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Old soldiers supply Central America

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FORT WALTON BEACH, Fla. — Harry Aderholt, the brassy brigadier general, was running an import shop full of wicker and vases. Mac McCoskrie, the colonel, had a falling furniture store down the street. Doc Fitzpatrick, the medic, was living idly off his pension.

Then they came up with an idea. "We decided we wanted to get involved in Central America," said Aderholt, who at 65 has gained some girth but has lost none of his tough-talking style from combat days. "We're not afraid to be patriots."

That was how the Air Commandos were re-born and a group of aging, retired soldiers from Florida's Panhandle found one more battle to join. So far, they say, they've shipped millions of dollars in medical supplies, clothes and food to El Salvador and Guatemala, and they hope to start supplying the Nicaraguan anti-government contras.

Along the way, they've attracted some worried glances from Washington, where Congress and the president are at odds over Central America and critics are troubled by the private flow.

But down in this Gulf Coast town, inside their tiny, paneled office on motel-lined Miracle Strip, between walls coated with photos of old planes and commendations for



Aderholt

wartime heroics, the Air Commandos have no such doubts.

"Our government has opted out, is what it is," said McCoskrie, 63, who fought from Pearl Harbor to Southeast Asia and ran the Air Force Special Operations training school before retiring. "It means the private sector is going to have to pick up with it."

The Air Commandos' mission is more peaceable than some in its members' pasts.

Gen. Aderholt, known as "Hienie" to his friends, is a former Central Intelligence Agency staff member and commanded covert air operations in Vietnam. Two years ago, he says, he spent a week flying with the Salvadoran Air Force to test its readiness. For their part, most of his fellow commandos fought in two or three wars and a few conflicts in between.

When Aderholt became president of Air Commando Association Inc. a little over a year ago, the group was nothing more than a social club for about 1,500 soldiers who had served in the defunct combat unit of the same name.

"We were just sitting around drinking whiskey," the general said. "So I told them I'd serve, but we were going to have to get out there and do something."

Supplies to Miami

These days, six or seven commandos meet each morning at their office. They work over the phone, arranging donations of antibiotics, vitamins, needles, skin ointment, blankets, soap, clothes and food to be sent to Miami. From there, the goods are flown to Central America, usually for free



McCoskrie

by one of the countries' airlines. The members take turns traveling south, they say, to make sure the supplies arrive.

"We're not talking about going out and fighting. That's not for us," said Aderholt, a short, alternately stern and wise-cracking man who still wears his graying hair in a close, military crop. "We're talking about coming up with programs that can make a difference in the way these people look at their governments."

Not everybody is convinced of the group's modest motives. With his CIA background, Aderholt is constantly asked about — and denies — any connection with his old intelligence contacts.

When Congress was debating the Nicaraguan contras aid package that was voted down two weeks ago, the Congressional Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus termed the Air Commandos one of a dozen key private supporters of the rebels.

It was a flattering, but overstated, assessment. The commandos are balding — many wear bifocals and most of them are long out of uniform — and their moves are not all that crisp these days.

At times, transportation has been limited to Mac McCoskrie's Chevette, lugging and a U-Haul trailer filled with supplies to Miami. "And that car wasn't built to do that," conceded the lieutenant colonel.

Swindled for \$2,000

In their enthusiasm, the commandos gave \$2,000 to a man named Alan Goetsch, who told them he was an army captain from Alabama working to build a hospital in the jungles of Central America. It turned out that Goetsch, who's now in jail, was a fake, and their money is gone.

Soon after they opened three clinics in Guatemala earlier this year, medical supplies — most of which go to refugee Indians left homeless by the conflicts of the region — ran out.

The bulk of what they've shipped to El Salvador and Guatemala, with a value they estimated at about \$7 million, has been donated by the Detroit-based

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F.B.I. CHIEF HAILS GAINS ON TERROR

By ELAINE SCIOLINO

William H. Webster, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said yesterday that by applying "lawful techniques," the bureau has been "extraordinarily successful" in reducing incidents of terrorism in the United States in the last six years. He added, "Those principles can be applied on the international stage."

Mr. Webster cited better intelligence, effective law enforcement, increased domestic and international cooperation and a better-informed public as reasons for the decrease. While there were 100 incidents of domestic terrorism in the United States in 1978, he said, that dropped to 13 incidents in 1984 and only 7 last year, when 23 such incidents were prevented.

He did not indicate what those incidents were or which groups or individuals were involved.

The active use of informants, undercover agents and court-ordered electronic surveillance also have contributed to the bureau's success, especially in bringing terrorists to justice.

Mr. Webster made his remarks while participating in an American Bar Association Convention panel on terrorism that brought together Reagan Administration officials, national security, legal and intelligence experts and journalists.

Calling terrorism a criminal act, he said, "The more we increase our ability to deal with terrorism as a criminal activity, the more successful we will be."

In contrast to the decrease in domestic acts of terrorism, Charles Allen,

head of counterterrorism for the Central Intelligence Agency, told the panel that "beyond any doubt" the number of international terrorist attacks has increased in recent years. In 1984, he said, there were almost 800 recorded incidents of terrorism worldwide, as against 500 incidents in the early 1980's.

Attacks Abroad Stepped Up

Mr. Allen said that in the last two years, terrorist attacks have become "more indiscriminate and lethal with little regard for the fate of innocent civilians," that Americans are increasingly the targets of terrorist attacks and that state-sponsor terrorism "has become virtually institutionalized."

He added that there was a tendency for terrorists to attack "softer, less protected targets" such as businesses,

hotels and restaurants, a tendency that he predicted would increase.

In an effort to combat terrorism, the C.I.A. and other intelligence agencies have doubled analytical and operational resources in the last two years, Mr. Allen said, adding that increased sharing of intelligence with allies has increased the agency's ability to track terrorist operations, disrupt financial and supply lines and pre-empt terrorist attacks.

The C.I.A., alone and in conjunction with allied intelligence organizations, he said, is also "working actively to penetrate terrorist networks, mount operations to sow seeds of suspicion among the cadres and among the leaders," as well as looking for new technical capabilities to deal with what he called "an unconventional target."

Mr. Allen said the selective use of force "has upped the ante" for state-supported terrorism, adding that such incidents had significantly decreased since the American bombing raid on Libya in April.

The raid was praised as a deterrent to terrorists by a number of other speakers, including Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d, who said that terrorism can not be combated by "conferences or making rules." He praised President Reagan for the Libyan raid, saying, "When someone commits an impermissible act, you swat him."

"A terrorist is kind of like the offense in any kind of sports contest," said Mr. Meese. The terrorist is successful, he added, when governments capitulate to his demands and when he causes such fear among the populace that "society is immobilized."