

EL SALVADOR/
DEATH SQUADS

RATHER: A major obstacle to President Reagan's policy in Central America, especially where El Salvador is concerned, has been the Salvadoran death squads. The political right and the left in that country have been accused of random and wanton killings. Until now, those who have ordered the killings have been anonymous, but as Walter Cronkite reports, some of those on the political right now have names, and they are the names of high-ranking Salvadoran officials.

(File tape) CRONKITE: A former high military official from El Salvador claims that the man who once directed his country's infamous death squads was a paid informer of the CIA. (To Unidentified Man): Do you think the United States or any of its agencies, the CIA, for instance, knew about the death squads? UNIDENTIFIED MAN (Voice of Interpreter): I understand, yes, precisely because they had people in their employ who were in the high levels in Salvador.

CRONKITE: Can you tell us who that is? UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Por ejemplo... (Voice of Interpreter): For example, Col. *Caranza.

CRONKITE: Right there at the top. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Si. (Voice of Interpreter): Yes, sir.

CRONKITE: Col. Nicolas Caranza is the chief of the El Salvador Treasury Police. Our source was interviewed in disguise in a secret location in the United States. He was in a sensitive post in the top ranks of the Salvadoran Security Establishment. The official was brought to the United States and given financial assistance, which is expected to reach \$50,000. The money came from critics of the administration's Salvadoran policy. They made him available to CBS News. Our source fingered as the originator and still-active head of the death squads former army Maj. Robert D'Aubisson, the right wing's candidate for president in El Salvador's election next Sunday. UNIDENTIFIED MAN (Voice of Interpreter): The way it was carried out was that D'Aubisson worked under the orders of Caranza.

CRONKITE: And yet he is an employee of CIA. UNIDENTIFIED MAN (Voice of Interpreter): He always has been, for five or six years.

CRONKITE: Well, do you think that the CIA actually gave orders on some of these assassinations? UNIDENTIFIED MAN: No, no lo creo que si. (Voice of Interpreter): No, I don't believe so.

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CRONKITE: The former officials said he had no evidence that the CIA had been given the details of the death squad operations, but this was his assumption because of the Caranza connection.

CRONKITE: Well, is there a central control that decides on who the victims will be? UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Algun tiempo... (Voice of Interpreter): Generally, there is control over designating the victims of the death squads. However, every once in a while they get out of hand, and they designate their own victims.

CRONKITE: Who was involved when there was a formal selection process? UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Generalmente, siempre Mayor D'Aubisson. (Voice of Interpreter): Always Maj. D'Aubisson.

CRONKITE: Maj. D'Aubisson was the key man in the death squads? UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Creo que si. (Voice of Interpreter): Yes.

CRONKITE: He ordered the assassination of these various people. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Si, si. (Voice of Interpreter): Yes, sir.

CRONKITE: Our informant said D'Aubisson was directly involved in the murders of Archbishop Oscar Arnolfo Romero and two American labor advisers. However, he said the murder of four American churchwomen (Graphic: Ford, Clarke, Kazel, Donovan), including three nuns, was not the work of the death squads. Five national guardsmen were charged with those murders, and our informant claims that a superior ordered the nuns killed. (To Unidentified Man): And who was the authority in La Paz who gave the order? UNIDENTIFIED MAN (Voice of Interpreter): The officer was a Col., uh, Oscar Eduardo Casanova.

CRONKITE: Casanova is a cousin of the present minister of defense, Vides Casanova, who at the time was the head of the national guard. (To Unidentified Man): He must have known as well, right? UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Perfectamente. (Voice of Interpreter): Perfectly.

CRONKITE: And he's covering up the assassination of the nuns. UNIDENTIFIED MAN (Voice of Interpreter): Yes, yes, that's so, because of famil... family ties.

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CRONKITE: The president of El Salvador at the time was Jose Napoleon Duarte, the Christian Democrat presidential candidate in Sunday's election. (To Unidentified Man): Did Duarte know about the cover-up of the murder of the nuns? UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Debe tener que conocerlo. (Voice of Interpreter): He had to know about it.

CRONKITE: Why? UNIDENTIFIED MAN (Voice of Interpreter): Because he was the provisional president of the country, and he had to be asking strongly what was, what happened in the case of the nuns.

CRONKITE: So in other words, the cover-up went broadly through the government, civilian and military. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Si, si. (Voice of Interpreter): Yes, sir.

CRONKITE: Robert D'Aubisson always has denied any involvement with the death squads. State Department experts don't buy all the informant's story. Deputy Assistant Secretary of the State for Latin American Affairs Craig Johnston says he knows some of the statements are inaccurate. For instance, he denies Col. Casanova was involved in the churchwomen's murders and said Duarte did not participate in any cover-up. The Central Intelligence Agency refused to either confirm or deny Caranza's relationship with them but said that the CIA does not employ assassins. However, several intelligence sources in Washington have confirmed for CBS News that our source was in a position to know about the matters he discussed with us, and Massachusetts Democrat Paul E. Tsongas, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he spent more than four hours questioning our source and believes that our story is essentially correct. Walter Cronkite, CBS News, Washington.