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Captive Reported to Say He Flew From Salvador

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Oct. 7 — An American captured by the Nicaraguan Army is said to have told reporters today that he was flying aboard a Nicaraguan rebel supply plane that took off from El Salvador.

The American, identified as Eugene Hasenfus, spoke to reporters who reached the remote jungle site in southern Nicaragua where the plane crashed.

Despite American denials, Nicaraguan officials continued to charge today that the plane, identified as a C-123, was operated by the Central Intelligence Agency to supply Nicaraguan rebels. They said Mr. Hasenfus had identified himself as an American military adviser in El Salvador.

"This is part of an aggressive escalation of the United States against Nicaragua," Angela Saballos, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, said.

C.I.A. Promises Reported

American officials said the plane was in fact operated by a private group of American supporters of the Nicaraguan rebels. A spokesman for the United States Embassy in El Salvador said there was no American military adviser there called Hasenfus.

Nicaraguan rebel officials said recently that the C.I.A. had promised supplies to their forces in the region where the plane crashed and that they had been delivered, though they did not specify who actually made the delivery.

The plane crash comes at a sensitive moment as Congress is expected to release \$100 million in new aid to the rebels after months of emotional debate.

The Nicaraguan Government said it captured Mr. Hasenfus and killed three people when its troops shot down a military supply plane dropping bullets, boots and rifles on Sunday.

The Associated Press said Mr. Hasenfus had told reporters at the crash site, near the Costa Rican border, that two Americans and a Nicaraguan on board were killed in the crash. Nicaraguan Army officers accompanying Mr. Hasenfus identified the Americans as Wallace Blaine Sawyer Jr. and Bill Cooper, the agency said.

American Embassy officials in Managua have not commented on the Nicaraguan claims but say they asked twice today to see the prisoner and to view the bodies of the three crew members reportedly killed.

Salvadoran Government officials have refused to comment publicly on reports that the plane may have been operating from the Ilopango military airport outside San Salvador.

But rebel supply planes have been based in El Salvador over the last three years, according to rebel and American officials. At least one rebel plane crashed in El Salvador late last year and another nearly crashed, according to these officials.

The downing of the plane is being treated as a major political event here, covering the front pages of the Government-controlled press and cited by officials as proof of the American threat to Nicaragua.

Heavy rain and cloud cover prevented journalists from traveling to the crash site for most of the day. But television teams reached the site late this afternoon on a helicopter provided by the Government and filmed the wreckage. The Government showed them military supplies reportedly carried on the plane.

U.S. Backs Two-Front War

The location of the crash, about 30 miles north of the Costa Rican border in Rfo San Juan Department, supports Nicaraguan charges that the plane was dropping supplies to guerrillas.

Such supply flights, usually originating in Honduras or El Salvador, according to rebel officials, have recently taken on added importance as the Reagan Administration has begun again to support a two-front rebel war against Nicaragua.

According to rebel officials, supply flights have been stepped up to guerrilla units based near the Costa Rican border as well as to the Honduras-

based rebel patrols farther to the north.

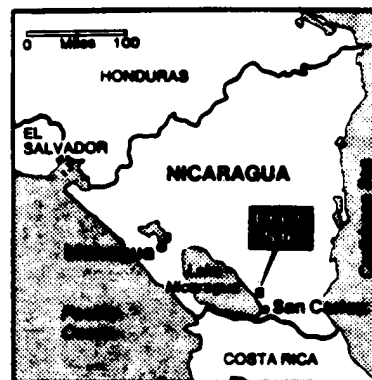
Because the new Costa Rican Government has closed several rebel airstrips in Costa Rica and cracked down on rebel operations there, supplies must be flown from more distant airfields in Honduras and El Salvador, the rebel sources said.

The Central Intelligence Agency has been working especially hard in recent months to supply the guerrilla units, estimated at perhaps 1,000 men, that operate near the Costa Rican border, according to three senior rebel officials.

These units used to support Edén Pastora Gómez, a rebel leader who has retired from the battle. But they joined the American-backed United Nicaraguan Opposition rebel organization after the C.I.A. reportedly promised at least two planeloads of supplies five months ago, senior rebel officials say. The supplies were delivered, the officials say.

It is not clear if the C.I.A. itself delivered them or only promised that they would be delivered, allowing other groups to make the supply drop.

But it seems unlikely that the Salvadoran or Honduran Governments would allow private American sympathizers of the Nicaraguan rebels to warehouse and ship thousands of pounds of rifles, bullets and other equipment to the Nicaraguan guerrillas without at least the tacit support of American officials.



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Nicaragua said rebel supply plane crashed north of San Carlos.