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Hostile Fire On Advisers Kept Secret

Latin Aid Measure Voted as Senate Debates U.S. Role

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U.S. military advisers came under hostile gunfire in El Salvador three times in the last five months but the Reagan administration held back the news, Sen. Jim Sasser (D-Tenn.) said yesterday.

"We simply are not being told the whole story" about U.S. military involvement in Central America, Sasser charged as heated Senate debate continued on administration requests for emergency aid to the government of El Salvador and to rebels in neighboring Nicaragua.

Late last night, the Senate voted tentative approval of a compromise \$62 million package of emergency military aid to the government of El Salvador but also agreed to consider the amount again.

The measure passed on an 11 p.m. voice vote with only six senators on the floor and was part of an agreement to end an undeclared filibuster by critics of administration policy. The critics thus deprived administration backers of the decisive roll-call vote they had sought in favor of the \$62 million figure.

Earlier, Sasser said the Defense Department had acknowledged the three gunfire incidents in writing in response to questions he raised at a hearing a week ago. The U.S. advisers were uninjured, but Sasser said the administration had broken the law in not reporting the incidents to Congress.

His disclosure came as U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Thomas R. Pickering also confirmed that U.S. military planes are making reconnaissance flights over El Salvador to provide instant intelligence to Salvadoran troops in combat on the ground. The reconnaissance flights were reported in The Washington Post on Wednesday. Pickering's careful remarks came at a news conference here in the first time a U.S. official has acknowledged publicly that U.S. forces have any involvement in the combat in El Salvador beyond training Salvadoran troops.

Last night's vote accepted an amendment from Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) that lowers the administration's aid request for El Salvador from \$93 million to \$62 million, but makes it subject to further amendments next Monday, including some that would impose stiff conditions.

The move followed several huddled floor negotiations in which Senate Republican leaders sought to halt a talkathon led by Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.) in return for not forcing a recorded vote on which the critics were sure to be badly beaten.

The Senate earlier rejected, 72 to 23, an amendment by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) that would have barred use of U.S. civilians or troops for any combat-related purpose in El Salvador or Nicaragua without specific authorization from Congress.

Kennedy afterward likened the vote to the Gulf of Tonkin resolution of 1964, in which the Senate, by 88 to 2, gave President Lyndon B. Johnson power to take "all necessary measures" in Vietnam.

Calling Central American policy "the most important foreign policy issue that the Senate will address this year," Kennedy said administration policy is "slowly but surely putting our combat troops in harm's way . . . We are being led into a war and we are entitled to an explanation."

Sen. John P. East (R-N.C.) defended the administration, saying, "There is strong bipartisan support" for Inouye's plan. "Those who oppose it are the reactionaries . . . offering a policy of isolation and washing their hands" of Central America, he said.

Supporting Kennedy, Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) warned that Congress "rolled over and played dead" when the president sent troops to Lebanon, which were subsequently withdrawn. "If there's anybody who

can stand up and say we have a coherent policy in Central America, I'd like to hear him spell it out," Leahy said.

U.S. military personnel have been fired on, and in some cases hit, in several previous incidents in El Salvador. In February, 1983, an Army sergeant was wounded when a helicopter in which he was flying took ground-fire east of San Salvador.

Sasser called the new disclosures "very disturbing." The Pentagon reported that "a small group of insurgent forces" attacked a Salvadoran training camp at San Miguel, where 17 U.S. Army and five Navy special

forces personnel were billeted, once in November and again this month. In neither case did the attackers "penetrate the perimeter and there were no injuries to U.S. personnel," the Pentagon said.

The Pentagon said a sniper attack occurred in February at the Salvadoran naval base at La Union, where 10 Army personnel are stationed. No injuries were reported.

Sasser said that when he asked about U.S. personnel at those two sites during a February visit to Honduras, he "was told that none were stationed at either location." He also said that the Arms Export Control Act requires any attack on U.S. military personnel to be reported to Congress, but no report was made on these incidents.

The senator said he plans to ask the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to decide whether the War Powers Resolution applies in this case. It requires a favorable vote from Congress for troops to remain where hostilities are imminent or occurring.

Pickering acknowledged that U.S. military planes are making reconnaissance flights over El Salvador and providing "real-time" intelligence information to Salvadoran forces. Previously no senior U.S. official had acknowledged publicly that U.S. activities in El Salvador had gone beyond the training function prescribed by President Reagan in 1981.

The term "real time" refers to intelligence gathered and disseminated while military operations, such as a battle or troop movements, are in progress.

Although he did not say so specifically, Pickering's admission appeared to indicate that the United States, while not necessarily directing Salvadoran military operations, is providing Salvadoran forces with information that helps them decide how to direct their artillery and air fire.

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