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U.S. Prisoner in Nicaragua Says C.I.A. Ran Contra Supply Flights

By JAMES LeMOYNE

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Oct. 9 — An American captured when a plane delivering supplies to rebels was shot down here said today that the supply flights were directly supervised by members of the Central Intelligence Agency in El Salvador.

"Two Cuban naturalized Americans that work for the C.I.A. did most of the coordination for the flights and oversaw all of our housing, transportation, also refueling and some flight plans," the prisoner, Eugene Hasenfus, said at a news conference here with Nicaraguan officials seated beside him.

Mr. Hasenfus then named the two reported C.I.A. officials and gave the most detailed account so far of rebel supply operations out of El Salvador and Honduras. His statements are being treated as a major political victory by the Nicaraguan Government.

Plane in 'Sting' Operation

"I was told we were working out of the El Salvador Air Force base at Ilopango," Mr. Hasenfus said. "We would be flying into Honduras to an air base called Aguacate and there we would load up small arms and ammunition and fly into Nicaragua. There it would be dropped to the contra."

The American prisoner looked healthy and Nicaraguan officials said he had been well treated. But reporters could not verify the conditions under which he has been held and questioned, and Mr. Hasenfus's future treatment could depend on the statements he is willing to make here.

[The Drug Enforcement Administration said the plane that was shot down was earlier involved in a United States "sting" operation against the Nicaraguan Government. And Senator Dave Durenberger, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, challenged the White House to acknowledge what he said was its role in the plane's flight.]

A Sensitive Moment

The incident comes at a sensitive moment when Congress is about to release \$100 million in aid to the rebels. If the C.I.A. was involved in the supply effort, as Mr. Hasenfus says, it would appear to violate Congressional restrictions and directly contradict repeated statements by Reagan Administration officials that the downed plane was part of a purely private effort by American supporters of the Nicaraguan guerrillas.

If, on the other hand, the rebel supply effort was run by a private American organization, as the Administration says, the group appears to have had

impressive resources that allowed it to hire former C.I.A. personnel, maintain dozens of Americans in El Salvador, warehouse tons of equipment, buy military transports and fly repeatedly in and out of El Salvador, Honduras and the United States.

Mr. Hasenfus, who is 45 years old, said Nicaraguan rebel supply flights from the main military air base at Ilopango in El Salvador and rebel bases in Honduras were not only supervised by the C.I.A., but were supported also by more than 25 employees of an American company based in El Salvador. These employees appear to have ferried more than 130,000 pounds of military equipment to rebel forces.

Prisoner Appears Nervous

The American prisoner appeared nervous and spoke slowly, staring straight ahead. Nicaraguan officials said he did not want to answer questions and Mr. Hasenfus left the stage

after talking for about 10 minutes. A Nicaraguan intelligence officer said Mr. Hasenfus had spoken because he was demoralized and felt abandoned.

Officials said they still had not decided if he would be put on trial.

Mr. Hasenfus is being detained in the Ministry of the Interior and has been interrogated for two days, according to Nicaraguan officials. They added that it is uncertain when American diplomats or Mr. Hasenfus's wife, Sally, will be allowed to see him. However, the radio here said Mrs. Hasenfus had visited him.

"His situation is very difficult," said Capt. Ricardo Wheelock, head of Nicaraguan military intelligence. "He is a mercenary who has been shot down."

Several documents reportedly taken from the downed rebel plane, including logbooks, registration certificates, Salvadoran Air Force identity cards and personal papers were shown to a reporter for two hours and appeared to support key parts of Mr. Hasenfus's account.

Bodies Left Outside Embassy

But other aspects, such as his supervision by C.I.A. agents in El Salvador, cannot be independently confirmed by a reporter here and are not documented in the papers captured by the Nicaraguans.

The bodies of two American crew members who died when the rebel plane crashed were taken to the American Embassy in coffins this afternoon and left on the street outside the main gate by Sandinista police in what appeared to be a propaganda gesture. The bodies were later taken inside by embassy employees.

Mr. Hasenfus said the Americans all worked for a company called Corporate Air Services in El Salvador, which

he said was part of the Southern Air Transport Company in Miami.

Nicaraguan officials charge that both companies work for the C.I.A.. Mr. Hasenfus said Corporate Air Services is based at the Salvadoran Air Force base outside the capital of San Salvador.

Captain Wheelock said Mr. Hasenfus had told interrogators that he believed he was working for the C.I.A. when he agreed to join rebel supply flights as a specialist in freight loading. Mr. Hasenfus did not repeat that reported statement at the news conference today.

But he did describe working for eight years for a C.I.A.-operated airline in Southeast Asia, Air America, which he said also once employed the American chief pilot of the downed rebel plane. The pilot died, along with the American co-pilot, when a Sandinista rocket hit the plane over southern Nicaragua on Sunday.

Mr. Hasenfus added that he was approached five months ago by the former Air America pilot, William J. Cooper, with whom he worked flying supplies to C.I.A. agents at remote airstrips in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam from 1965 to 1973. From 1960 to 1965, Mr. Hasenfus said, he was in the Marine Corps.

He said he was paid \$3,000 a month plus all expenses for working as a loader on rebel supply flights over Nicaragua. The money was deposited directly into his account at the Pestigo Bank in Marinette, Wis., according to Sandinista officials. It is not clear who paid the money.

The documents found on the rebel C-123 military supply plane include Salvadoran Air Force identity cards that describe the three American crew members, including Mr. Hasenfus, as United States military advisers in El Salvador.

In a statement today, the Salvadoran Army high command denied any involvement in the rebel supply flights. A spokesman at the American Embassy in El Salvador has also denied that any of the American crew members were working as United States military advisers in El Salvador.

One of the crew member's wallet carried the business card of a Robert W. Owen and listed a Washington address and telephone number. Another business card in the wallet was for a Mr. P. J. Buechler, listed as working for the State Department's Nicaraguan Humanitarian Affairs Office. That office was in charge of sending nonlethal aid to Nicaraguan rebels over the last year.