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# Witness says CIA trained contras

By Thomas Palmer  
Globe Staff.

The Central Intelligence Agency provided Nicaraguan contras with combat training last year after Congress had passed a law intended to ban such aid, according to an American who assisted in the training.

Iain Crawford, who participated last spring in an American operation that airdropped weapons to contra forces inside Nicaragua, said that a CIA officer based in Honduras told him of receiving authorization to train contra soldiers in combat parachute jumping.

Crawford, a former parachute rigger and member of the highly trained Delta Force, said that contra soldiers were subsequently trained in paratrooping and that he accompanied six soldiers on two training flights in mid-1986. The CIA officer, known to Crawford only as "Mick," was present on one of the training flights and coordinated the ground training, as well as both parachute jumps, the crewman said.

On the second of Crawford's flights, he said, parachute jumps were made from a Caribou aircraft carrying weapons to contra positions inside Nicaragua. The plane was heading south to airdrop weapons at Bocay, Crawford said, and the contras made their jumps before it crossed the Nicaragua-Honduras border.

The Globe reported previously that CIA officers in Honduras gave assistance to crewmen in the airdrop operation supporting the contras, despite the aid ban and a

CIA policy against contacts. The training raises new questions about the extent and the propriety of CIA contacts with the contras themselves.

From late 1985 to October 1986, the CIA was barred by statute from giving the contras any military aid except communications assistance and what was labeled by Congress as "advice."

This ban was interpreted broadly by the congressional intelligence committees. Lee Hamilton, then chairman of the House committee, informed CIA Director William Casey in December 1985 that the statute required that "intelligence personnel are not to act as military advisers."

The CIA itself, according to the Tower Commission, concluded it was not authorized to provide the contras with "specialized logistics training," although CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson was unable to say last week what came under that category. Crawford said he was told that most training was prohibited but that the paratrooper training had been specially approved.

## Intelligence board memo

That approval possibly came from the President's Intelligence Oversight Board in an April 8, 1986, memorandum to National Security Adviser John M. Poindexter, which interpreted the ban as allowing actions clearly beyond what was considered legal by congressmen.

The board concluded that, under the provision authorizing communications support and "advice" for the contras, any US government agency could lawfully provide "basic military training ... so long as such training does not amount to the participation in the planning or execution of mili-

tary or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua."

"I felt that the legal advice that the IOB gave was incorrect," Michael D. Barnes, former chairman of the House subcommittee on western hemispheric affairs, said yesterday. "I'd like to see the written legal analysis that the IOB used to come to that conclusion, because it doesn't jibe with my memory of what everyone in Congress thought the law was."

According to the CIA publication "The Acme of Skill," the board is "responsible for discovering and reporting to the President any intelligence activities that raise questions of propriety or legality in terms of the constitution, the laws of the United States or presidential executive order."

The board's only responsibility is to the president.

Said Robert R. Simmons, former staff director of the Senate Intelligence Committee, now a visiting lecturer at Yale University, "I've never heard of someone trying to run a covert activity on the OK of the IOB."

## Authorization source unclear

Authorization for field actions by CIA officers customarily comes from the CIA's general counsel. It is not known whence the authorization came that led to the paratrooper training of the contras. But it was only a month after Poindexter received the opinion from the Intelligence Oversight Board that Crawford was told by an officer in the field that he had the approval for such training.

The board's opinion to Poindexter raises the question of whether the CIA expanded its program beyond the parachute training witnessed by Crawford. The CIA declined comment on the training allegation.

Acting CIA Director Robert Gates said in testimony to the Senate last month that the office of CIA inspector general Carroll Hauver was continuing an investigation into CIA ties with the contras during the congressional ban.

## Extensive CIA involvement

According to published reports, investigators have discovered many types of involvement by CIA officials in channeling arms to the contras during the period between 1984 and 1986 when CIA involvement in military assistance was restricted or barred.

Tomas Castillo, formerly the station chief in Costa Rica, assisted former National Security Council aide Oliver L. North in the airdropping of weapons to contras inside Nicaragua during the first half of 1986, according to the Tower Commission report. Castillo reportedly was asked to retire, after discrepancies were discovered in his account of his activities to the CIA's inspector general.

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In June 1985, the CIA station chief in Honduras helped resolve a dispute among contra factions over weapons shipments arranged by North, the Miami Herald has reported. One knowledgeable source said that this same officer was station chief at the time of the combat parachute training.

The Washington Post reported last week that the CIA station chief in Taiwan was known to have assisted in the transfer of light arms from the Taiwan government to the contras in 1985.

The Globe reported earlier this month that the two CIA officers at Aguacate, Honduras, assisted supply crews by providing them with access to a "situation map" that included Sandinista antiaircraft positions inside Nicaragua.

The Globe also reported that Huey helicopters linked to the CIA operated along the Nicaragua-Honduras border. One crewman said he was aboard a helicopter that ferried plastic explosives to contras positioned there. Another said he hauled helicopter fuel to the area aboard one of the Caribou cargo planes normally used to airdrop weapons inside Nicaragua.

Castillo told the Tower Commission that his activities had the approval of superiors. According to one account, Castillo was authorized at a station chiefs' meeting in late 1985 to facilitate contact between North and the airdrop effort. These reports raise questions about how high the approval went.

A small delegation from the House and the Senate select investigatory committees is to travel to Central America next week on a fact-finding mission. Among the topics to be explored are the CIA's contacts with the contras in Honduras and Costa Rica during the congressional ban.

#### **Training issue raised in May**

Two CIA officers, known as Mick and Moe, were stationed at Aguacate, and Crawford said it was Mick who first raised the issue of the training last May, when he asked to borrow an airplane.

"He came over to us and said, 'We are training these guys in par-

atrooping and would sure like to use that Caribou instead of the Huey.'" Crawford recalled. "So I said I didn't see any problem as long as I got to jump out with them."

Crawford said Mick told him that the CIA officers were not permitted to train contras in "immediate-action drills . . . things to do to get away, to break contact, during an ambush . . . things like this that are your soldiers' daily practice."

Crawford said that the soldiers did not jump with guns or combat gear during the short time he was at Aguacate but that "it was obviously building to that."

"In all honesty, I'd say that paratrooping in camouflage fatigues . . . is military paratrooping," he said.

Photographs were taken on one of the parachute-jump flights, and Crawford produced a photograph that he said showed Mick. The photo is one of a set chronicling the supply operation that were purchased from Crawford by The Globe.

Crawford added that the pilots on the airdrop missions trained contra pilots to fly the Caribou airplane but that Mick "was not helping, aiding or instigating it." One crewman said Mick joked that he wanted to receive flight training himself.

*Freelance writer Jeff McConnell contributed to this report.*