

Buckland Statement

As you may know, an American military officer assigned to the US Embassy in San Salvador, a major Eric Buckland, came forward on January 2, 1990, with important information that linked Col. Guillermo Benavides, commander of the Military School in El Salvador, with the murders. Within two weeks, Col. Benavides was arrested and charged with ordering the crime.

In mid-October I learned for the first time of information that Major Eric Buckland disclosed to the FBI information on January 12th that pertains to an event that allegedly occurred 10 days prior to the murders -- sometime in October 1989 -- in which Col. Benavides actually talked of killing the Jesuits.

Buckland recanted his statement some six days after it was given.

The United States government did not turn any of this information over to the the Salvadoran authorities or to the judge -- until I complained. Even now, the judge is still missing some information (a video-tape of the interview with the American official).

I do not know why the U.S. government did not turn the appropriate information over to the Salvadoran authorities. Quite frankly, it's inexcusable.

I do not know at this time whether Buckland's statement of prior knowledge of the killings is true or not. And I do not know really why he recanted.

In today's Newsweek Magazine, a Bush Administration official is quoted as saying that Buckland "...was grilled and grilled until he finally cracked."

I asked about the "prior knowledge" issue several times of our Ambassador and others at the embassy last February-- and was told that there was no indication of any prior knowledge.

I found out last week from the FBI that, in fact, our embassy was given all the relevant documents on January 13th -- and that the Dept. of State was provided information on that date. Yet, the Speaker's Task Force was not given anything.

I am angry -- and I feel misled. It makes me wonder what else we have not been told.

In the coming weeks, the Task Force will look into this matter further. I intend to interview again Major Buckland, the FBI. the State Dept. and officials at our Embassy in San Salvador.

This is a major screw-up -- which I think reflects badly on the United States.

I do not know whether the withholding of the information was intentional -- or whether it was incompetence. In either case, it's inexcusable. But we'll find the truth.