

Guatemala

Response to Information Request Number:	GTM02001.ZSF
Date:	February 04, 2002
Subject:	Guatemala: Information on the Policia Militar Ambulante (PMA)
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Arbitrary detention / Disappearances / Extrajudicial executions / Military personnel / Military police / Police / Political violence / Security forces / Women

Query:

What was the PMA? What was the CAPMA? What was the role of women in the PMA and CAPMA? Were members of the PMA involved in human rights violations between 1983 and 1986? Who is Colonel Edgar Augusto Godoy Gaitán? What was his role in the PMA?

Response:

The CAPMA (Centro de Adiestramiento de la Policia Militar Ambulante) was the training center for the Policia Militar Ambulante (Mobile Military Police, PMA). Training included classes taught by civilians, including doctors, attorneys, and personal defense experts (Inforpress 2001, 1).

The PMA was founded in 1965 as an entity independent of the military police. Although separate from the military police, the PMA was under direct military control. The PMA's responsibilities included police functions and protection of elite interests. The National Security Archive Database indicates that the PMA "was intended as an extension of military control over law enforcement operations in the Guatemalan countryside...In addition to performing general police functions, the PMA protected the landowning elite and controlled the rural population." Thus, the PMA patrolled both urban and rural areas. Protection duties included security for both state and private enterprise. The segment of the PMA devoted to the protection of state businesses, such as electric generating plants and train stations, was referred to as "ordinaria," while the segment responsible for protection of private business was called "extraordinaria." Private businesses protected by the PMA included commercial enterprises, delivery trucks, and banks. The "extraordinaria" included retired members of the military. During the 1980s there were between 1,800 and 2,000 police in the PMA, with sixty percent of the force in the PMA "extraordinaria" (Inforpress 2001, 1).

By the 1970s the PMA was a critical counterinsurgency force and an integral part of the state intelligence apparatus. PMA detachments operated throughout the country with a rapid reaction force based in Escuintla, approximately 30 miles southwest of Guatemala City. Until 1984 the urban headquarters, based in Guatemala City, was located next to the headquarters of the military intelligence directorate (D2). After 1984, this D2 facility was reportedly used to hold guerrillas under interrogation (National Security Archive).

As a result of its involvement in the counterinsurgency, the PMA was implicated in a series of human rights violations. Latin American Newsletters described the PMA as "a particularly vicious arm of the security forces" (1976, 354). The Los Angeles Times noted that the PMA "had a reputation for extreme abuse of authority" (1997). A 1981 Amnesty International report stated that the PMA was "named in many reports of abuses on and around large plantations in rural areas, and of seizure and 'disappearance' of trade union

leaders at factories where the PMA provided security services" (Fried, et al, 1983, 144). In a 1984 study, analyst George Black wrote, "In the countryside, the security forces of the Mobile Military Police and the Hacienda (Treasury) Police, private landowners and freelance thugs connected to the fascist MLN used terror in ways that made one group indistinguishable from the others" (Black, et al, 1984, 6).

Human rights violations by the PMA peaked in the 1980s. Allan Nairn and Jean-Marie Simon reported in 1986 that some of the disappeared "were being held at the headquarters of a security force called the Ambulant Military Police (PMA) outside the capital. The prisoners were held in cells hidden behind a concealed door in a building next to the soccer field" (The New Republic).

In the fall of 1988, the Civilian Protection System (SIPROCI), led by D2, was created. SIPROCI included parts of the PMA, the National Police, other security forces, and government agencies. In SIPROCI, PMA units were devoted to operations targeted at crime and drugs. "By 1990, the army was using the Mobile Military Police to enhance its 'unofficial' role in anti-narcotics efforts...In 1995, the PMA attached its units to the Honor Guard Brigade, the Mariscal Zavala Brigade, and Army General Headquarters (Military Zone One, ZM1) to reinforce security and increase police visibility in the capital." The PMA was dismantled in 1997 pursuant to the Peace Accords (National Security Archive).

Evidence concerning the magnitude of human rights violations by the PMA continues to come to light. In 1999, as the PMA's Guatemala City compound was being renovated to house the National Police Academy, bones were found. A police official stated that these bones were evidence of mass graves. Testing of the evidence proved inconclusive. Nevertheless, the Families of the Detained and Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA) contend that over 3,000 individuals disappeared and died at PMA headquarters during the civil war. Special Prosecutor Fernando Mendizabal said, "Torture, killing, and illegal burial of people took place at the PMA" (EFE News Service 1999).

WOMEN IN THE PMA:

In the early to mid-1980s, approximately 50 women were in the PMA, a few of whom were sergeants. Women members of the PMA increased in the late 1980s. As women's employment in the PMA increased, so did their representation in positions with the rank of sergeant. The increase of women's involvement in the PMA coincided with an overall increase of female membership of the security forces (Inforpress 2001, 1-2).

An army source told Inforpress, that women in the PMA were employed in more traditional posts and generally not involved in repression. At CAPMA, women taught first aid, nursing, and legal training. Women were armed with light weapons (such as a Beretta pistol or light machine gun) and participated in urban patrols. Women police also frisked women suspects. Women working in traditional administrative support duties were often given official status during the 1980s (Inforpress 2001, 1-2).

THE ROLE OF COLONEL GODOY GAITAN:

Colonel Edgar Augusto Godoy Gaitán was a member of D2 in 1978. He served as the commander of D2 from January 1986 to June 1987. From March 1988 to January 1991, he served as the chief of the Estado Mayor Presidencial. Colonel Godoy, along with two other senior officers, was arrested in 1996 for the September 1990 murder of anthropologist Myrna Mack. As of February 12, 2002, he had not yet been tried for this charge, and was under house arrest (National Security Archive).

Although no sources available to the RIC indicate that Colonel Godoy was involved with the PMA Training Center, there are reports that each military base had an intelligence section (S-2), which maintained direct contact with the D-2 (National Security Archive).

INTELLIGENCE STRUCTURE:

The following excerpt from the National Security Archive database on the Guatemalan military explains the structure of the intelligence community in the 1980s, including the role of the PMA.

"The Intelligence Directorate of the Estado Mayor de la Defensa Nacional (EMDN) is the country's primary intelligence organization, with functions comparable to the U.S. CIA, FBI, DIA, Military Intelligence, and the DEA combined...The D2 maintains an intricate intelligence gathering network enhanced, according to one U.S. document, by its reputation as an 'effective and dangerous entity.' The document described the network as concentric rings around D-2: the first ring comprised S2 officers of major army units. The second ring was the Mobile Military Police (PMA), Archivo (DSEMP), the National Police (PN), and D2's network of paid agents. The third ring included agent networks run by the S2s, military commissioners, PMA-trained and uniformed civilian hired guards, and reservists. The final ring was made up of civil patrollers. The D2 also retains formal control of security-related intelligence in police organizations through the Civilian Protection System (SIPROCI). It controls the National Police, Archivo, and the Presidential Staff in part by rotating its personnel into top positions."

The PMA was, therefore, central to the intelligence apparatus used by the Guatemalan state in its war with the guerrillas.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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