

April 2, 3:50pm version.

ATLACATL

The troops charged with the Jesuit murders were a part of the Atlacatl Battalion. The Atlacatl has a special relationship with the United States in that it was the first Salvadoran battalion to be created basically from scratch by United States military trainers. The purpose of the U.S. military training of the Atlacatl, which began with the Battalion's formation in 1981, was to create an approximately 2,000 man infantry unit that would respond rapidly to points of conflict and pursue guerrillas through the countryside. The Atlacatl Battalion members also received human rights training from U.S. advisors. The total training package was promoted as the way to create a new, "professional" Salvadoran army that would fight FMLN combatants aggressively while also respecting international rules of war, such as refraining from torture and from the killing of civilians and non-combatants.

Unfortunately, the Atlacatl Battalion has compiled an extensive record of human rights violations from its conception in 1981 up to the present. In December 1981, soldiers of the Atlacatl took part in a search-and-destroy operation in Morazan department known as the El Mozote massacre which resulted in the murder of over 700 civilians, according to the Catholic Church legal office in El Salvador. Americas Watch reports that in November 1983, dozens of civilians were killed by Atlacatl soldiers in the towns of Copapayo, La Escopeta, and San Nicolas. Then-U.S. ambassador to El Salvador Thomas Pickering even said that he was prepared to believe that "troops of the Atlacatl had actually been involved in a massacre." Just last year, Atlacatl soldiers were implicated in three episodes of civilian killings including the torture of seven detainees near Tres Ceibas which resulted in the death of two of the tortured men.

There are additional documented cases of human rights atrocities committed by the Atlacatl Battalion. In total, Americas Watch and the Catholic Church legal office have determined that the Atlacatl Battalion has been responsible for the murder of over 925 civilians and non-combatants in El Salvador since the Battalion's formation in 1981.

Jim: All the facts here have been checked. In regard to ① above and what US view on it was: I checked "Country Reports" and their only mention was that it seemed that ^{some} charges against Atlacatl might be exaggerated. But we have Pickering quoted w/ his line . . .