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Private Venture Operated Plane Downed by Nicaragua, Aides Say

U.S. Disavows Role — Right-Wing Group Led By Ex-Army General

By **RICHARD HALLORAN**

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7 — An American-built cargo plane that was shot down over southern Nicaragua on Sunday was operated by a private group led by a retired United States Army major general, Reagan Administration officials said today.

The officials said the plane was operated by an organization headed by the retired general, John K. Singlaub, and had taken off from El Salvador. It had flown down the Pacific coast of Nicaragua and turned inland to deliver ammunition and supplies to insurgents seeking to open a southern front against the Sandinista Government in Managua.

Spokesmen for the Administration, the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense all emphatically denied that the flight was in any way connected with the United States Government.

A Message From Singlaub

One official here said General Singlaub was in Washington last week but was believed to be in El Salvador today. General Singlaub is head of the United States Council for World Freedom, an organization based in Phoenix.

A spokesman for the general, Joyce Downey, relayed a statement from him: "I've been informed about the situation. We know nothing about it. It has nothing to do with the United States Council for World Freedom." Ms. Downey said General Singlaub was not in Central America but was on a plane back to the United States.

Reports from Nicaragua said three people were killed in the crash and that one, an American named Eugene Hasenfus, survived. Mr. Hasenfus is said to have told reporters who went to the crash site that he had been aboard a plane that took off from El Salvador to supply Nicaraguan rebels. [Page A8.]

A Former Marine

The Defense Department said that Mr. Hasenfus, 45 years old, had served in the Marine Corps from 1960 to 1965, reaching the rank of corporal.

A Pentagon spokesman said Mr. Hasenfus had not been positively identified as the survivor of the crash, only that a man of that name had been a Marine Corps parachute rigger for equipment drops at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

A senior American official said that a company set up by General Singlaub in El Salvador had been used for C.I.A. operations in the past but that this particular flight was not a Government operation.

An Anti-Communist Leader

General Singlaub drew public attention in 1979 when he criticized President Carter's plan to reduce the number of American troops in South Korea, where the general was chief of staff of United States forces.

He was subsequently reassigned to the United States and then retired. General Singlaub formed the United States Council for World Freedom in 1981; it is affiliated with the World Anti-Communist League, of which he is the current chairman.

Through the council, he has been reported to have raised perhaps \$10 million privately to provide military and other supplies to the insurgents in Nicaragua, known popularly as the contras. While on duty in Vietnam from

1966 to 1968, General Singlaub headed a covert unit that specialized in terrorist and guerrilla operations.

The Nicaraguan Defense Ministry announcement said that a plane, possibly a C-123, was shot down with a surface-to-air missile at 12:45 P.M. on

Sunday north of San Carlos in Rio San Juan Province near the border with Costa Rica.

The statement said 50,000 rounds of ammunition for Soviet-built AK-47 automatic rifles, plus rifles, grenades and boots, were aboard the plane.

The C-123, a twin-engine turbo-prop built by Fairchild in the 1950's, was used by the Air Force to carry cargo and to drop paratroopers and their equipment. Only a few remain in Air Force service.

'Obviously a C.I.A. Operation'

"The intruding aircraft was hit by our air defense when it tried to carry out a supply mission to mercenary forces that operate from abroad against our country," the Defense Ministry statement said.

The secretary general of the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry, Alejandro Bendaña, said in a television interview: "The facts are that there was a plane shot down, that it had an American crew on it."

He said that "we're talking about a U.S. plane. We're not saying U.S. Army plane but this is obviously a C.I.A. operation with C.I.A. operatives; whether they are U.S. Army personnel or not, it's almost beside the point."

Mr. Bendaña said the dead men were "U.S. citizens now dying in Mr. Reagan's U.S. war against Nicaragua. I think the American people are owed an explanation."

'No Connection,' Shultz Says

Secretary of State George P. Shultz, appearing on a United States Information Agency broadcast, said that "it was, for all we know, a plane hired by private people; apparently some of them American. They had no connection with the U.S. Government at all."

The chairman and vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee said they had been assured by the C.I.A. that there was no American Government role in the incident.

But Senator Patrick Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who is vice chairman of the committee, said he was skeptical of claims that American groups voluntarily assisting the contras were operating without the knowledge of American officials.

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18 June 1986

U.S. MAY ESTABLISH AFGHAN REBEL TIES

By **RICHARD HALLORAN** J
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 17 — A senior Administration official said today that President Reagan held open the possibility that the United States would extend diplomatic recognition to the Afghan rebels if they acquired "more of the attributes of a government."

The official's stand on the issue was noticeably different than that taken publicly Monday by the White House spokesman, Larry Speakes, after Mr. Reagan met with four leaders of an Afghan rebel coalition based in Pakistan.

Mr. Speakes said the President had told the Afghan delegation, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, that it would be "premature" for the United States to extend such recognition now.

The Administration official repeated that point today but told a group of reporters that Mr. Reagan had "encouraged" the Afghans. The official said the use of the word "premature" should not be taken as a polite way of saying "forget it."

The official said Mr. Reagan supported the Afghan leaders' demands that negotiations over the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan be between "the warring factions" — the Afghan rebels and the Soviet Union.

Instead, what diplomats call "proximity talks" have been held in Geneva between representatives of the Afghan and Pakistani Governments. The delegates do not meet face to face, but their views are conveyed by a United Nations official.

Rebels Meet With Senators

On Capitol Hill, the Afghan delegation met with Senator Gordon J. Humphrey, Republican of New Hampshire, who generally agreed with their position on both issues. A spokesman said the Senator favored closing the United States Embassy in Kabul, the Afghan capital, and expelling Afghan diplomats from Washington.

The spokesman also said Senator Humphrey felt that the rebel leaders should be included in the negotiations sponsored by the United Nations.

The Afghan delegation also met with Senator Bill Bradley, Democrat of New Jersey, who repeated his support for their movement and the recognition of the rebels as the "sole legitimate representative of the Afghan people."

A spokesman for the Senator said Mr. Bradley had long felt that the rebels should become members of the Islamic Conference Organization and should take the Afghan seat at the United Nations. He also reiterated the Senator's position that no settlement of the Afghan issue should be made without the rebels' consent.

The Administration official briefing reporters on the rebel leaders' meetings with the President on Monday and with lower-level officials today laid out

several "attributes of a government" that the President would consider in his decision on diplomatic recognition.

One would be greater cooperation among the rebels, the official said. Ever since Soviet troops swept into Afghanistan in late 1979 in an effort to keep in power a Government friendly to Moscow, the Moslem rebels have found it difficult to work together.

A second criterion, the official said, would be greater rebel control over Afghan territory. In the guerrilla war being fought there, neither the Soviet Union nor the rebels have firm control over large sectors of the country.

In that connection, the Afghan leaders renewed their request for anti-aircraft weapons with which to drive off Soviet helicopters and aircraft. The Administration official said he would not discuss "covert" operations — meaning the supply of American weapons to the rebels — but said a sound anti-aircraft defense was crucial to the control of territory.

Election Plan Is Cited

The Administration official noted that the coalition planned to hold elections in Afghanistan and the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan next fall to form a deliberative council.

The official emphasized that Mr. Reagan had encouraged the rebel leaders to seek "greater international visibility." He suggested that the United States would find it easier to extend diplomatic recognition if the rebel coalition gained wider acceptance and did not appear to be a proxy of the United States.

He also said United States officials had suggested that the rebel leaders

make a greater effort at the United Nations and at Islamic conferences to cultivate nonaligned nations that might be sympathetic to their cause.

The official noted, with evident approval, that the rebel coalition planned to open an office in New York. In addition, about 40 Afghan refugees are scheduled to arrive in the United States this week for medical treatment.

'Deeper Exchange' Is Sought

The rebel delegation's visit to the United States and the meeting with Mr. Reagan should be seen as part of a process of widening the rebels' international image, the official said. He said the Administration favored a "deeper exchange of political views" between the rebels and Administration officials.

Mr. Reagan, in his meeting with the rebel leaders, "completely ruled out separate deals with Moscow" in which an arms agreement, for instance, would be reached in exchange for a halt to American support for the rebels, the official said.

He said that anxiety had swept through the refugee camps in Pakistan whenever the Afghans, who are often isolated from political and diplomatic developments elsewhere, suspected that the United States and the Soviet Union might reach an agreement at their expense.