites—fences to limit access through guarded entry gates.

In El Salvador, *cuartel* means a garrison. The DM *cuarteles* look like 19th century thick-walled fortresses while a brigade *cuartel* looks like a base camp with permanent structures.¹⁵

*Note: At the San Miguel *cuartel* only the upper, central part was completely fenced. Internal access to *cuartel* central was controlled by a guardpost and gate. Only guard posts at the entry points had communications with the command post. Security patrol sweeps outside the perimeter were rarely conducted.¹⁶

With a conventional war mentality (defense against Honduran land and air attacks in retaliation for its incursion in 1969), the Salvadoran *Estado Mayor* (General Staff) positioned the 4th Brigade *cuartel* at El Paraiso to reinforce the DM-1 *cuartel* located in Chalatenango. The 3rd Brigade *cuartel* at San Miguel backstopped the DM-4 *cuartel* at San Francisco de Gotera near the Honduran border blocking another invasion corridor.¹⁷ This conveniently placed the 3rd Brigade *cuartel* between two major guerrilla *focos* to the north and south.

From 1981 to 1984, the El Salvador Armed Forces (ESAF) were struggling to survive, to expand, and slowly trying to gain the initiative against the loosely aligned groups of the FMLN. By early 1984, ESAF combat effectiveness and morale had improved—the result of new brigade commanders, a major staff shuffle in the *Estado Mayor*, better trained battalions, a central basic training facility, and joint coordination. By the end of 1984, the ESAF had 42,000 troops in uniform, more than three times the highest estimate for guerrillas.¹⁸

As the focus began to shift from expansion and training of new ESAF units to more small-unit COIN operations and to pacification and civic action, the MILGP wanted to have more continuity in its training and advisory role at the brigades. The three-officer OPATT program, developed by Colonel John D. Waghelstein to satisfy that need, dovetailed neatly with the shakeup of the Salvadoran senior officer corps in late 1983.¹⁹ The expansion of the OPATT program to all brigades and to all *Estado Mayor* staff sections by COL Stringham overlapped with the last SUTT mission performed by a Special Forces MTT from Panama.

The mission to train the 350-man *Cazador* (Hunter) battalions of the 3rd Brigade in San Miguel had been assigned to ODA-7, 3rd Battalion, 7th SFG in the fall of 1983. The original ESAF *Cazador* battalions (three) had been organized and trained by a Venezuelan Army MTT using a compressed six-week program in late 1982.²⁰ These *Cazadores* were lightly armed and equipped mobile battalions that could deploy with little notice. The *Cazadores* were assigned to brigades where as the immediate action, heavily armed 600-man BIRI



8th SFG trained the Venezuelan *Cazador* battalions in the early 1960s.



Cuscatlán was the initial *Cazador* battalion trained by the Venezuelan Army MTT in 1982.



The old DM-4 cuartel in San Francisco de Gotera "butted up" against the Catholic church in the town center. Note the basketball court painted on the street outside the main gate of the cuartel.



The central area of the San Miguel cuartel looked like a rimless wagon wheel missing some spokes. Outside that "wheel" were defensive trenches, guard towers, and some sandbag bunkers surrounded by an inner barbed-wire fence.

battalions—like *Atlacatl*, *Atonal*, *Arce*, *Belloso*, and *Bracamonte*—that received six months of training, were controlled by the *Estado Mayor*.²¹

Regardless of organization, the ESAF units from company to battalion were reconstituted almost annually with conscripts based on national service laws.²² Infantry tactical training was a constant, although regularly interrupted by operational requirements. Thus, a brigade's fighting strength fluctuated very dramatically according to its conscription fill cycles; three battalions would in actuality equate to one reinforced battalion. These two very important realities were consistently overlooked by analysts counting units to compare with guerrilla elements. And, since U.S. military aid was tied to achieving certain force levels by deadlines (national elections),

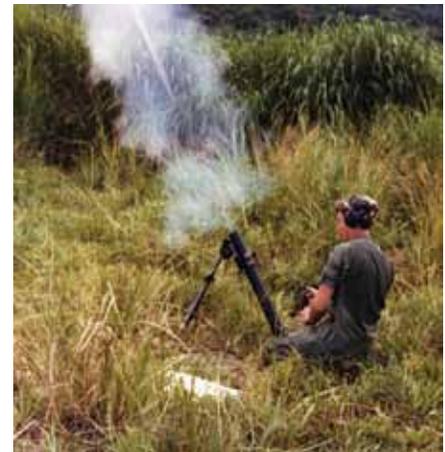


Empire Range was the primary firing range in Panama used by all U.S. military forces. It was located opposite Fort Clayton on the Pacific side of the Panama Canal.

ESAF labeled units as battalions, i.e., the brigade security battalions, when they were actually reinforced companies at best. Brigade commanders preferred the smaller *Cazador* battalions since they could be trained faster.²³ SFC Sena and SSG Moosey discovered that these ESAF-wide practices indeed existed at the 3rd Brigade in San Miguel during their "working" site survey. They brought these insights back to Panama where ODA-7 was finalizing preparations for its upcoming mission.²⁴

During the last four weeks before Christmas 1983, ODA-7 conducted mission prep. SGT Ken Beko remembered, "Captain Gil Nelson, battalion S-2, provided intelligence briefs to the team and showed an FMLN film in which San Miguel guerrillas were firing an 82mm mortar. After researching tropical diseases and disorders, I had an extensive 'laundry list' of medicines and supplies to accumulate and pack. Then, it was off to Empire Range for a week."²⁵

"SFC Sena put us through his 'Gun-a-Rama'—a relentless shooting and firing regimen on everything from small arms [45 cal automatic pistol, M-16 and M-14 rifles, M-79 grenade launcher, and M-21 sniper system] to crew-served weapons [M-60 and M-2 machineguns, 90mm recoilless rifle, 3.5" rocket launcher, and 60mm and 81mm mortars]. It was designed to provide a functional familiarity and basic competency with each weapon, and insure the accuracy of the team's shooting. I didn't think a Special Forces soldier could ever get tired of shooting, but



Staff Sergeant Gary Davidson fires the 60mm mortar during the ODA-7 "Gun-a-Rama" at Empire Range in Panama.



The 3rd Brigade cuartel at San Miguel with the central area and El Bosque outlined.

we were at the end of the week. We were ‘smoked.’ But, that refresher ‘got our heads into the game,’” remembered Sergeant Ken Beko.²⁶ After that training, SFC Sena and SSG Moosey left for El Salvador.

Special Forces MTTs were tailored to provide skills requested by the MILGP based on available personnel in the 3rd Battalion of 7th SFG in Panama. The 55-man “force cap,” strictly managed by the MILGP, governed the team size and mission duration. Shortly before Christmas 1983, SFC Sena and SSG Moosey returned to Fort Gulick, leaving CPT Leeker and Staff Sergeant Charles Studley behind at San Miguel.²⁷ ODA-7 for the San Miguel SUTT would be all noncommissioned officers (NCOs).

Shortly before New Year’s 1984, MSG Dutton; SFCs Sena and Jorge M. Reyes; SSGs Moosey, Gary Davidson, and Loyd Palmer; and SGTs Beko and Dave Janicki boarded a U.S. Air Force C-130 “Hercules” transport aircraft at Howard Air Force Base, Panama, to fly into Ilopango Airbase in San Salvador. Sergeant Major Carlos Parker, 3/7th SFG operations sergeant, met the military aircraft when it arrived. He had made arrangements

to secure the ODA-7 pallet of equipment before taking the team to the MILGP in the U.S. Embassy.²⁸ The eight Special Forces soldiers, dressed in *guayaberas* (short-sleeved, open neck Panamanian dress shirts worn over trousers—a climate-driven equivalent to a sports jacket) and slacks, were carrying small gun “tote bags” to lower their profile as American soldiers. After several days in the Sheraton Hotel, ODA-7 boarded a U.S. Army UH-1D Huey (TDY from Panama to support the Defense Attaché) for the trip to San Miguel.²⁹

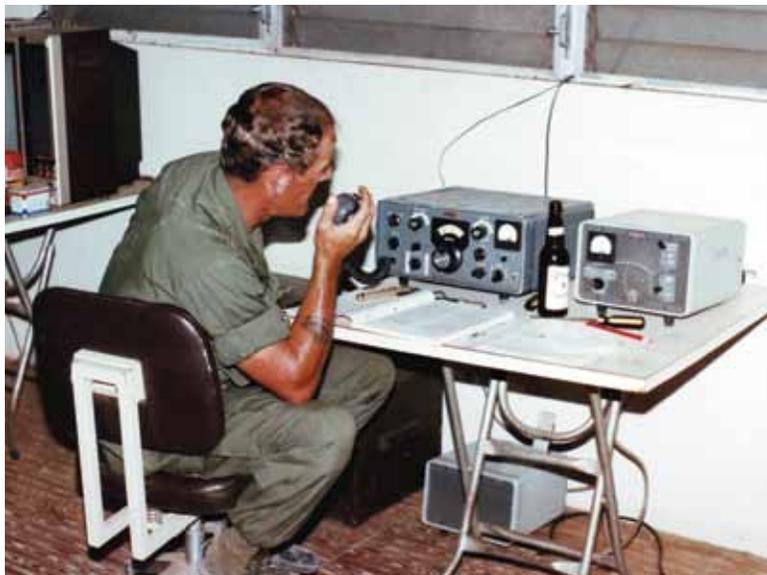
CPT Leeker met them at the 3rd Brigade helipad and took them to the messhall for their first of hundreds of meals consisting of rice, beans, tortillas (mealy thick corn version), and soup. SSG Chuck Studley, the last member of the Mortar MTT, took the helicopter back to the capital en route home to Panama.³⁰ “I thought that we’d be going to the jungle. Instead, it was dry, dusty, and flat terrain like central California. I really didn’t know what a coastal plain was like, but I was happy and excited to be there,” said SGT Beko, the team medic.³¹

“What wasn’t so good was discovering that we were going to live in the *El Bosque* area of the *cuartel*. In November, when the FMLN attacked, they drove a herd of cattle in front to conceal their movement and broke through the *Bosque*. It was a ‘huge attack’ that penetrated deep inside the *cuartel*. The FMLN controlled the camp for several hours. ESAF casualties were high . . . most were new conscripts that had not been issued weapons. There were twelve KIA [killed in action] in *El Bosque* alone. The *cuartel* ammo storage facility was destroyed as were numerous vehicles. Before they withdrew, the guerrillas killed several nurses and all the wounded in the hospital and set the building afire. The brigade was still doing clean up and rebuilding when we did the site survey. Security became my highest priority,” said SFC LeRoy Sena, the heavy weapons sergeant.³²

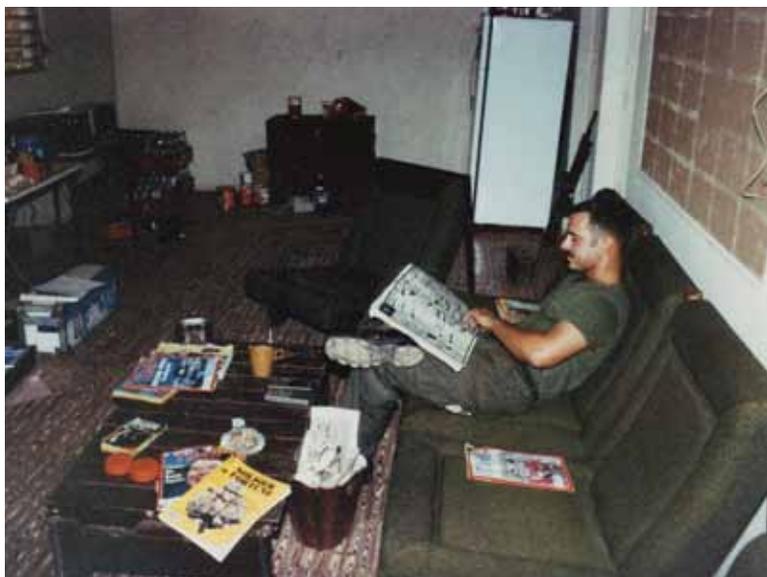
SFC Sena got serious about security shortly after ODA-7 arrived. The third week in January 1984, the 3rd Brigade *cuartel* was attacked again just as intelligence



Tortillas served as the soldiers’ plates for beans and rice, the staples of the Salvadoran diet, whether in the cuartel messhall or in the field. ODA-7 soldiers ate the same thing, but were served on plates in the messhall.



Master Sergeant Rodney Dutton, ODA-7 team sergeant, uses the AN/FRC-93 shortwave radio to make a MARS call to his family in Panama at night.



Staff Sergeant Loyd Palmer, senior radioman, relaxes in the team "lounge" area.



Visiting ESAF nurses and nurse's aides inoculate 3rd Brigade conscripts.

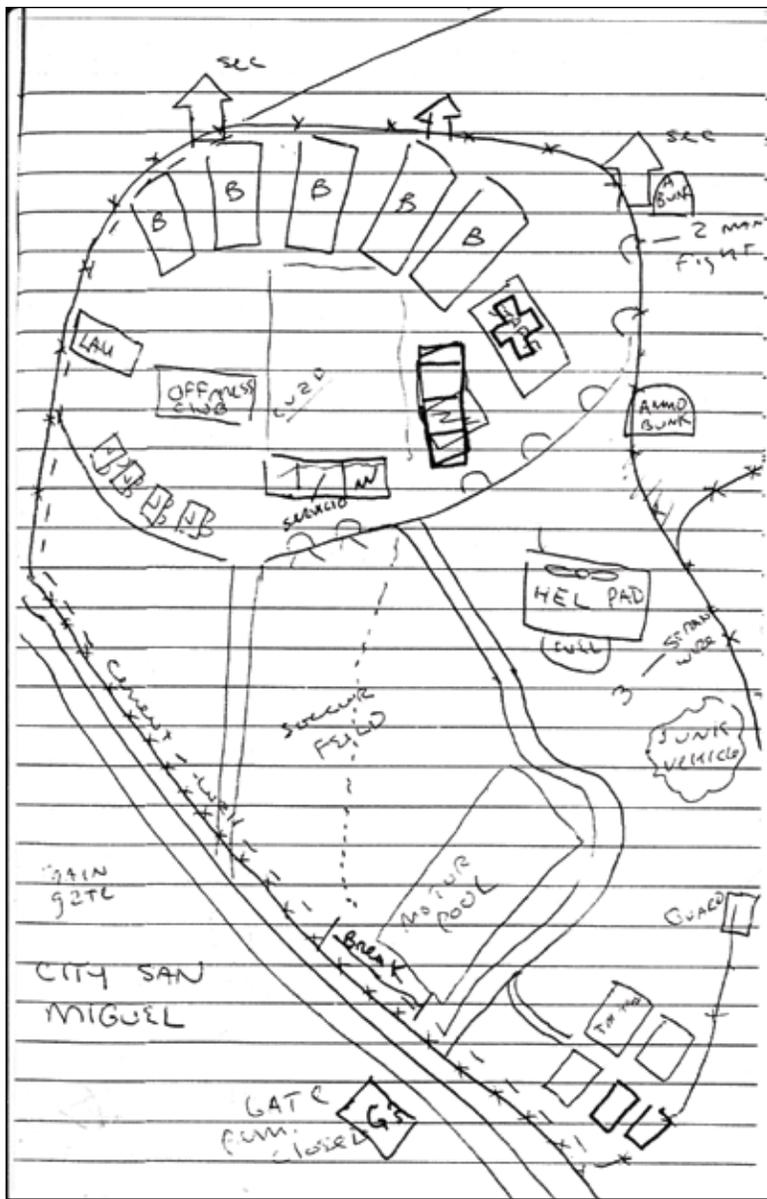
had indicated they would. The previously coordinated plan for the Americans to move up inside the *cuartel* inner perimeter when under attack proved foolhardy. CPT Leeker alerted the brigade tactical operations center using the telephone in the *Bosque* guardhouse that the SF team was coming up to the *cuartel*. But halfway up the interior road to the *cuartel* center, the well-armed ODA "bumped into" a *Cazador* element returning from patrol. The Special Forces team froze when they heard the weapon safeties of the unknown group coming off as the individual soldiers, or guerrillas, fanned out into assault formation. *Cazadores* patrolled with weapons loaded and safeties on. There was a lot of gunfire and outgoing tracer fire visible when SSG Moosey calmly spoke, "*Americanos. Fuerzas Especiales . . .*" and then repeated it in English.³³ After a long pause, a Salvadoran lieutenant stepped forward and asked "what the hell they were doing." CPT Leeker intervened and both groups proceeded into the upper *cuartel* perimeter.

After that close encounter, the rest of the night was spent sitting in a defensive ring outside the headquarters, watching the ESAF response to the attack. "Salvadoran soldiers, dispatched to reinforce the perimeter, would stop to fire their weapons while others manning sand-bagged bunkers just blasted away. Fortunately, most ESAF fire was directed outside in response to the initial guerrilla firing. New conscripts, though armed, simply sought shelter. The *soldados* did explain afterwards how they knew the guerrillas were about to attack—dogs would be barking all around the *cuartel*," said SGT Beko.³⁴ To avoid being accidentally killed by the ESAF during an attack, ODA-7 reached the conclusion that it would be safer to simply protect themselves in *El Bosque*.

The near fratricide with the Americans was not a major concern to Lieutenant Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, the former BIRI *Atlatl* commander who had just recently been assigned to command the 3rd Brigade. Since the aggressive leader had already had all the vegetation in and around the *cuartel* burned off, it was not difficult for CPT Leeker to broker an agreement that the SF billeting area



Lieutenant Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, former commander of BIRI *Atlatl* (in the lead), took command of the 3rd Brigade in December 1983. The third soldier in line was Monterrosa's body guard, Soldado Juan Antonio Gómez.³⁵



Original 3rd Brigade cuartel defense sketch made by Staff Sergeant Peter Moosey.

would be "off limits" to Salvadorans at night for "safety reasons." In the meantime, SFC Sena and SSG Moosey put together an escape and evasion plan with contingencies, and started making range cards for two-man defensive positions adjacent to their quarters.³⁶

A few days after the January 1984 attack, the 3rd Brigade soldiers were busy improving defensive positions. They had already repaired the fence and blocked most of the escape holes.³⁷ By then, the ODA-7 trainers, assisted by second enlistment veterans (*chucas*) from the original *Cazador* battalion *Cuscatlán* serving as *cabos* (corporals), had started the basic infantry training for the conscripts assigned to the 2nd *Cazador* battalion *Ponce*.³⁸ In the middle of the six-week Venezuelan POI (program of instruction) for the *Ponce*, ODA-7 narrowly missed being ambushed.

In early February 1984, three members of the team were to return to San Salvador for the monthly MILGP meeting. Administrative activities did not merit the use of a helicopter, so flights were arranged with a commercial



Ponce Battalion SSI



The ODA-7 "jeep" was made operational by cannibalizing several ESAF vehicles in the junk yard next to El Bosque. Sergeant Ken Beko (left) and Staff Sergeant Gary Davidson (right).



3rd Brigade *Cazadores* en route to training practice typical vehicle security measures.



Sergeant First Class LeRoy Sena demonstrates how to "direct lay" a 60mm mortar to the Salvadoran *Cazadores*.



Ft Benning OCS graduate, *Cadete José Arturo Rodríguez Martínez*, LIV (54), was one of the best assistant instructors.

air carrier operating from the San Miguel dirt airstrip. Cessna C-172 aircraft were used to shuttle passengers to and from San Salvador daily. The MILGP suggested this service. It had been used before by previous SF MTTs. “Lady Luck” smiled on ODA-7 that morning. Transportation problems delayed the arrival of everyone and the agreed upon cross-loading plan prevented MSG Dutton and SGT Beko from getting aboard the first aircraft. Just as the five-seater plane started to lift off the airstrip, there was an explosion (a land mine). The small plane slammed nose-first into the ground. Covered by MSG Dutton and SSG Palmer from the dispatch shack, SSG Moosey and two *Cazadores* fanned out to search the airstrip for the guerrillas and more mines. Having received a “thumbs up” from Moosey, CPT Leeker, who had accompanied the party to the airstrip, and SGT Beko—wearing his medical vest as usual—ran to the crash site. Though the two passengers in the rear were dead, the pilot’s son in the baggage area was only banged up. His father and the front right seat passenger were alive. Beko

applied tourniquets to their crushed legs to keep them alive. They had the airplane engine in their laps. Both survived, but lost their legs.³⁹ Going to San Salvador that day was no longer a priority. A helicopter that stopped to investigate agreed to carry the two worst casualties and a Volkswagen van was commandeered to take the rest of the injured to the San Miguel hospital. The disquieted SF team members returned to the *cuartel* to resume training *Cazador Ponce*. That ambush reinforced the need to keep force protection a high priority.

The constant fight with the brigade logistics officer for sufficient training ammunition prompted SFC Sena and SSG Moosey to begin searching the *cuartel* area for long-hidden caches. The ESAF leadership, always unsure if and/or when the United States would reduce or cut-off military aid, tended to hoard ammunition. When the two NCOs finally got inside the padlocked and guarded ammo bunker, they discovered vast quantities of 5.56 and 7.62mm. But, the banded cases were all stenciled “Training Ammunition.” After a Salvadoran lieutenant opened all the boxes, sure that they were mislabeled, they discovered that they had been hoarding thousands of rounds of blank ammunition in their ammo bunker; additional outdated ammo was being stored in the S-4 (logistics) warehouse virtually unguarded. That incident gave Sena and Moosey the opportunity to rummage around the rooms of the warehouse.⁴⁰

In a back room they found a treasure trove of M-1918A2 Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs), M-1919A6 Browning light machineguns, and innumerable cases of .30 cal ball, tracer, and armor-piercing ammunition. None of it was linked for machinegun usage, but there was an old hand-operated link-belt machine. After the *Cazador* training was complete, SFC Sena, SSG Moosey, and SGT Beko began inspecting, field-stripping, and cleaning all weapons—some thirty BARs and twenty A6s. When they were done “cannibalizing” them, they had about twenty BARs and fifteen A6 machineguns operable. The



3rd Brigade propaganda leaflet blaming the FMLN for destroying the Cessna C-172 that killed two and injured two passengers in February 1984.



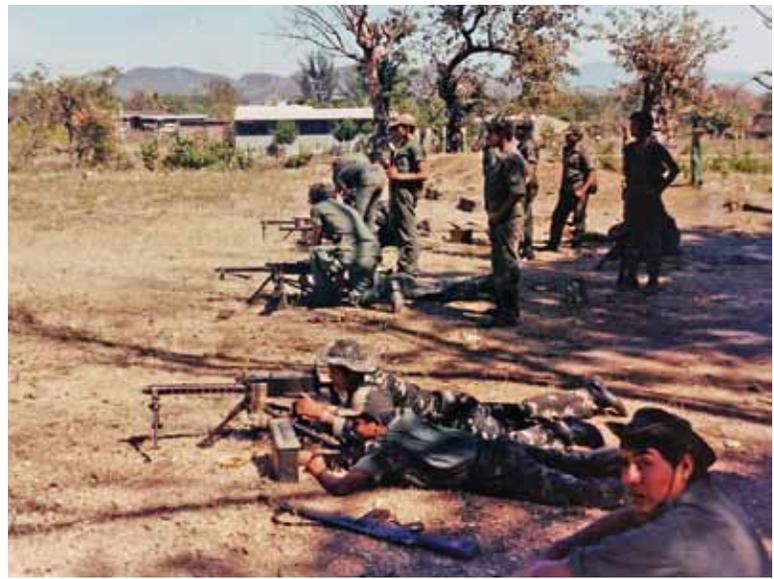
ESAF C-123 Provider carrying ballot boxes for the 25 March 1984 election was ambushed using a command-detonated mine on the same airstrip just weeks after the Cessna C-172 was wrecked.⁴¹



Left to right: Sergeant First Class LeRoy Sena, Staff Sergeant Davidson, Staff Sergeant Moosey, and SGT David Janicki reconditioning the newly-found Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs) outside their billets in El Bosque.

neighboring *Sección Dos*, the brigade S-2 intelligence reconnaissance element living in *El Bosque*, agreed to link the .30 cal ammunition into belts for the machine-guns in return for two BARs and an A6. LTC Monterrosa was pleased with the new firepower because it enabled him to recoup 7.62 M-60 machineguns emplaced at static guard positions near strategic security sites. Since the Americans had found, reconditioned, and trained elements of his Security Battalion on the BAR and A6, Monterrosa gave ODA-7 one of the A6s and a BAR for security in *El Bosque*. CPT Leeker's suggestion to temporarily place twelve A6s to defend the brigade's mountaintop radio repeater site near Perquin in northern Morazán had already worked wonders. Their interlocking fires had devastated a large FMLN attack force; the A6 could fire 600 rounds per minute.⁴²

Toward the end of February 1984, with the six-weeks tactical training of *Cazador Ponce* completed, LTC Mon-



ODA-7 trains Salvadoran 3rd Brigade soldiers on the M-1919A6 light machinegun outside San Miguel.

terrosa wanted to test his new unit in combat by launching an offensive in the Ciudad Barrios region with two *Cazador* battalions. His operation provided a welcome break for ODA-7. Everyone except SFC Sena and SGT Beko elected to return home to Panama for five days to visit their families and friends. Sena and Beko chose to stay at the *Bosque*. Two OPATT officers [Infantry Lieutenant Colonel (frocked Major) Lesley Smith and SF Captain Jae Hawksworth] had arrived and were billeted in the *cuartel*.⁴³

It was quiet and peaceful until the fourth night (3 March) when "we were awakened by the 'thump-thump' sound of mortar rounds being dropped into the tubes, followed shortly thereafter by the exploding shells that were hitting in the upper part of the *cuartel*. I grabbed my weapons and LBE [load bearing equipment] and climbed up on the roof for better observation. Sergeant Beko, wearing his medical vest, took up a defensive position just below me in the inner courtyard of our building. When the mortar fire lifted, a ground assault



Sergeant David Janicki (left) and Sergeant First Class LeRoy Sena (right) checked the 3rd Brigade Security Battalion's M-1919A6 machineguns nightly.



Ponce Cazador Battalion passes in review after completing six-weeks of training by ODA-7.



In November 1983, a 3rd Brigade Cazador was badly mauled by a 600-man FMLN force in the mountains near Ciudad Barrios about 40 km NNW of San Miguel and 30 km WNW of San Francisco de Gotera. In February 1984, the Cuscatlán Cazador battalion that "collapsed" under heavy FMLN pressure was stopped by the physical intervention of LTC Domingo Monterrosa.

began, supported by snipers in a building opposite the main gate. Though we weren't receiving any fire in the *Bosque*, I was never able to reach Colonel Smith and Captain Hawksworth in the *cuartel* by telephone. For a few hours, we watched the small arms tracer fire going in and coming out of the *cuartel*. Here we were, four Americans, split-up, in a brigade-sized camp under attack [estimated 500-man force], being guarded by a reinforced platoon of ESAF. We were lucky. Repeated attempts to penetrate the *cuartel* failed, but that made me get serious about defensive measures," said SFC Sena, the Vietnam SOG [Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (MACV)–Special Operations Group] veteran. "When Colonel Stringham arrived the next morning, he ordered Smith and Hawksworth into San Salvador until the rest of ODA-7 returned from Panama."⁴⁴

Unbeknownst to Sena and Beko, the FMLN attack on the *cuartel* was a blocking action while another element dropped the Urbina Bridge in San Miguel and their major assault force mauled LTC Monterrosa's leading *Cazador* battalion, *Cuscatlán*. A well-armed, 600-man guerrilla force simply outgunned and then overwhelmed the lightly armed, widely dispersed, understrength 250-man ESAF battalion. Only Monterrosa's physical, armed intervention enabled him to regain control of the shattered units. An airborne company was dispatched to help disperse the enemy forces. After reorganizing the two *Cazador* battalions to fight as one element, doubling his firepower, Monterrosa was able to counterattack and achieve a measure of success.⁴⁵ The valiant Salvadoran commander learned the hard way that the *Cazador* battalions were "a creation of expedience." Afterward he always operated with combined *Cazador* battalions.⁴⁶

The *Cuscatlán Cazadores* who had not performed well at Ciudad Barrios and the *Cuscatlán iguaneros* who had



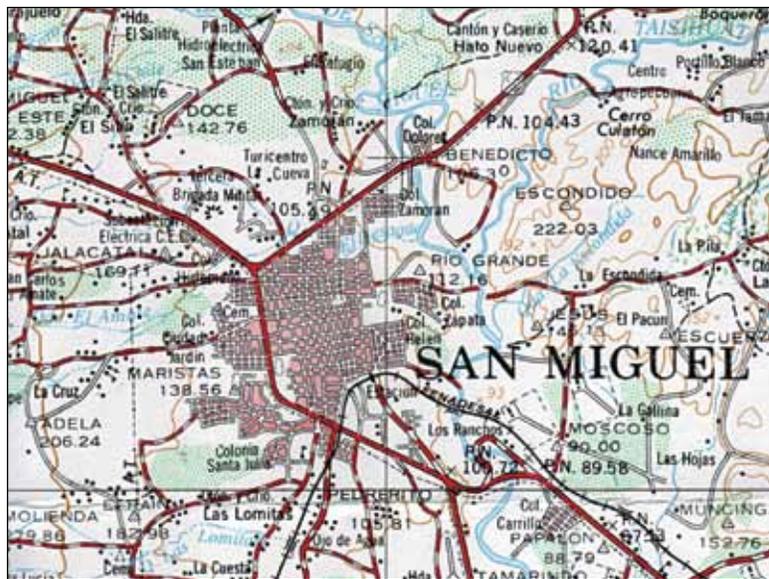
The Urbina Bridge in San Miguel was one of the last Lempa River bridges collapsed by the FMLN.

been AWOL (absent without leave) for the mission had their heads shaved and uniforms torn to ribbons. Then they were publicly humiliated by being put through a physical "hell week" and treated like "outcasts" (*castigados*). Weak officers were sent away in disgrace.⁴⁷ "Captain Leeker and I read about the San Miguel attacks in the *Miami News* on our way back to El Salvador. The story was based on interviews with the guerrillas," recalled SSG Moosey.⁴⁸ Things were definitely heating up as the FMLN tried to disrupt the presidential election slated for 25 March.

Instead of starting to train the newly-forming third *Cazador* battalion, *Leon*, when they returned from Panama, ODA-7 first dealt with a primary weapon rearmament for *Ponce*. M-16 rifles had arrived to replace the battalion's old 7.62mm Heckler and Koch (H&K) G3 rifles. The *Ponce Cazadores* were already scheduled to guard election sites in the department. ODA-7 would ensure that the soldiers were proficient with their new weaponry before deployment. "During that train-up, we encountered so many booby traps and personnel mines on the Hato Nuevo range, clearing the range before training became a daily prerequisite. Guerrillas were actually spending



Sergeant Kenneth Beko, wearing ear protectors, during M-16 training for the Ponce Cazadores prior to the 25 March 1984 election.



San Miguel as shown on 1/100,000 topographical map used by ODA-7 in El Salvador.



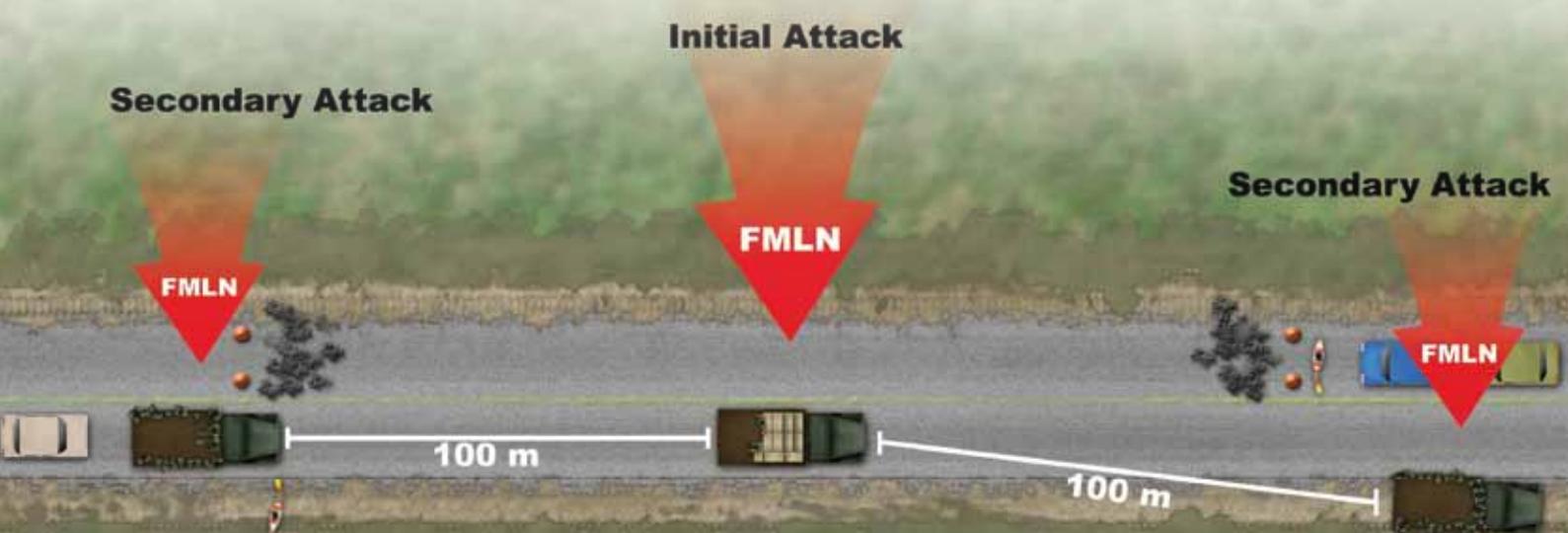
Left to right: Sergeant David Janicki, Staff Sergeant Peter Moosey, and Sergeant Kenneth Beko at an FMLN campsite whose occupants received an early "wake up call" from a Cazador range clearing patrol.

the night in the arroyos surrounding the site. We found old campfires and actually surprised a few that overslept one morning. They abandoned everything. One day a group of four sat and watched us—out of small arms range, of course," said SSG Moosey.⁴⁹ In exchange for the M-16s, the *Estado Mayor* wanted all the H&K G3 rifles collected and carried back to San Salvador.

By the time everything was arranged for the shipment of weapons, the operation was compromised.⁵⁰ Less than ten miles from San Miguel, just after they entered the San Vicente department, the three-truck convoy encountered a highway repair team controlling traffic to a single lane area. Traffic controllers with flags limited vehicle access through the one-lane zone, alternating traffic flow from each side. The ambush was well coordinated and simply executed. The lead guard truck cleared the far road guard (over 100 meters) and pulled over to wait while traffic accumulated. The truck carrying the several hundred G3 rifles was waved into the one-lane construction area (the ambush "kill zone"). It was allowed to get halfway between the lead and trail guard trucks

when guerrillas sprang out of hiding and began firing. ESAF LT Armando Nuñez Franco, the driver, and the rifle guards in the back of his truck were killed. That firing triggered simultaneous assaults on the lead and trail guard vehicles. Within minutes, thirty *Cazadores* were dead and the guerrilla force had fled in the truck carrying the G3 rifles. Truck and automobile drivers on both ends of the "road construction" watched in amazement.⁵¹ The "*Semana Santa Ambuscade*" was another black day for the 3rd Brigade. The FMLN was determined to discredit the American-trained ESAF and Salvadoran government before the election. Daily sniping and chance contacts became almost routine. The question was merely when they would attack the *cuartel* again.

Efforts to improve security around the SF billets in *El Bosque* were already underway. Being located in the lower, southerly section of the *cuartel*, it was imperative to have an elevated vantage point to observe the major avenues of approach and to adjust their defenses based



- 1 SF Team Quarters
- 2 Soldier Insurance Office
- 3 Humanitarian MTT
- 4 ESAF Maintenance Yard
- 5 Gas Pumps
- 6 *El Bosque* Gate and Guard House
- 7 To Base
- 8 To *Sección Dos*
- 9 To Banana Grove and Wrecked Vehicles
- 10 To Open Field
- 11 Inter-American Highway

- 1 CPT Leeker and SSG Palmer
- 2 MSG Dutton
- 3 SGT Beko
- 4 SFC Sena and SSG Moosey
- 5 SFC Reyes

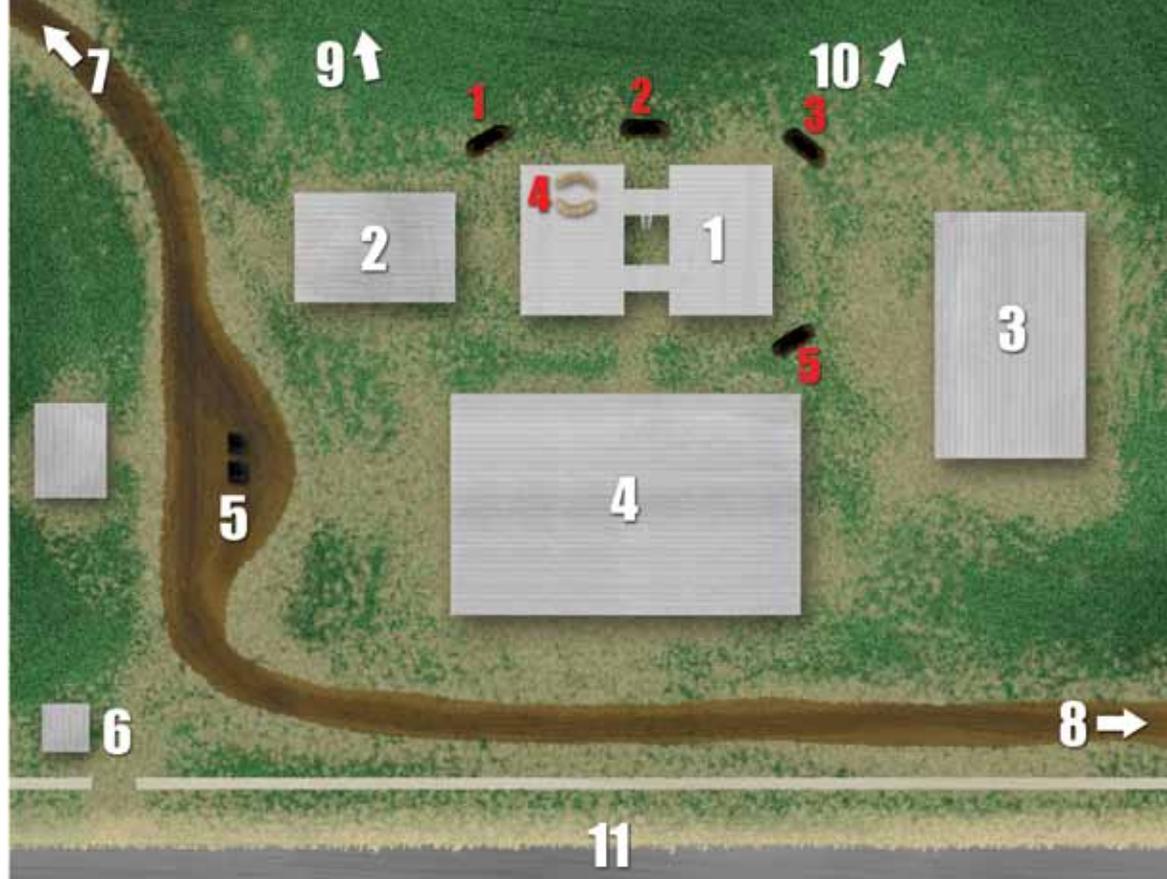


Diagram of ODA-7 defensive positions within El Bosque.

on directions of attack. Previous attacks in January and March 1984 had made this obvious. To the rooftop they went. SFC Sena and SSG Moosey started construction of a two-man position, bringing sandbags up two at a time, until they had two small sausage-shaped walls about three sandbags high and four and a half feet wide. It was initially to be an OP (observation post) for CPT Leeker and a radioman.⁵² When COL Stringham came to explain that an OPATT team would replace ODA-7, he announced that the SF team would remain at San Miguel

(in reduced numbers) through the election. The coming “election watch” would require the OPATT to be augmented for the mission. Sergeants Palmer, Davidson, and Janicki, though going back to Panama, would be returning to serve as election observers. And the increased FMLN threat dictated having “real infantry fighting positions around the *Bosque* billets of the Americans,” said Team Sergeant Rodney Dutton, a former Vietnam infantryman. “Hasty individual prone shelters were not going to cut it, despite the rock-hard ground.”⁵³

“I wanted infantry . . . Ranger fighting positions



Two Salvadoran soldiers help Sergeant First Class Jorge Reyes (second from right) and Sergeant Kenneth Beko (far right) carry sandbags up to the rooftop defensive position.



The primary digging tool for the ground defensive positions was the U.S. Army folding entrenching tool. The rock-hard dirt was used to fill the sandbag barriers in front of each position.

Phase 1: At approximately 9:00 P.M., 25 March, occupants of a truck on the Pan-American highway do a “drive-by,” firing their weapons at the main gate of the *cuartel*.

Phase 2: The SF soldiers hear the distinctive “whump, whump” of mortars followed by explosions in the *cuartel*. The generators are immediately shut off and the *cuartel* is plunged into total darkness.

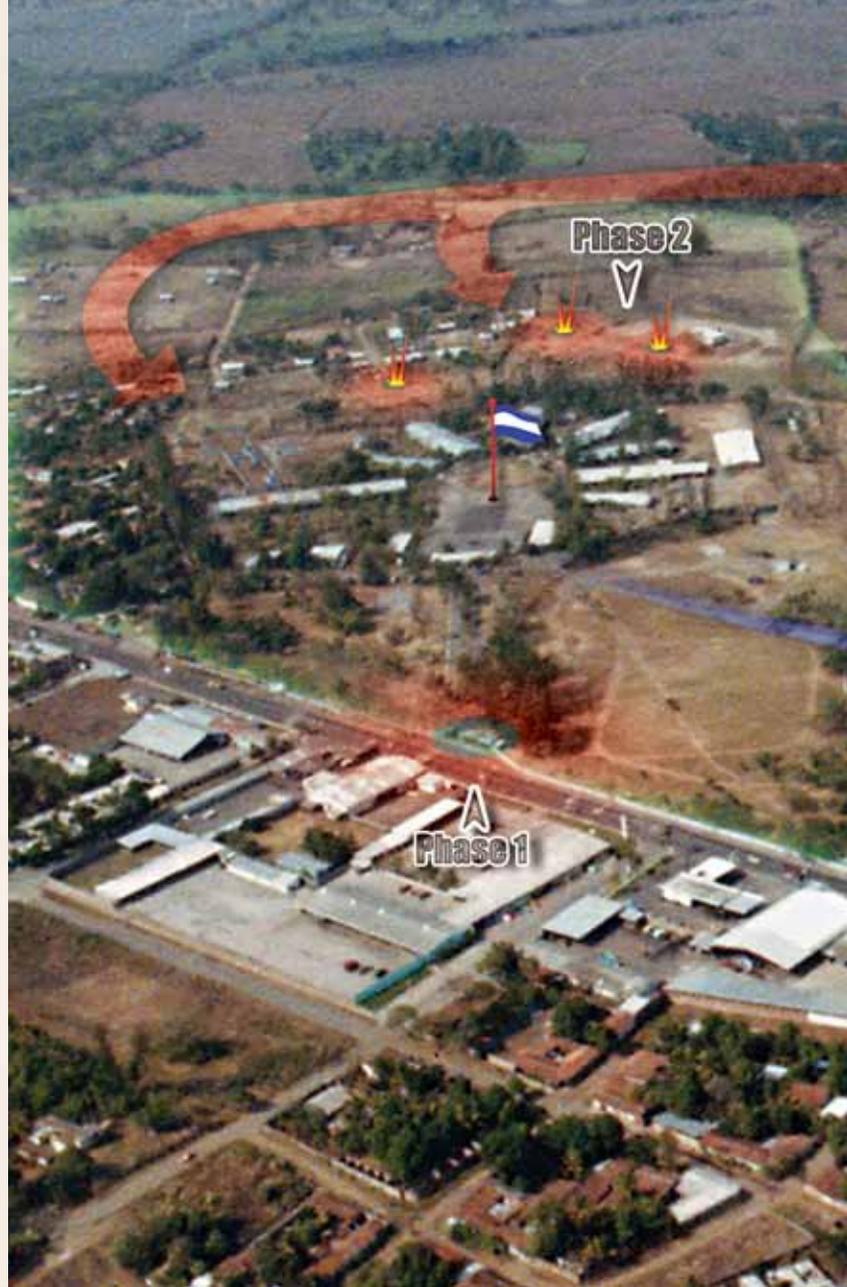
Phase 3: Guerrillas begin mass assault toward the SF position only to meet SSG Moosey’s machinegun fire. Having disrupted the enemy’s main attack, the SF soldiers begin receiving heavy small arms fire from all directions.

Phase 4: FMLN attempt to infiltrate through the dry streambed. They are decimated in series by “Claymore” mines, A6 machinegun, and BAR fire from the *Sección Dos* defenders.

Phase 5: Approximately eight guerrillas climb onto the flat roof of the tractor dealership some fifty meters to the rear of the SF rooftop position. SFC Sena engages them with semi-automatic fire.

Phase 6: An armored vehicle departs the *cuartel*, stops to refuel in the *El Bosque* area, then continues on into the field adjacent to the dry streambed. The crew fires a single round from the .50 cal machinegun before it jams. Ineffective and exposed to enemy fire, the armored vehicle reverses and retreats back to the *cuartel*.

Phase 7: AC-130 overhead spots a convoy of three trucks heading toward the *cuartel* through the northern field. The aircrew reports that they are carrying heavy machineguns. SFC Sena shifts the A6 fire to engage the new threat. When he finishes, only small fires caused by his tracers mark their destruction.



around the *Bosque* facility . . . ideally DePuy bunkers. The team had to have several positions in order to have a flexible defense. We also had a medical MTT (two NCO medics) working in the *cuartel*. There would be a lot of Americans on site during the election. I told Colonel Monterrosa that the SF team needed help ‘digging in’ and he sent half a platoon the next day. ESAF infantry platoons had two *secciones* of troops, where ours had three rifle squads. When the positions were done, I inspected them,” said Stringham.⁵⁴

“The positions were dug with U.S. Army folding entrenching tools. The Salvadorans had no picks or

The Vietnam-era AN/PVS-2 night observation device (NOD) was intended to be rifle mounted. The weight and ambient light needed to make the “Starlight Scope” effective limited its use by the ESAF. In a fixed defensive position it worked well for ODA-7.



D-handle shovels in the *cuartel*. Between the rock-hard ground (dry season) and the tree roots, it was a chore getting down four plus feet. We used the dirt to fill sandbags to serve as berms,” said SFC Sena.⁵⁵ He had already convinced CPT Leeker and MSG Dutton that the single M-1919A6 machinegun should be up on the roof with its primary fields of fire, the open field to the east and the dry streambed to the south (FMLN primary avenues of approach in November 1983 and on 3 March 1984, respectively). Leeker kept their BAR with a box of magazines on the ground.⁵⁶ Another chance discovery in the brigade supply warehouse further enhanced the American defensive measures.

“While I was in the brigade S-4 (logistics) shop, I spotted two U.S. Army AN/PVS-2s, Vietnam-era night observation devices (NODs) called ‘Starlight Scopes,’ gathering dust on a shelf. They were brand new and the batteries were good. None of the Salvadorans knew how to use them. They had no interest in them; the second-generation NODs were heavy, bulky, and had poor resolution. Captain Leeker got permission from

Secondary Attack

The Fight for *El Bosque*



Lieutenant Colonel Monterrosa to borrow them. Now, we were able to see what was going on at night,” said SSG Moosey.⁵⁷ Since almost all 3rd Brigade elements were being dispatched to guard voting sites in Morazán and San Miguel departments, *Cazador* training was suspended. Nationwide, commercial businesses were closed on election day.

The San Miguel OPATT officers, team leader LTC Smith, and his training officer, CPT Hawksworth (after being released from chicken pox quarantine), worked in the *cuartel* during the election watch. Sergeants Palmer and Janicki, who had come back from Panama, joined them in the San Miguel *cuartel*, alternating work shifts. SFC Davidson was sent to San Vicente to augment that OPATT team. The rest of ODA-7 stayed in the *Bosque* and pulled local security; two armed men on guard duty at all times through the election period. SFC Sena and SSG Moosey helped *Sección Dos* construct field-expedient “Claymore” mines to bolster their defense. Metal ammo cans were filled with C3 plastic explosive and machinegun ammo belt links. They used an old car battery to initiate them.⁵⁸

After dinner Sunday night, 25 March, CPT Leeker relaxed the *El Bosque* crew’s alert status so the men could take showers and enjoy a slightly cool beer after the *cuartel* generators started up at sundown. Since it was still hot, most men stripped down to shorts and shower sandals before settling in for the evening. However, they would get no rest that night.⁵⁹

About 9:00 P.M., a staccato of small arms fire erupted as occupants in a truck on the Inter-American highway fired their weapons at the main gate of the *cuartel*. “Drive-by” shootings by FMLN mobile teams were common harassment, but this volley was immediately followed by telltale mortar “whump, whump” launching sounds and explosions in the *cuartel*. The generators were immediately shut off and the *cuartel* was plunged into total darkness. All seven SF soldiers in the *Bosque* knew that a major attack was imminent and that they were an ancillary part of the brigade’s defense plan.⁶⁰

They hurriedly pulled on combat boots, grabbed weapons, LBE, and ammunition bags, and began moving to their defensive positions. SFC Sena scrambled up

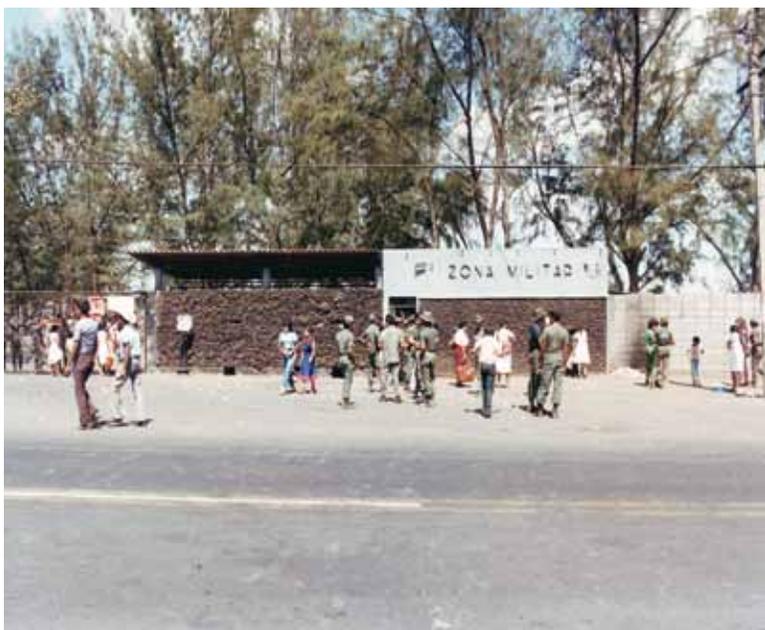


Typical scene of voters waiting in line to vote in the national elections; Christian Democrat José Napoleon Duarte was the first popularly elected president in El Salvador's history.

the ladder to the rooftop position with SSG Moosey, carrying extra ammunition boxes, close behind. The cacophony of barking dogs all around had grown louder as SFC Reyes jumped into his hole facing the walled fence along the Inter-American highway. SGT Beko checked his emergency treatment bay as he donned his medical vest. Then, he moved outside and dropped into his position at the corner of the building to the left of Reyes. Beko quickly turned on his AN/PVS-2 and began to sweep the area. MSG Dutton got

into his hole as CPT Leeker and SSG Loyd Palmer, senior radioman off-shift from election watch duties in the *cuartel*, manned theirs. Leeker established communications with LTC Monterrosa. As Palmer began searching the darkness with the other NOD, the SF captain loaded the BAR. That's when the action started.⁶¹

"Staff Sergeant Moosey and I had no sooner gotten into the rooftop position when it seemed like the entire field directly to our east was suddenly alive with hundreds of guerrillas as they rose up almost simultaneously from the darkened ground. Then they began charging towards us in a massive wave," said SFC Sena. "I warned Captain Leeker as I pointed them out to Pete on the A6 machinegun and yelled, 'Shoot! Shoot! The field is full



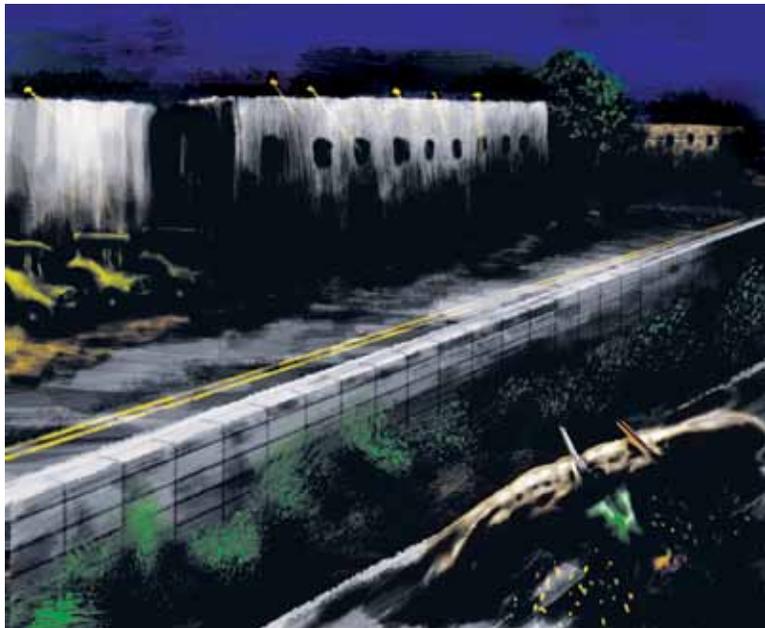
3rd Brigade *cuartel* front gate adjacent to the Inter-American highway. The FMLN "drive-by" shooting at this gate started the 25 March 1984 attack on the 3rd Brigade *cuartel*.

of them!' When his tracers began to illuminate the guerrillas, Moosey poured it into them with the A6. But, the machinegun fire from us began to draw enemy fire from everywhere . . . 360 degrees. Unknowingly, we had disrupted the main attack and were attracting heavy small arms fire. Some of it was coming from the *cuartel*. I was changing ammo boxes like crazy and feeding the gun (the ammo boxes were missing the belt feeder shelf) while the two of us tried to keep our heads down," said Sena.⁶² CPT Leeker requested mortar illumination from the Salvadorans.⁶³

"Then all hell broke loose to the south where the *Sección Dos* manned the perimeter adjacent to the dry streambed, the favorite FMLN attack route," remembered SSG Moosey.⁶⁴ We heard loud explosive 'wham, wham, wham' reports as the homemade 'Claymore' mines were fired by the *Sección Dos* defenders, then the 'chug-chugging' of the BARs kicking in, and finally, the extended 'baruppppp' of the A6 light machinegun firing that long belt. Sena and I had helped them to position their 'Claymores' and interlock their A6 and BAR fires. They also followed our advice to whitewash the slanted concrete erosion wall under the bridge on the far side of the streambed. When that white space turned black (because it was filled with massing enemy infiltrators), they were told to fire the 'Claymores' and then cut loose with everything they had," said Moosey. "They did exactly that and the effect was devastating."⁶⁵ The two SF soldiers had no opportunity to cheer as the FMLN began zeroing in on the rooftop machinegun position.

"Moosey, in his boxers, was bitching about the expended brass and ammo links eating into him, when it got real interesting. About eight guerrillas managed to get onto the flat roof of the tractor dealership some fifty meters to our rear. They were determined to remove the major obstacle thwarting their attack. Pete, intently firing the A6, didn't hear the rounds pinging off the roof behind him. I did. Maybe they were hitting closer to me. I stopped balancing the ammo belt to feed the gun and crawled over him to get to our rifles [an M-1 Garand and an H&K G3] leaning against the rear sandbag wall. It was really tight between those two small walls of sandbags. The two of us traded leg kicks as I scooted from left to right to engage those Gs [guerrillas] with semi-automatic fire. It took about fifteen minutes, expending several magazines per gun, before I eliminated that threat. The shooters would pop up from behind a parapet, fire several shots and then drop down. It took a while to figure out their routine. My 'maneuvering' from left to right and right to left was really me clambering back and forth overtop of Pete who was firing the machinegun in the opposite direction," chuckled Sena.⁶⁶

Though the ODA was disrupting the main attack, it did not dissuade the ESAF defenders in the *cuartel*, two hundred meters to the northwest, from firing in the direction of the assaulting FMLN guerrillas. Consequently, a large portion of this fire was inadvertently directed towards the *Bosque*. The low ground in *El Bosque* provided scant



Artist rendition of Sergeant First Class LeRoy Sena engaging snipers on the rooftops of buildings along the Inter-American Highway to the west while Staff Sergeant Peter Moosey fires into the banana grove where the ESAF junk vehicles had been dumped.

protection from “friendly fire” coming from the *cuartel* 200 meters to the north. The several 81mm mortar illumination rounds fired by the BIRI *Arce* located in San Miguel proper were insufficient. But, ODA-7 got some “top cover,” courtesy of the U.S. Air Force.

About 11:00 P.M., a U.S. Air Force AC-130 from Howard Air Force Base, Panama, arrived overhead. These aircraft began flying intelligence support missions over El Salvador after General Paul F. Gorman became the Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Southern Command. The aircraft’s ability to discern enemy personnel groupings and to illuminate their exact locations with infrared light beams proved quite helpful to ODA-7 on the ground. Since the aircrew was unfamiliar with the layout of the *cuartel*, it was up to CPT Leeker, talking with them on the radio, to focus their search efforts. Then Sergeants Beko and Palmer, scanning with the NODs, could direct the A6 machinegun fire appropriately because they could see the AC-130 infrared marking beams. Beko and Palmer were the spotters for the rooftop machinegunners, somewhat masked by the trees. The two sergeants on the ground with NODs adjusted direction and range of the .30 cal tracer rounds according to the trajectory and ground impact points.⁶⁷ But by midnight, the guerrillas had gotten so close to the perimeter that the AC-130 crew could no longer distinguish friendly from enemy. It was at that point that two humorous incidents occurred.

First, CPT Leeker, concerned about their poor observation to the north, called to Palmer for a report about the guerrillas struggling to advance from that direction. After sweeping that sector with his NOD, Palmer called back in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear, “They’re all wearing plaid shirts with the top button buttoned!” All of the seven Special Forces troopers erupted in riotous laughter, doubtlessly puzzling their FMLN attackers. A few days earlier the team had received a



Strict rules of engagement prevented use of the AC-130 aircraft weapon systems. The electronic sensors could be used to detect enemy activity. Reports of enemy locations were radioed to Captain Craig Leeker on the ground. Only the Salvadoran Air Force could engage the FMLN.

warning from the MILGP in San Salvador indicating that an FMLN assassin targeting Americans had been sent to the San Miguel area. The “hit man” was known to wear plaid shirts with the top button buttoned.⁶⁸ Obviously, the seven Americans were being attacked by several hundred assassins at the moment.

The second thing to happen was comical and wildly absurd, especially considering that it occurred in the middle of the fight. SSG Moosey, while firing his A6 machinegun, was quite taken aback when he caught sight of a vehicle lumbering down the road from the *cuartel* with a single headlight burning. As it got closer, he realized that it was an armored tracked vehicle, and through the beam of the headlight, he could see enemy small arms fire sparking as it ricocheted off the body. It was a moving bullet magnet. Still, on it lumbered down into the *Bosque* area and stopped alongside the ODA-7 billets. Then, with its engine running and headlight burning, the top hatch opened up, and the vehicle commander began shouting, ‘*Gasolinero! Gasolinero!*’ to get the fuel pump unlocked. Then, in the midst of incoming small arms fire, ‘Lo and behold,’ the *gasolinero* appeared from out of the dark to explain that the pump would not operate without electricity. With that the commander banged on driver’s hatch to explain the problem. Then, seemingly oblivious to the ongoing fight, the three Salvadoran soldiers proceeded to manually pump fuel into the idling armored vehicle. I was dumbstruck,” said Moosey. “But, that’s not all.”⁶⁹

“When the tank was full, the two crewmen climbed inside, closed their hatches, and with their headlight burning, clanked past Sergeant First Class Reyes and *Sección Dos* into the open field, adjacent to the dry streambed, where the main attack had started. As the vehicle lumbered into the field, you could hear the small arms fire pinging off and watch the tracers ricocheting



The homemade mini-armored vehicle was a "bullet magnet," that valiantly charged into the mouth of the FMLN, fired once, and beat a hasty, ignoble retreat to safety.

into the air. Then, the armored vehicle stopped and fired its .50 cal shielded machinegun. One round erupted and then, silence . . . the headspace and timing had not been adjusted on the heavy gun. The silence lasted about five seconds before every FMLN in the area began firing at the armored car silhouetted by its single headlight. You could hear gears grinding as the driver tried to reverse and escape. Fearing that the armored vehicle would be 'bum rushed' by the FMLN nearby, I put a steady stream of A6 fire behind it while Sena did the same in front with his G3. Then, back they came to the *Bosque* trailing small arms fire. They lumbered past us, up the road, and back into the *base*," said Moosey. "It was so surreal that we questioned whether it actually happened afterwards. But it did, because three days later we set the headspace and timing on that .50 cal. and the crew thanked us for saving their butts."⁷⁰

The M-1919A6 had been fired so much that it was becoming sluggish. The barrel was overheated and the headspace had to be adjusted. SFC Sena and SSG Moosey did not have a spare barrel. Motor oil was poured onto the bolt and barrel extension to lubricate it enough to remove the short flash hider to adjust the headspace—backing the barrel off a few clicks. The flash hider and barrel were red hot. While Moosey was delicately doing this with his tee shirt wrapped around an adjustable wrench, Sena returned fire with the rifles, tossed empty ammo boxes off the roof, accepted more ammo and water from MSG Dutton, and swept spent shell casings and belt links on his buddies below. As soon as Moosey finished the adjustment, Sena began reloading the hot machinegun.⁷¹ That was when CPT Leeker detected another major threat approaching the open field.

The AC-130 had spotted three trucks moving in convoy from San Miguel. The aircrew reported that the trucks were bringing heavy machineguns. CPT Leeker was no sooner alerted than he spotted a convoy of three trucks, headlights burning, heading east towards the *cuartel* just approaching the edge of the open field. Sena and Moosey, intently working on the A6, had not noticed the vehicles coming. Leeker shouted the type of threat and direction to the two men on the roof. "Shoot them! Shoot them! Take them out!" he yelled up.⁷² SFC Sena, behind the machinegun, waved Moosey aside, swung the barrel and engaged the lead five-ton truck with a steady stream of tracer fire. First, one headlight was knocked out, then the other, as Sena raked the first truck with fire. Amazingly, the other two trucks kept their headlights on. When Sena extended the trajectory of his fire to arc a stream of tracer bullets into the other two trucks, the rest of the detachment and *Sección Dos* joined in. "On the roof I felt the shock wave when the BAR and the G3s cut loose. A huge dust cloud rose up in front of the team positions," recalled SSG Moosey.⁷³ (Note: Burnout for .30 cal tracer rounds was about 400 meters.) Only small fires started by the tracers lingered to mark the devastation. Movement and firing around the trucks had ceased. From that point on, there was only sporadic small arms fire. That steadily diminished, ending as the dawn approached.⁷⁴

That was fortunate because the A6 machinegun barrel was "shot." Its well-directed firepower had been instrumental in the disruption and defeat of several hundred guerrillas.⁷⁵ While protecting themselves, the seven Special Forces soldiers of ODA-7 acquitted themselves well. LTC Monterrosa came down to the *Bosque* shortly after daybreak to "look around" as two ESAF A-37s swept overhead searching for the withdrawing FMLN columns. When the Salvadoran commander saw the piles of machinegun belt links and spent brass below the rooftop position, he said to CPT Leeker with a grin, "So, my guys got a little help last night," and left.⁷⁶

The Salvadoran presidential election had taken place as scheduled on 25 March 1984. But, it would be the 6 May 1984 runoff that elected José Napoleon Duarte president.⁷⁷ When the American ambassador, Thomas Pickering, visited San Miguel on Monday, 26 March, ODA-7 was maintaining a very low profile while it prepared to start training the conscripts of the third *Cazador* battalion, *Leon*, the next day.⁷⁸ The failed attack on San Miguel and the inability of the FMLN to disrupt the election



The WWII-era M-1919A6 light machinegun was capable of firing 600 rounds of .30 cal ammunition per minute.



Cazador León battalion shoulder patch



Christian Democrat presidential candidate José Napoleon Duarte



ARENA presidential candidate Roberto D'Aubuisson

were major setbacks after months of dominating the battlefield in Morazán and San Miguel. This was especially notable since the *cuartel* was being guarded by little more than a company on 25–26 March 1984. Most significantly, when the ODA-7 SUTT left San Miguel on 27 April 1984, that marked the finale for Special Forces MTT training of ESAF elements in country.⁷⁹

Contrary to what many Special Forces soldiers in Panama believed following the return of ODA-7, their defensive actions at *El Bosque* had no bearing on the termination of MTTs to El Salvador. By early 1984, the

FMLN newspaper photos were "doctored" to highlight guerrilla atrocities and win popular support for the government of El Salvador.

ESTE ES EL QUE ASESINA, ROBA, DESTRUYE Y SECUESTRA A TU FAMILIA.



SACALO DE TU COMUNIDAD
Denuncia donde se esconde
Tu familia tiene Derecho a estar Unida

expanded ESAF had been trained using Special Forces MTTs and units. Having helped the Salvadoran military survive the desperation period, the MILGP shifted its approach to sustain that momentum. COL Stringham had expanded the OPATT program to stabilize support and institute planning at the brigades as well as in the *Estado Mayor* staff sections. With the "force cap" in effect, this new approach allowed him to bring humanitarian (medical) and logistics support teams, which were critical to sustainment.⁸⁰ It was the beginning of a new MILGP military training philosophy designed to assist the Salvadoran Armed Forces to better wage their fight against insurgency. The "KISS" principle had been expanded and modified to "KISSSS" or "Keep It Simple, Sustainable, Small, and Salvadoran."⁸¹

This article revealed many overlooked aspects associated with expanding and sustaining a military built and rebuilt almost annually with conscripted citizens. While battalion names did not change, the personnel turnover in the units was almost 90 percent every year. U.S.-trained units had short lives, especially after 1984, yet the liberal U.S. and international media continued to blame American training for human rights abuses and to hold the MILGP and U.S. Embassy in San Salvador responsible.⁸² Since that label (U.S.-trained unit) was never refuted nor eliminated, it was perpetuated in revisionist histories and is regularly used by media today to "explain" debacles by indigenous defense and police forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Uncertainty associated with annual U.S. military aid levels naturally caused the ESAF to hoard arms, ammunition, and supplies to cover lean years.⁸³ Resourceful SF NCOs at San Miguel doubled the firepower of LTC Monterrosa's 3rd Brigade by refurbishing WWII-vintage .30 cal BARs and M-1919A6 machine-guns. They also capitalized on unused "Starlight scopes" to spot massing enemy forces on a non-illuminated battlefield. ODA-7, while defending themselves, put a serious dent in FMLN ranks around San Miguel in 1984⁸⁴. Force protection cannot be over-emphasized when typical Special Forces ODAs of seven to ten stalwarts are regularly working alone in "Indian Country" worldwide. 7th SFG operational detachments did return to El Salvador in 1989, as Deployments for Training, but that practice ended with the November 1989 Offensive. ♣



U.S. government support of El Salvador during its thirteen-year counterinsurgency war was not popular on university and college campuses in America as shown by these button pins.

Endnotes

- 1 Colonel John D. Waghelstein, "El Salvador: Observations and Experiences in Counterinsurgency," paper for U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1985, Annex F, F-1, F-2. Colonel Joseph Stringham, the former 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger commander, served two years in Vietnam with Special Forces from 1963–1965 [XO ODA 725, Montagnard CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group), Detachment Commander, ODA 301, and III Corps Mike Force] before serving a third tour with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade (Separate).
- 2 Iván C. Montecinos, *NO HAY GUERRA QUE DURE CIEN AÑOS. . . : El Salvador 1979–1992* (San Salvador: Algier's Impresores, 1993), 149, hereafter Montecinos, *NO HAY GUERRA*.
- 3 David E. Spencer, *From Vietnam to El Salvador: The Saga of the FMLN Sappers and Other Guerrilla Special Forces in Latin America* (Westport, CN: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 88–90. Spencer's account, based on Greg Walker, "Sapper Attack!" *Behind the Lines*, July/August 1993, and Greg Walker, "Blue Badges of Honor," *Soldier of Fortune*, February 1992, is quite inaccurate. His date of 6 May 1984 is totally incorrect. The USAF aircraft overhead on 25–26 March 1984 was an AC-130, not an EC-130. ODA-7 did not have "some M-60 machine guns and M-16/M203 grenade launchers." And, the SF soldiers did not urinate on their guns "to cool them down." Author, based on numerous interviews with ODA-7 team members.
- 4 Sergeant Major (Retired) Peter J. Moosey, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 3 April 2007, Colorado Springs, CO, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Captain Rodger Kenneth Garrett (formerly Sergeant Kenneth Rodger Beko), interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 19 May 2007, Tierra Verde, FL, digital recording,
- 5 Garrett interview, 19 May 2007.
- 6 "At our first meeting, Ambassador Pickering told me that if I allowed the number of military trainers to exceed the 55-man limit, I would be 'canned.' We counted heads every day and I had to make a formal report of compliance to the ambassador or deputy chief of mission every Friday afternoon at 1700," recalled Stringham. Brigadier General (Retired) Joseph S. Stringham III, notes to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 June 2007, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Stringham notes, 21 June 2007; Command Sergeant Major (Retired) LeRoy R. Sena, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 27 March 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007; Command Sergeant Major (Retired) LeRoy R. Sena, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 6 June 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 7 Stringham notes, 21 June 2007. "My philosophy was that 'if they're armed, they could shoot.' We immediately taught them how to load and fire their weapons so they could defend themselves. I'd worry about aimed fire and marksmanship later. We taught them basic survival skills. Then, I had them dig holes around their perimeter. When their *cabo* blew his whistle, they knew enough to grab their weapons and get in the holes," said Leeker. Colonel (Retired) Craig W. Leeker, telephone interview with Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 June 2007, Arlington, VA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 Leeker interview, 21 June 2007.
- 9 Moosey interview, 3 April 2007; Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey e-mail, 25 June 2007.
- 10 Howard I. Blutstein, Elinor C. Betters, John Cobb Jr., Jonathan A. Leonard, and Charles M. Townsend, *El Salvador: A Country Study*, Department of Army Pamphlet 550-150, Washington, DC: The American University, 1979, 28, 38, 51, hereafter cited as Blutstein et al, *El Salvador*.
- 11 Blutstein et al, *El Salvador*, 28, 38.
- 12 Blutstein et al, *El Salvador*, 29.
- 13 Blutstein et al, *El Salvador*, 36.
- 14 Blutstein et al, *El Salvador*, 39.
- 15 Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey U. Cole, e-mail to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 28 June 2007, subject: San Miguel, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 16 Master Sergeant (Retired) Allen B. Hazlewood, telephone interview by Dr.

Captain Craig Leeker (left) and ODA-7 stand behind his defensive position in El Bosque on 26 March 1984. The rooftop position was directly behind and above the group. Front left to right: Captain Leeker, Staff Sergeant Peter Moosey, Sergeant David Janicki (holding FMLN armband), Sergeant First Class Jorge Reyes, and Sergeant Kenneth Beko; Rear left to right: Sergeant First Class LeRoy Sena, Staff Sergeant Gary Davidson, Master Sergeant Rodney Dutton, and Staff Sergeant Loyd Palmer. Notice all the spent cartridges on the ground.



- Charles H. Briscoe, 20 March 2007, Miami, FL, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Captain Rodger Kenneth Garrett, e-mail to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 19 June 2007, subject: San Miguel 1984, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 17 **When the 3rd Brigade was installed in San Miguel, the DM-4 in San Francisco de Gotera was organizationally subordinated to the brigade. However, it continued to be the center of military authority in the department. This complicated operational coordination in the region.** Colonel (Retired) Cecil E. Bailey, e-mail to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 19 June 2007, subject: San Miguel 1984, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 18 Robert D. Ramsey III, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 86.
 - 19 Brigadier General (Retired) Joseph S. Stringham, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 29 May 2007, Woodville, AL, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Cecil E. Bailey, "OPATT: The U.S. Army SF Advisers in El Salvador," *Special Warfare* (December 2004), 18-19; Waghelstein, "El Salvador: Observations and Experiences in Counterinsurgency," F-1, F-2.
 - 20 **The Venezuelan Army MTT was withdrawn abruptly after a U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense let it slip that the South Americans had been asked to help the ESAF and that this did not violate the Congressionally-mandated 55-man force cap. The resultant adverse international press caused the Venezuelan government to withdraw the MTT.** Colonel (Retired) John D. Waghelstein, e-mail to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 20 June 2007, subject: San Miguel 1984, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 21 Colonel Joseph S. Stringham, interview by Colonel Charles A. Carlton, 29 May 1985, Carlisle Barracks, PA, U.S. Army War College/U.S. Army Military History Institute Oral History Program, Carlisle Barracks, PA, transcription, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Colonel (Retired) John D. Waghelstein, telephone interview by Colonel (Retired) Cecil E. Bailey, Annapolis, MD, 23 October 2003, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. **The Venezuelan Army trained three *Cazador* battalions in the western departments of Santa Ana and Ahuachapan. The Venezuelans were pleased to help the Salvadorans, at U.S. urging, as a gesture of thanks for assistance provided to them during their fight against a Cuban-supported insurgency in the 1960s. It was the 8th Special Forces Group in Panama that provided the training. They organized and trained a conscript-filled force.** Sergeant First Class (Retired) Jerald L. Peterson, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 6 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 22 Colonel (Retired) Rudolph M. Jones, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 3 August 2006, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Jorge M. Reyes, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 2 May 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. **The period of obligatory service was twenty-four months by law. The practice was to keep the conscripted soldier in uniform for only twelve months. Under U.S. pressure, as the war wore on, the period of uniformed service was pushed to twenty-four months.** Max G. Manwaring and Courtney Prisk, eds. *El Salvador At War: An Oral History of the Conflict from the 1979 Insurrection to the Present* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1988), 295.
 - 23 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007; Stringham interview, 29 May 2007.
 - 24 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
 - 25 Garrett interview, 19 May 2007; Colonel (Retired) Hugh Scruggs, e-mail to Dr. Briscoe, 13 July 2007, subject: San Miguel Article for Veritas, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 26 **"SFC LeRoy Sena conducted his "Gun-a-Rama" every Sunday while ODA-7 was in country. It kept everyone proficient, demonstrated to the ESAF that we could really shoot, and served as a psychological deterrent to the FMLN sympathizers."** Garrett interview, 19 May 2007; Sergeant Major (Retired) Peter J. Moosey and Captain Rodger Kenneth Garrett (formerly Sergeant Kenneth Rodger Beko), interview with Dr. Briscoe, 20 May 2007, Tierra Verde, FL, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 27 Sergeant Major (Retired) Rodney F. Dutton, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 17 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. **This SUTT deployment shows the difficulties associated with supporting MTTs rotating in and out of El Salvador. The 55-man "force cap" governed the size and composition of MTTs. Special Forces composite teams were formed to fit the mission and time frame requested by the MILGP. ODAs were rarely deployed as organic entities, but were composed of soldiers with the military and language skills needed. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Stankovich, who followed Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Scruggs as the 3rd Battalion, 7th SFG commander, only wanted to know who the detachment commander and team sergeant were. They were the constants on composite teams.** Colonel (Retired) Craig W. Leeker, interview by Colonel (Retired) Cecil Bailey, 17 July 2003, Arlington, VA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Colonel (Retired) Craig W. Leeker, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 19 June 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Colonel (Retired) Craig W. Leeker, e-mail to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 20 June 2007, subject: San Miguel 1984, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Leeker interview, 21 June 2007.
 - 28 Reyes interview, 2 May 2007.
 - 29 Garrett e-mail, 19 June 2007.
 - 30 **Per USMILGP policy, the "two-man rule" applied to Americans throughout El Salvador. To stay at San Miguel cuartel during the Christmas holidays. SSG Studley remained with CPT Leeker.** Leeker interview, 21 June 2007.
 - 31 Garrett interview, 19 May 2007.
 - 32 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007; Leeker interview, 17 July 2003; Stringham interview, 29 May 2007.
 - 33 Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
 - 34 Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
 - 35 Professional Soldado Juan Antonio Gómez, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 19 July 2007, San Salvador, El Salvador, personal notes, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 36 Moosey interview, 3 April 2007; Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007; Leeker interview, 19 June 2007.
 - 37 Moosey interview, 3 April 2007; Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Dutton interview, 17 April 2007; Leeker interview, 21 June 2007.
 - 38 **Many of the *chucas* (second enlistment soldiers) were former Nicaraguan soldiers from Somoza's *Guardia Nacional*, who had escaped automatic imprisonment by the *Sandinistas*. The 3rd Brigade *Cazador* was the first battalion trained by the Venezuelans in 1982, and the *chucas* were extremely proud of this.** Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
 - 39 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007. **Despite the land mine incident (actually a series of pressure-detonated mines) on the San Miguel airstrip in mid-February 1984, the ESAF did not guard the site, "sweep" the runway daily for mines, nor patrol in its vicinity. Thus, about three weeks later, an ESAF C-123 Provider twin-engine transport delivering the national election ballot boxes was ambushed in the same way. That was a serious loss.** Colonel (Retired) René Magaña, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 22 July 2007, San Salvador, El Salvador, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007; Moosey e-mail, 25 June 2007. Spencer, *From Vietnam to El Salvador*, 87-88.
 - 40 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
 - 41 **The date of the C-123 ambush is cited erroneously in Montecinos, *NO HAY GUERRA*, 81; Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.**
 - 42 Leeker interview, 17 July 2003; Leeker interview, 19 June 2007; Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Garrett and Moosey interview, 20 May 2007. **Each night Sergeant First Class Sena, Staff Sergeant Moosey, and Sergeants Beko and Janicki rotated the duty of checking the timing and barrel calibration of the ESAF A6s and BARS of the Security Battalion manning the perimeter.**
 - 43 **Ambassador Thomas Pickering insisted that Colonel Stringham get the Operations and Planning Assistance Training Teams (OPATT) identified, deployed, and in place for the March elections. Since it was impossible to cover all brigades in the time left, 3/7 SFG personnel were brought down TDY to serve as election observers.** Stringham interview, 29 May 1985; Garrett interview, 19 May 2007.
 - 44 Sena interview, 27 March 2007. **Command Sergeant Major Sena served two tours in Vietnam. Both were classified special operations assignments. The second tour with Command and Control North, Military Advisory Command, Vietnam-Special Operations Group, he served on Reconnaissance Teams Cobra, Rhode Island, and Rattler.**
 - 45 Hazelwood interview, 20 March 2007; Spencer, *From Vietnam to El Salvador*, 86; Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Magaña interview, 22 July 2007; Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) René Alcides Rodríguez Hurtado, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 July 2007, San Salvador, El Salvador, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 46 Master Sergeant (Retired) William Strobel, e-mail to Colonel (Retired) Cecil Bailey, 11 December 2003, subject: *Cazadores* in El Salvador, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Colonel (Retired) Kevin Higgins, e-mail to Colonel (Retired) Cecil Bailey, 1 May 2003, subject: Monterrosa and *Cazadores*, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. **Though more *Cazador* battalions were created than any other type infantry battalion to satisfy U.S. aid quotas, they were no match for the well-armed and equipped 600-man battalions being fielded by the**

- FMLN in northern Morazán and Chalatenango in late 1982. Stringham interview, 29 May 1985.
- 47 Magaña interview, 22 July 2007; Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
- 48 Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
- 49 Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
- 50 Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007. The *Estado Mayor* did not have secure radio and telephone communications with either the ESAF brigade *cuarteles* or the DM (*destacamento militares*) *cuarteles* in each military district until 1987. A system of thirty-nine radio-telephone microwave relay towers to provide communications was completed in 1985. These relay towers, typically positioned on remote mountaintops like the one near Perquin in Morazán, were constantly attacked by the FMLN to disrupt communications. Their security was part of the National Campaign Plan. Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Richard R. Pérez, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 9 February 2007, Tampa, FL, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 51 Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
- 52 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 53 Colonel Stringham realized that he was keeping ODA-7 in a highly contested zone, yet thought it necessary to strengthen the command in the east during the election period. Stringham interview, 29 May 1985; Dutton interview, 17 April 2007; Reyes interview, 2 May 2007.
- 54 Stringham interview, 29 May 2007; Stringham notes, 20 June 2007. The DePuy fighting position was designed by then Major General William DePuy, 1st Infantry Division commander in Vietnam, to prevent American Fire Bases from being overrun by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese attackers. Adopted by the senior leadership, it was promulgated Army-wide in defense doctrine in the early 1980s.
- 55 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 56 Leeker interview, 19 June 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 57 Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 58 Sergeant Major (Retired) Peter J. Moosey, e-mail to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 June 2007, subject: San Miguel 1984, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Garrett interview, 19 May 2007.
- 59 Moosey e-mail, 18 June 2007; Dutton interview, 17 April 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007; Leeker interview, 21 June 2007.
- 60 Sena interview, 27 March 2007.
- 61 Leeker interview, 21 June 2007.
- 62 Sena interview, 27 March 2007.
- 63 Leeker interview, 21 June 2007.
- 64 Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
- 65 Moosey e-mail, 18 June 2007; Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
- 66 Sena interview, 27 March 2007.
- 67 Captain Craig Leeker was talking to the AC-130 from *El Bosque*, but the aircrew's unfamiliarity with the *cuartel* made passing information to the Americans below difficult. Leeker interview, 19 June 2007; Moosey and Garrett interview, 20 May 2007.
- 68 Master Sergeant Peter J. Moosey, C Co, 3/7th SFG, Fort Davis, Panama, APO 34005, memorandum, 15 June 1994, subject: Significant Events in El Salvador, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 69 Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 70 Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 71 Moosey e-mail, 20 June 2007. "Headspace can be adjusted from the breach under ideal conditions, but without the proper tool and with the gun so hot, I removed the flash-hider to get access to the muzzle. The conical flash-hider is not a suppressor; it doesn't do more than cover some of the flash. Held in place by a tension spring attached to a post it is difficult to remove when hot. The barrel muzzle is flat on two sides. An adjustable wrench can be used to adjust the barrel. The barrel was smoking like a charcoal barbeque grill. But, motor oil was the only lubricant we had. LSA in El Salvador was nonexistent. After I got the flash-hider off, I couldn't replace it, nor did I have the time because SFC LeRoy Sena was already firing." Moosey e-mail, 25 June 2007. Contrary to Greg Walker's account in *Behind the Lines* (July/August 1993), "Sapper Attack!" 9, perpetuated as truth in Spencer, *From Vietnam to El Salvador*, 89, neither SFC Sena nor SSG Moosey, "urinated in the [empty oil] cans and then poured this over the guns" as an expedient method to keep them from overheating. Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 72 "The AC-130 'spotted' the guerrillas north of the *cuartel* using burros to carry the .50 cal machineguns and ammunition boxes. The aircraft 'tracked' the group and watched them transfer the weapons and ammunition to three five-ton trucks just north of the city. They were easy to follow because the three vehicles were driving with their headlights on. Anyone with any sense drove with their lights on [at] night because [the] roads in El Salvador were in such poor condition. You'd have been crazy not to." Leeker interview, 19 June 2007.
- 73 Leeker interview, 19 June 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007; Moosey e-mail to Briscoe, subject: San Miguel, 25 June 2007, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 74 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 75 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007. Spencer, *From Vietnam to El Salvador*, 89.
- 76 Leeker interview, 21 June 2007.
- 77 Federal Research Division, Online Country Study, El Salvador. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+sv0093\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+sv0093)).
- 78 Sena interview, 27 March 2007; Moosey interview, 3 April 2007.
- 79 Actually, one more SF SUTT MTT deployed to El Salvador as a composite team. Captain William Ball and Master Sergeant Juri Stepheniak arrived at San Vicente with a team composed of ODA 783 and 784 soldiers. This composite element replaced ODA 783 to train units after the Operation *Bienstar* concluded. Leeker interview, 17 July 2003.
- 80 Stringham interview, 29 May 2007. With standardized battalion training programmed for the CREM, Stringham saw little point in continuing to commit as much manpower to Special Forces MTTs. Future MTTs would have to be selective and promise a high return. Establishing an advisory presence in the ESAF brigades revived the brigade Operations and Planning Assistance Training Team (OPATT) of 1981. Colonel (Retired) James Roach, e-mail to COL (Retired) Cecil Bailey, 11 April 2003, subject: OPATTs in El Salvador, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 81 Tommie Sue Montgomery, "Fighting Guerrillas: The United States and Low-Intensity Conflict in El Salvador," *New Political Science* (Fall/Winter 1990), 29, cited in Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 85.
- 82 John D. Waghelstein, "El Salvador and the Press: A Personal Account," *Parameters*, Autumn 1985, 67-68, 70.
- 83 Stringham interview, 29 May 1985.
- 84 Leeker interview, 19 June 2007; Sena interview, 22 January 2004; The valiant defensive actions of Captain Leeker and ODA-7 (four Bronze Stars for Valor) on 25-26 March 1984, and the individual bravery of Sergeant Beko (Army Commendation Medal for Valor) at the San Miguel airstrip on February 1984 were recognized fourteen years later at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (June 1998). Special Forces soldiers not previously awarded a Combat Infantryman Badge and Combat Medic Badge received them for El Salvador during the same ceremony.

(L) MAJ Rene Alcides Hurtado Rodríguez, FAES Airborne Company Commander, and (R) LTC Domingo Monterossa, 3rd Brigade Commander, at Ciudad Barrios.