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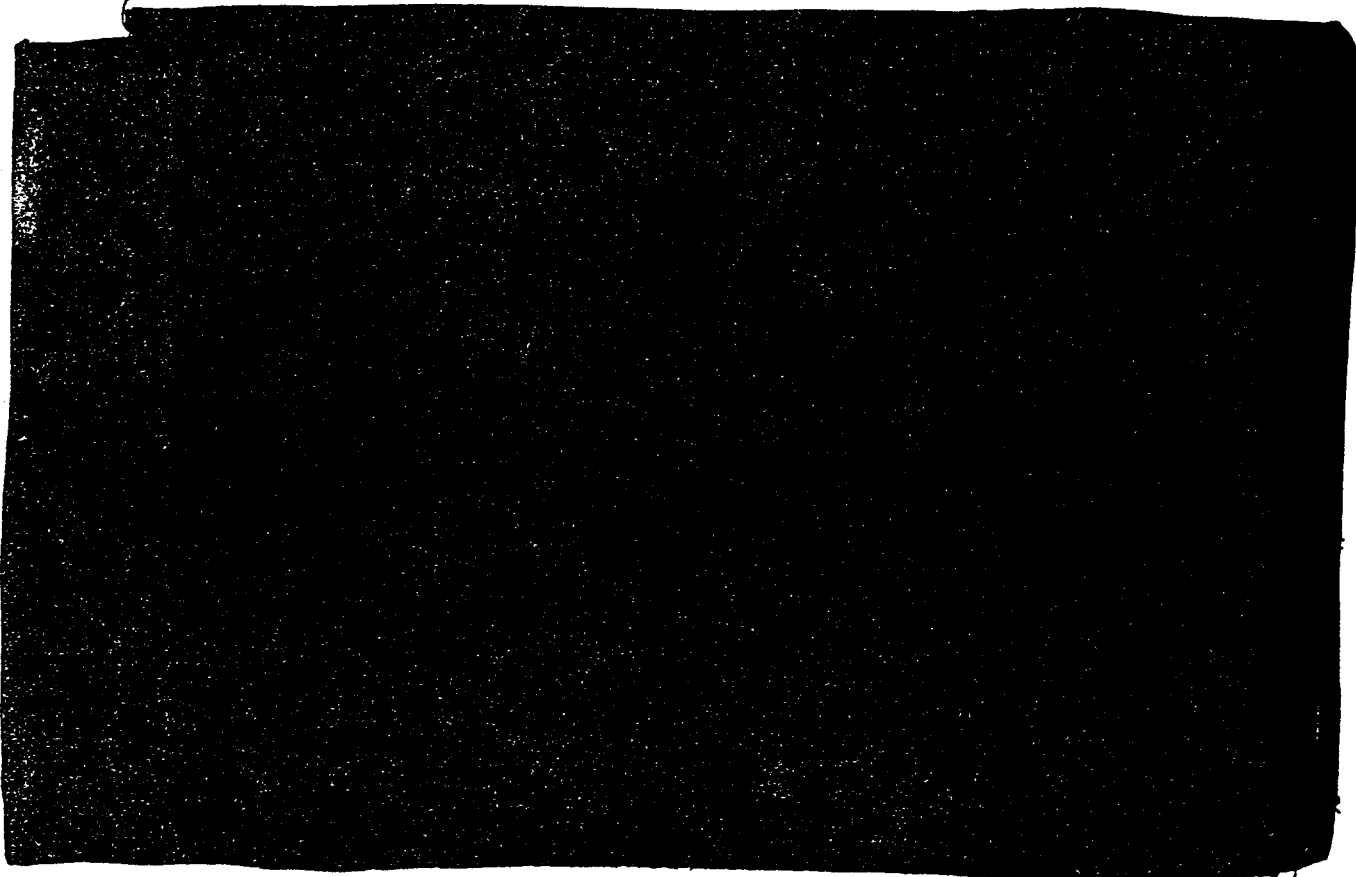
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THE ASSASSINATION ON 5 AUGUST 1991 OF JOSE MIGUEL ((MERIDA)) ESCOBAR, THE FORMER CHIEF OF THE HOMICIDE AND KIDNAPPING INVESTIGATION SECTION OF THE GUATEMALAN NATIONAL POLICE, IS BELIEVED BY SENIOR POLICE OFFICIALS TO HAVE BEEN RELATED TO HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH A GROUP OF CORRUPT POLICE OFFICERS, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS NAMED ((SOTO)), ((SOLARES)), ((PENNA)) AND ((SALAZAR)). THESE MEN HAD FORMED PART OF A GANG DEDICATED TO BANK ROBBERIES AND OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES. THE TWO CHIEF SUSPECTS IN THE MURDER ARE LUIS ARMANDO ((CASTRO)) JIMENEZ AND EDGAR ENRIQUE ((GALVEZ)), BOTH FORMER MEMBERS OF MERIDA'S UNIT WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE DECEMBER 1990 ROBBERY OF THE LAS VEGAS BILLIARDS HALL IN ZONE 1. BOTH MEN WERE DISMISSED AND CHARGED IN THE THEFT, WHICH INVOLVED THE ROBBERY OF U.S. CITIZENS. MERIDA WAS ALSO SUSPECTED OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE ROBBERY AND HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM HIS POSITION AS CHIEF OF THE HOMICIDE AND KIDNAP INVESTIGATION SECTION A WEEK BEFORE HIS MURDER. HE WAS TO HAVE BEEN DISMISSED FROM THE NATIONAL POLICE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. EITHER CASTRO OR GALVEZ BORROWED THE CAR USED IN THE ASSASSINATION FROM A THIRD FORMER NATIONAL POLICEMAN KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF A BANK ROBBERY GANG. (SOURCE COMMENT: IT APPEARS THAT MERIDA INFORMED ON HIS PARTNERS WHEN THE POOL HALL ROBBERY WAS INVESTIGATED, LEADING TO HIS MURDER WHEN THEY WERE RELEASED FROM CUSTODY. BY INFORMING, HE TEMPORARILY SAVED HIS JOB. THE FULL EXTENT OF HIS INVOLVEMENT IN ILLEGAL ACTIVITY IS UNKNOWN. IN THE COURSE OF HIS POLICE WORK, MERIDA HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN THE INVESTIGATION OF THE MURDER OF MYRNA ((MACK)) CHANG, A GUATEMALAN ANTHROPOLOGIST WITH LEFTIST POLITICAL TIES.)

2. THE CAR USED IN THE ASSASSINATION OF MERIDA WAS OWNED BY ALFREDO DE JESUS ((GUERRA)) GALINDO, WHO HAD PURCHASED IT A SHORT TIME BEFORE THE INCIDENT AND HAD NOT HAD TIME TO TAKE OUT THE LEGAL PAPERS FOR IT. (FIELD COMMENT: THE GUATEMALAN PRESS OF 7 AUGUST REPORTED THAT GUERRA HAD BEEN ARRESTED AS A SUSPECT IN THE CRIME.) GUERRA IS A FORMER MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL POLICE FIFTH DEPARTMENT, WHO WAS DISMISSED ON 23 FEBRUARY 1990, FOR FAILING TO SHOW UP FOR WORK. HE WAS ASSIGNED TO WORK WITH THE SECURITY FORCE FOR THE VICE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT. AT THE TIME HE WAS DISMISSED, HE WAS UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR A SERIES OF ROBBERIES WHICH HAD TAKEN PLACE AT THE END OF 1989 AND IN EARLY 1990. THESE INCLUDED THE ROBBERY OF THE BANCO BANDESA IN JUTIAPA IN 1989, THE ROBBERY OF THE BANCO BANDESA IN COBAN IN 1990, AND THE ROBBERY OF THE BANCO INMOBILIARIO IN GUATEMALA CITY. THE GANG ALSO ROBBED TWO GAS STATIONS IN GUATEMALA CITY. A VEHICLE AND WEAPONS BELONGING TO THE SECURITY STAFF OF THE VICE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT WERE USED IN THE ROBBERIES. GUERRA HAS THUS FAR CLAIMED HE "LENT" THE CAR TO EITHER CASTRO OR GALVEZ (WHICH ONE WAS NOT SPECIFIED) AND HAD NO IDEA THEY WERE GOING TO USE IT IN THE ASSASSINATION OF MERIDA.

3. DESPITE THE FAIRLY CLEAR TRAIL LEADING TO THE MURDERERS OF MERIDA, COLONEL MARCO ANTONIO ((GONZALEZ)) TARACENA, DIRECTOR OF THE

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT FERNANDO ((HURTADO)) PREM AND RETIRED COLONEL MARIO ((PAIZ)) BOLANOS, DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL POLICE, HAVE STARTED TO SPREAD THE RUMOR THAT THE SECURITY DEPARTMENT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL STAFF, WHICH COMES UNDER THE CONTROL OF COLONEL LUIS FRANCISCO ((ORTEGA)) MENALDO, WAS IN SOME WAY INVOLVED IN THE KILLING. MERIDA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE INVESTIGATION OF THE MYRNA MACK CASE, WHICH HAS GAINED WIDESPREAD INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION AND THE PERSONAL INTEREST OF PRESIDENT JORGE ((SERRANO)) ELIAS, MAKES HIS MURDER A USEFUL TOOL FOR ANYONE WISHING TO DAMAGE A POLITICAL ENEMY. THE BASIS OF THE RUMORS IS THE FACT THAT TWO ENLISTED MEN ASSIGNED TO THE SECURITY DEPARTMENT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL STAFF, MARCO TULIO ((LOPEZ)) RAYMUNDO AND JUAN ((HERNANDEZ)) SANCHEZ, WERE ARRESTED ON 9 JULY BY THE NATIONAL POLICE IN COLONIA BELEN, MIXCO (A SUBURB OF GUATEMALA CITY). BOTH WERE ARMED AND SAID THEY WERE WAITING FOR FRIENDS TO GO DRINKING. IN FACT, THEY WERE IN MIXCO PLANNING TO STEAL A CAR. THEY WERE TURNED OVER TO THE COMMANDER OF THE SECURITY DEPARTMENT LATER IN THE DAY, AND THAT SAME DAY A HEARING WAS HELD, AND BOTH WERE DISMISSED FROM THE SERVICE AS HABITUAL DRUNKARDS. THE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL POLICE HAS NOW CLAIMED THE MEN WERE IN FACT SURVEILLING A NATIONAL POLICE OFFICER WHO LIVED IN THE AREA. FROM THIS, HE IS TRYING TO MAKE A CASE IT WAS THE SECURITY DEPARTMENT THAT WAS INVOLVED IN THE KILLING OF MERIDA.



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