

GAO

Report to the Honorable
Richard A. Gephardt, House of
Representatives

July 1988

CENTRAL AMERICA

U.S. National Guard Activities



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United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-230756

July 18, 1988

The Honorable Richard A. Gephardt
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Gephardt:

In response to your March 3, 1987, request, we reviewed the training programs conducted by the U.S. Air and Army National Guards in Central America since 1983. Our objective was to determine how many troops had trained in Central America and the nature, purpose, and costs of the training. We also developed information regarding your questions on whether the training was conducted in a secure environment, whether the training program related to U.S. efforts to aid the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance (Contras), and how the training of National Guard troops aided the host countries.

The Air and Army National Guards conduct both unit and individual training throughout the United States and at overseas locations. Since 1983, approximately 176,000 National Guard troops have participated in overseas training throughout the world. Of these, 38,388 guardsmen have participated in training conducted in Central America, primarily in Honduras and Panama.

Since 1983, U.S. forces have conducted an almost continuous series of military training exercises in Honduras. National Guard participation in the exercises expanded during fiscal years 1983-87, as part of these U.S. efforts in the region, and 740 Air and 6,721 Army Guard troops were deployed to Honduras for training. The Army Guard troops have primarily conducted road-building, artillery, and armor training exercises, and the Air Guard troops have primarily conducted civil engineering type training exercises. Guard troops have also deployed to augment or assist active duty units conducting training exercises and to help upgrade or maintain U.S. facilities in Honduras. The exercises also have an indirect effect in countering Cuban/Soviet expansion in the region.

During fiscal years 1983-87, 12,135 Air and 17,761 Army National Guard troops participated in training exercises in Panama. A total of 6,680 Army guardsmen participated in road-building exercises similar to those in Honduras, and 3,525 guardsmen received training at the U.S. Army Jungle Operations Training Center. In addition, 1,490 Army guardsmen participated in training for defense of the Panama Canal, and 6,066 troops participated in medical training exercises, public

affairs activities, and other annual training activities. Air Guard training has provided airlift support and air defense capability for the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) located in Panama.

The cost of Air and Army National Guard training in Central America during fiscal years 1983-87 was about \$22 million for incremental pay and allowances, real estate leasing, repair parts, administrative costs, and some transportation costs within the United States. The National Guard Bureau primarily funded these costs, which do not include the cost of transporting troops and equipment from the United States to a foreign country and to locations within a foreign country. The Joint Chiefs of Staff fund these transportation costs, and, according to Military Airlift and Sealift Command officials, such costs are not maintained separately for active, reserve, and National Guard training. The cost of Air National Guard activities in support of SOUTHCOM was not readily available because the Guard conducts flying missions on a continual basis throughout South and Central America, and separate cost information is not maintained by location.

The exercises have provided guardsmen training experiences different from those at U.S. locations. Training in overseas locations enables the Guard to plan for mobilization, overseas deployment, and redeployment to the United States. Furthermore, in Central America, training activities are conducted in more remote and austere locations than is often the case elsewhere.

The National Guard has benefited Honduras and Panama through its exercises, principally by constructing roads. For example, the Army National Guard built a road approximately 25 kilometers long in central Honduras that provides improved access to an important agricultural area. In addition, Guard units have provided medical treatment, improved school buildings, and participated in other humanitarian assistance activities.

The National Guard has generally conducted training with security and safety in mind, and no hostile incidents have occurred as far as we could ascertain. Honduran troops and U.S. military police provide perimeter security, and hostile activities are closely monitored. In one case, a Guard unit near the Nicaraguan border was immediately withdrawn when it was reported to be potentially exposed to hostile action.

Our review of records and visits to exercise locations did not disclose any indications that the National Guard had provided assistance to the

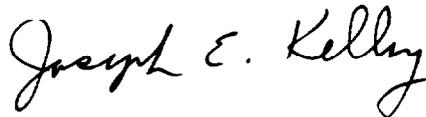
Contras through its training exercises. According to SOUTHCOM and National Guard officials, efforts were made to ensure that National Guard training did not aid, or give the appearance of aiding, the Contras.

Appendix I contains more detailed information on these and other matters.

The Departments of Defense and State reviewed a draft of this report. The Defense Department fully concurred with the draft (see appendix IV). The State Department expressed concern that parts of the draft could be misleading, and we have made adjustments as appropriate (see appendix V).

Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 15 days from its issue date. At that time we will send copies to the Chairmen, Senate and House Committees on Appropriations, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, and House Committee on Government Operations; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; the Department of Defense; the National Guard Bureau; and other interested parties.

Sincerely yours,



Joseph E. Kelley
Associate Director

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Abbreviations

AID	Agency for International Development
NGB	National Guard Bureau
SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command

U.S. National Guard Training in Central America

As of September 30, 1986, the U.S. National Guard was comprised of Air and Army National Guard units with over 500,000 personnel. The National Guard has 54 offices, one in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. While in state or territorial service, National Guard units are under the command and control of the governor and adjutant general in each state, territory, or U.S. possession. The National Guard Bureau (NGB) in Washington, D.C., funds most Guard activities and provides liaison between the states and the Departments of the Army and Air Force. The NGB also provides information to the state adjutants general on potential Guard training opportunities with active service components.

Title 32 of the U.S. Code states that National Guard units shall be ordered to federal active duty and retained as long as necessary whenever the Congress determines that active duty units need assistance for national security purposes. Army National Guard units are aligned with the active Army units and the Army reserve as part of the total force concept. For example, all of the Army's infantry scout troops and heavy helicopter companies and nearly 75 percent of its infantry battalions are in the National Guard units. The Air National Guard provides over 70 percent of the Air Force's continental U.S. strategic interceptor force and aircraft control and warning units and nearly 50 percent of its combat communication, engineering installation, and tactical control units.

National Guard Training

When ordered to active duty for training purposes, the Guard units are under the command and control of the active service components, and their training programs must conform to those required of the active forces. National Guard units are required to assemble for drill and instruction at least 48 times each year. An assembly for drill may consist of a single ordered formation of a unit or a series of formations—in practice, four formations are usually conducted one weekend each month. In addition, National Guard units are also required to participate in training at a field exercise or other type exercise at least 15 days each year.

Programs available to meet the Guard's annual training requirements include exercises conducted at locations throughout the United States. Training programs also include overseas deployment training, which may include participation in Joint Chiefs of Staff exercises or may involve a unit deploying for a short-duration exercise to meet annual training requirements. The United States has deployed the National Guard to more than 40 foreign countries for training purposes.

Army National Guard Training in Central America

From 1983 through 1987, approximately 24,500 Army National Guard troops trained in Central America. As shown in appendixes II and III, 6,721 Army guardsmen received training in Honduras and 17,761 received training in Panama. In addition, 18 members of a National Guard band were in Costa Rica participating in a goodwill tour, and 13 public affairs officers visited Costa Rica as part of annual training.

Honduras

U.S. forces have conducted an almost continuous series of military training exercises in Honduras since 1983. As part of these efforts, National Guard training in Honduras was expanded during the period 1983-87. The Guard troops have primarily conducted road-building (BLAZING TRAILS) and infantry and armor (AHUAS TARA) training exercises. Troops have also deployed to augment or assist active duty units conducting training exercises and to upgrade or maintain U.S. facilities, such as barracks or mess halls.

BLAZING TRAILS Exercises

As part of BLAZING TRAILS 1986, 3,562 guardsmen helped construct a new road 9 kilometers long and repair an existing road 11 kilometers long in north central Honduras. BLAZING TRAILS 1987, also conducted in Honduras, provided logistical and public affairs support training for 835 Army guardsmen. These guardsmen supported an Army Reserve task force in the construction of a 5.5-kilometer road in north central Honduras. The Army Guard and the Honduran armed forces jointly conducted the exercise from January through May 1987.

AHUAS TARA Exercises

Joint exercises designated as AHUAS TARA I, II, and III involved U.S. and Honduran armed forces and were conducted from 1983 to 1987 in Honduras. A total of 632 Army guardsmen participated in these exercises.

In January 1983, these forces conducted the AHUAS TARA I command post exercise to identify operational and logistical problems that might arise during a field training exercise scheduled for February 1983. The field training exercise provided for U.S. participation in civic, medical, and construction projects. National Guard participation included one Army infantry unit from Puerto Rico and one joint communications support squadron from Georgia.

AHUAS TARA II consisted of a series of command post and field training exercises conducted jointly with members of the Honduran Armed

Forces from August 1983 to February 1984. U.S. forces constructed and improved airstrips, constructed wooden huts for dining and administrative facilities, and established two U.S. radar sites. National Guard participation included air support activities by the Puerto Rico Army National Guard.

During AHUAS TARA III in 1985, new facilities were constructed and existing facilities were upgraded in San Lorenzo, and the United States and Honduras conducted an antiarmor exercise in the Choluteca region of Honduras. The antiarmor exercise included the participation of a Texas Army National Guard task force, which trained with the Honduran Army.

In addition to these exercises, 1,692 guardsmen participated in public affairs activities and various other training exercises in Honduras.

Panama

In Panama, National Guard training expanded between 1983 and 1987 as additional training opportunities were identified that met Guard training requirements. A total of 17,761 Army National Guard troops have participated in road-building exercises (MINUTEMAN and BLAZING TRAILS), exercises to test the defense of the Panama Canal (KINDLE LIBERTY), training at the U.S. Army Jungle Operations Training Center, and individual training in their military specialty.

- MINUTEMAN I was conducted in Panama from February through May 1984. A total of 778 Army guardsmen from Louisiana, Florida, and Puerto Rico constructed a 15-kilometer road on the west coast of the Azuero Peninsula.
- During BLAZING TRAILS 1985, the road, previously constructed during the MINUTEMAN I exercise, was repaired and a new 27-kilometer road was constructed in Panama. Construction took place in the area of the Azuero Peninsula with 5,418 Army guardsmen participating in the exercise. During BLAZING TRAILS 1986, 484 Army guardsmen supported a U.S. Army Reserve unit, which built a new 20-kilometer road in Panama.
- The KINDLE LIBERTY exercises have provided training for U.S. and Panama forces and are designed to test the defense of the Panama Canal. A total of 1,490 Army guardsmen have participated in KINDLE LIBERTY exercises since 1983.

In addition to these training exercises, 3,525 guardsmen received training at the Jungle Operations Training Center, and 6,066 participated in

medical readiness training exercises, public affairs activities, and other annual training activities.

Air National Guard Training in Central America

During the period 1983-87, 12,875 Air guardsmen trained in Central America. On an annual basis, the Guard trains its pilots to operate C-130 and A-7D aircraft in Central America under two programs: VOLANT OAK (C-130) and CORONET COVE (A-7D). In addition, Air National Guard engineers ("prime beef" teams) and other Air guardsmen have deployed to Panama and Honduras to participate in training exercises.

VOLANT OAK Exercises

VOLANT OAK operations have been ongoing since the late 1970s when the Air Guard was tasked to provide airlift support to the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) while maintaining readiness for contingency and wartime tasks. The C-130 cargo carrier is the primary aircraft used in this mission, and members of the Air Force Reserve and National Guard operate it. The units rotate through Howard Air Force Base, Panama, every 2 weeks to provide airlift support for (1) special assignment airlift missions, (2) scheduled channel missions, (3) joint/airborne/air transportability training missions, (4) unilateral training missions, and (5) extra section channel missions.

Special assignment airlift missions are generally the highest priority missions flown by VOLANT OAK forces. These missions are scheduled to fly distinguished visitors and foreign dignitaries, public affairs officials, medical assistance teams, search and rescue units, and disaster relief units to locations in Central and South America. Scheduled channel missions provide airlift support for U.S. military advisory groups located in countries throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean. Joint airborne-air transportability training missions provide airlift to support the training missions of the 193rd Infantry Brigade, which is based in Panama. Unilateral training missions support VOLANT OAK unit training requirements and Air Force combat control teams. Extra section channel missions provide airlift for backlogged cargo, on an as-required basis, to Central and South American capitals.

Training activities conducted during any of the C-130 missions may include parachuting cargo and troops, defense training operations, search and rescue operations, disaster relief operations, and pilot/air crew operation of the aircraft in airports throughout the region. Since 1983, about 5,773 Air guardsmen have participated in VOLANT OAK exercises.

CORONET COVE Exercises The CORONET COVE exercises involve the training of Air Guard personnel on A-7D aircraft. Fourteen Air National Guard units from 10 states and Puerto Rico participate in these exercises. Each unit owns a minimum of four aircraft and rotates the aircraft and guardsmen to Panama for a 1-month period (50 percent of the unit is trained for 2 weeks and then is replaced by the other 50 percent). Each unit contains about 53 members: 6 pilots and 47 ground crew. Since fiscal year 1983, 4,376 Air guardsmen have participated in CORONET COVE exercises.

Prime Beef Training The Air National Guard also maintains prime beef (base engineer emergency force) units capable of providing personnel skilled in civil engineering, including construction, electronics, and plumbing. These units deploy annually to various locations where they perform and train in their respective crafts. During the 5-year period, 814 prime beef members have deployed to Panama or Honduras to conduct training exercises.

Other Training In addition to the Air Guard exercises, 1,912 Air guardsmen have participated in smaller exercises in Panama and Honduras, such as the satellite communication field training exercises, as part of the AHUAS TARA exercises in Honduras in 1986 and 1987.

Training Benefits The Chief of the National Guard Bureau said that the opportunities to expand training into Central America have greatly benefited the Guard's capabilities to plan for, mobilize, and conduct operations in a tropical or subtropical environment. The units must prepare and execute plans to move people and equipment to remote and austere overseas locations. Situations such as adverse weather, time delays, equipment failures, and communication breakdowns can be dealt with and resolved in the course of the training in a noncrisis atmosphere. Such overseas locations provide additional opportunities to conduct essential training for engineering and logistics, communications, infantry, field artillery, armor, aviation, and special forces personnel.

Training Costs The National Guard Bureau generally funds the training of guardsmen in Central America. Transportation costs associated with exercises directed or coordinated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff are funded from

appropriations set up specifically for the exercises, and SOUTHCOM provides funding for in-country incremental costs, such as logistical support. The cost of training for the Army National Guard during fiscal years 1983-87 was about \$22 million for incremental pay and allowances, real estate leasing, repair parts, administration, and some transportation costs within the states.

We were unable to develop the total cost directly associated with the National Guard training in Central America. This is because (1) DOD does not maintain transportation costs for Army National Guard training separately from those expended for active Army and other Reserve forces and (2) the Air National Guard does not maintain separate cost information by location of the exercise.

AID to Honduras and Panama

According to SOUTHCOM, Agency for International Development (AID), and National Guard officials, U.S. participation in engineering, medical, and humanitarian projects has provided economic development assistance to Honduras and Panama. For example, during the BLAZING TRAILS exercises, units constructed a farm road in the interior of Honduras as part of a Honduran rural roads program. The road provides improved access to the Aguan Valley, an important agricultural area in Honduras, and is primarily for the use of farmers to take their produce to market.

No Hostile Incidents Found

Our discussions with SOUTHCOM, National Guard, and AID officials and National Guard troops participating in the exercises; our review of after-action reports; and our on-site visits to Honduras indicated that no hostile incidents had occurred during training exercises involving National Guard troops. Honduran forces and U.S. military police provided perimeter security for the areas occupied by Guard troops. Participating guardsmen are briefed on antiterrorist activities, and under SOUTHCOM directive, security personnel carry live ammunition.

Some units have conducted exercises close to the Nicaraguan border, even as close as 3 miles, and extra precautions have been taken to provide security. Observation posts are continually manned, and perimeters are surrounded by concertina wire. Further, the Guard is not to remain exposed to any potential hostilities. For example, according to the Director of Plans, Operations and Training, Florida National Guard, a Florida artillery battery was conducting a joint exercise with Honduran troops in early 1987 when it learned that hostile activities could take place on or near the Nicaraguan border, approximately 25 miles away. The

National Guard unit was withdrawn immediately to Palmerola Air Base, approximately 70 miles from possible hostile activities.

AID to Contras Not Identified

According to senior SOUTHCOM and National Guard officials, efforts were taken to ensure that National Guard training did not aid, or give the appearance of aiding, the Contras. The exercises in which the National Guard participated did not support Contra activities insofar as we could determine from our review of records and from our visits to exercise locations.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

On March 3, 1987, Representative Richard Gephardt asked us to review the National Guard training program in Honduras. Subsequent discussions with his staff resulted in our reviewing Air and Army National Guard training in Central America during fiscal years 1983 through 1987.

Our primary objective was to determine what units and how many troops had trained in Central America, the nature and purpose of the training, and the cost of the training. In addition, we developed information on (1) whether the training was conducted in a secure environment, (2) whether the training program related to U.S. efforts to aid the Contras, and (3) how the training of National Guard troops aided the host countries.

We interviewed officials and examined records at

- the National Guard Bureau and Department of the Army, Washington, D.C.;
- the U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia;
- the Corps of Engineers, Mobile, Alabama;
- Second Army Headquarters, Fort Gillem, Georgia;
- Fifth Army Headquarters, Fort Sam Houston, Texas;
- Sixth Army Headquarters, Presidio of San Francisco, California;
- the U.S. Southern Command in Panama;
- Joint Task Force Bravo in Honduras; and
- National Guard offices in Alabama, California, Florida, Illinois, Puerto Rico, and Texas.

We observed road-building activities in Honduras in 1986 for previous reviews and in 1987 for this review. We also discussed National Guard training activities with AID and U.S. Embassy officials in Honduras. We

Appendix I
U.S. National Guard Training in
Central America

obtained information relating to National Guard troops trained in Central America from the adjutants general of the United States and its possessions. We performed our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Army Guardsmen Trained in Honduras: Fiscal Years 1983-87

Adjutant General	Fiscal Years					Total
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	
Alabama				243		243
Arizona				60		60
Arkansas			18	204		222
California				41		41
Colorado				30	13	43
Connecticut			13			13
Delaware				1		1
Florida					208	208
Georgia					57	57
Illinois			108		816	924
Iowa				46		46
Kansas				1	2	3
Michigan			1	115		116
Mississippi			1	1		2
Missouri				3,170		3,170
Montana					13	13
Nebraska				1		1
New Hampshire			13		58	71
New Jersey		1				1
New York			1			1
North Carolina			20	15		35
North Dakota				36		36
Oklahoma				215	49	264
Oregon			168	13		181
Pennsylvania				232		232
Puerto Rico	120	51				171
Rhode Island				9		9
South Carolina				4	12	16
South Dakota					13	13
Texas			465	1		466
Virgin Islands					56	56
West Virginia					6	6
Total	120	52	808	4,438	1,303	6,721

Army Guardsmen Trained in Panama: Fiscal Years 1983-87

Adjutant General	Fiscal Years					Total
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	
Arkansas					21	21
California				13		13
Colorado				13		13
Connecticut					13	13
District of Columbia					1	1
Delaware					8	8
Florida		993	1,080	1,168	1,353	4,594
Georgia				103	12	115
Idaho					13	13
Louisiana		520	2,836		1	3,357
Maine					12	12
Maryland				15		15
Michigan					1	1
Minnesota					13	13
Mississippi					16	16
Missouri			2,235		6	2,241
Nebraska					1	1
New Hampshire			1	15		16
New Jersey			15			15
New Mexico				39	13	52
New York					25	25
North Carolina			127		1	128
Ohio				2		2
Oklahoma					1	1
Pennsylvania			10	10	1	21
Puerto Rico	700	875	1,670	1,520	1,400	6,165
Rhode Island		121			11	132
South Carolina				218	4	222
Tennessee				447		447
Texas			11	1	7	19
Utah					13	13
Vermont	3					3
Virginia					5	5
West Virginia				12	2	14
Wisconsin			34			34
Total	703	2,509	8,019	3,576	2,954	17,761

Comments From the Department of Defense



RESERVE AFFAIRS

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

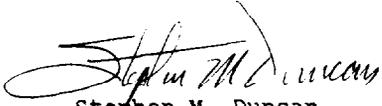
Mr. Frank C. Conahan
Assistant Comptroller General
National Security and
International Affairs Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Conahan:

This is the Department of Defense response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) Draft Report, "CENTRAL AMERICA: U.S. National Guard Training Activities," dated April 8, 1988 (GAO Code 463756/OSD Case 7594).

The DoD concurs with the findings contained in the draft GAO report. The Department appreciates this opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,


Stephen M. Duncan

Comments From the Department of State



United States Department of State

Comptroller

Washington, D.C. 20520

May 6, 1988

Dear Mr. Conahan:

I am replying to your letter of April 8, 1988 to the Secretary which forwarded copies of the draft report entitled Central America: U.S. National Guard Training Activities (Code 463756) for review and comment.

The enclosed comments on this report were prepared in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs.

We appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roger B. Feldman".

Roger B. Feldman

Enclosure:
As stated.

Mr. Frank C. Conahan
Assistant Comptroller General,
National Security and
International Affairs Division,
U.S. General Accounting Office,
Washington, D.C.

Appendix V
Comments From the Department of State

GAO DRAFT REPORT COMMENTS: CENTRAL AMERICA: U.S. NATIONAL GUARD
TRAINING ACTIVITIES (Code 463756)

We are in general accord with the report's findings but are concerned that in two instances the language in your proposed response to Congressman Richard A. Gephardt appears to be misleading.

See comment 1.

We differ with the order of priority you have assigned the purposes of military training exercises in Central America. First and foremost, military exercises and training deployments are conducted to provide unique training opportunities for U.S. troops. Secondly, these exercises are intended to demonstrate U.S. support for friendly governments such as Honduras. While they do have an indirect effect in countering Cuban/Soviet expansion in the region, National Guard training exercises are not conducted solely or even primarily for this reason.

See comment 2.

Also, we cannot agree with your conclusion that the National Guard, through its training in Central America, funds certain foreign assistance activities such as providing medical treatment, improving school buildings and participating in other humanitarian and civic action activities. The Department of Defense in carrying out these activities operates pursuant to Defense authorization and appropriations statutes. Such activities are not under the purview of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and, therefore, should not be considered as "foreign assistance." While these activities do provide tangible benefits to the civilian populace and foster a spirit of cooperation between the visiting units and their hosts, the benefits are solely incidental to the training received by the participating U.S. units. For example, medical units gain valuable experience treating uncommon maladies, and engineer units conduct construction and repair activities that they are unable to undertake in a United States training environment.



Elliott Abrams
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Inter-American
Affairs

The following are GAO's comments on the State Department's letter dated May 6, 1988.

GAO Comments

1. It was not our intent to prioritize the purposes of military training exercises in Central America, and we have modified the report to clarify the description of U.S. training objectives in Honduras.

2. We recognize that the Department of Defense Authorization and Appropriation Acts contain certain authority to provide humanitarian and civic assistance in conjunction with military activities, and therefore we have deleted the reference to these programs as "foreign assistance" activities. This term was used in the draft report because of the similarity of the projects and activities to those typically provided through foreign assistance funds.

It should be noted that we questioned the funding of somewhat similar activities with operations and maintenance funds in our 1984 and 1986 reviews of military exercises in Honduras (62 Comp. Gen. 422 [1984] and B-213137, Jan. 30, 1986). However, we did not review and therefore take no position on the propriety of funding these activities (in part) with National Guard operations and maintenance and personnel funds.

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