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COUNTRY: EL SALVADOR

SUBJECT: ALLEGED MASSACRE OF CIVILIANS IN SONSONATE DEPARTMENT  
BY ELEMENTS OF ARMED FORCES MILITARY DETACHMENT SIX.

*Las Hojas*

DOI : [REDACTED]

SOURCE : [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Approved for Release

NOV 1993

[REDACTED]

1. AT APPROXIMATELY 0520 HOURS ON 22 FEBRUARY 1983, THREE MILITARY TRUCKS CARRYING ABOUT 150 SOLDIERS FROM MILITARY DETACHMENT SIX IN SONSONATE ENTERED THE VILLAGE OF LAS HOJAS. A FOURTH TRUCK, CONTAINING ABOUT 50 SOLDIERS, WAS STATIONED OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE. THE SOLDIERS IN LAS HOJAS, COMMANDED BY A CAPTAIN ((FIGUEROA)) MORALES, STOPPED AND QUESTIONED A NUMBER OF VILLAGERS WHO HAD JUST LEFT AN EARLY MORNING CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS SERVICE. THE SOLDIERS STATED THAT THEY HAD INFORMATION THAT THERE WERE SUBVERSIVES IN THE AREA WHOSE COMMANDER WAS A FATHER ROBERTO LEONARDO ((ZACAPA)), A CATHOLIC PRIEST. THE VILLAGERS REPLIED THAT THEY HAD NEVER HEARD OF ZACAPA.

(COMMENT: ONE OF THE VILLAGERS QUESTIONED BY THE SOLDIERS WAS A CATHOLIC LAYWORKER NAMED ROBERTO LEONARDO ((PARRANGA)), WHO IS NOT A LEFTIST. DUE TO THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN HIS NAME AND ZACAPA'S, HOWEVER, HE IS FEARFUL OF POSSIBLE ACTION AGAINST HIM BY THE ARMED FORCES).

2. THE DETACHMENT SIX SOLDIERS IN LAS HOJAS WERE ACCOMPANIED BY A CIVILIAN WHO WORE A MASK OVER THE LOWER PART OF HIS FACE. DESPITE THE MASK, A NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS

RECOGNIZED HIM AS NAPOLEON ((GARCIA)) ARIAS, AGE 29. GARCIA CARRIED A LIST AND INDICATED TO THE SOLDIERS THE LOCATIONS OF VARIOUS RESIDENTS IN THE AREA. THE VILLAGERS WHO HAD ATTENDED THE RELIGIOUS SERVICE AND HAD BEEN QUESTIONED SUBSEQUENTLY BY THE SOLDIERS WERE THEN ORDERED TO LEAVE THE AREA. AS THEY WERE LEAVING, THE VILLAGERS SAW THE SOLDIERS ROUNDING UP AND ABUSING A NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LOCAL AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE. THE COOPERATIVE MEMBERS HAD THEIR HANDS TIED BEHIND THEIR BACKS.

3. BY 2000 HOURS, ON 22 FEBRUARY, A GROUP OF COOPERATIVE MEMBERS LED BY ADRIAN ((ESQUINO)) LIZCO, A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL INDIAN ASSOCIATION (ANIS), DISCOVERED BETWEEN 19 AND 23 CORPSES IN THE VICINITY OF LAS HOJAS. AMONG THE DEAD WERE THE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD BEEN ROUNDED UP THAT MORNING BY THE SALVADORAN MILITARY. ALL OF THE VICTIMS HAD BEEN SHOT THROUGH THE HEAD AND ALL HAD THEIR HANDS TIED BEHIND THEIR BACKS. SEVEN OF THE VICTIMS WERE BURIED IN SEPERATE CEREMONIES AT 1100 HOURS ON 23 FEBRUARY. THE REMAINDER WERE BURIED IN A COMMON GRAVE NEAR LAS HOJAS LATER IN THE DAY AT A CEREMONY OFFICIATED OVER BY A LOCAL PRIEST, FATHER (FNU) ((WALTERS)), SINCE THE FAMILIES WERE TOO FRIGHTENED TO IDENTIFY OR CLAIM THE BODIES.

4. ON 27 FEBRUARY, TWO SOLDIERS OF DETACHMENT SIX INFORMED

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A CONFIDANT IN SONSONATE THAT THEY HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN THE EXECUTION OF THE LAS HOJAS CIVILIANS. THEY CLAIMED THAT THE ACTION HAD BEEN ORDERED BY THE DEPARTMENTAL COMMANDER, COLONEL ELMER GONZALEZ (ARAUJO). THE SOLDIERS FURTHER STATED THAT, PRIOR TO THE OPERATION, NAPOLEON GARCIA ARTAS HAD BEEN ARRESTED BY THE CIVIL DEFENSE FORCES FROM THE NEARBY VILLAGE OF SAN ANTONIO DEL MONTE AND TRANSFERRED TO THE SONSONATE DETACHMENT WHERE HE WAS DETAINED AND TORTURED. FOLLOWING HIS TORTURE, GARCIA PRODUCED A LIST OF NAMES OF LAS HOJAS RESIDENTS WHO HE CLAIMED WERE ANTI-MILITARY AND "TROUBLEMAKERS". THE SOLDIERS ALSO SAID THAT THEY BELIEVED THAT GARCIA HAD BEEN EXECUTED IN THE SONSONATE GARRISON FOLLOWING HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE MASSACRE. ACCORDING TO THE TWO SOLDIERS, ONE REASON FOR THE MASSACRE WAS THAT THE CANTON COMMANDER OF THE LAS HOJAS AREA, A CIVILIAN WHO SERVES AS AN INFORMANT TO THE MILITARY IN

SONSONATE, WAS ATTACKED WITH STONES AND HARASSED BY THREE TEENAGERS IN LAS HOJAS. THE CANTON COMMANDER REPORTED TO COLONEL ARAUJO THAT THE ATTACK WAS AN INDICATION OF ANTI GOVERNMENT SENTIMENT IN THE AREA. [REDACTED] COMMENT: BOTH SOLDIERS WERE EXTREMELY UPSET OVER THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE MASSACRE AND WANTED TO DESERT FROM THE ARMED FORCES. THEY WERE AFRAID TO DO SO, HOWEVER, AS THEY BELIEVE REPRISALS WOULD BE INFLICTED ON THEIR FAMILIES BY THE MILITARY).

5. [REDACTED] COMMENT [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] COLONEL RAFAEL ((FLORES)) LYMA, THE SUB-SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, SAID ON 28 FEBRUARY THAT AN INVESTIGATION OF THIS INCIDENT BY THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES CLEARLY REVEALED THAT COLONEL ARAUJO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLINGS.)

*Elmer Gonzalez*

[REDACTED]

ON