

Video Shows Horrific Details of DEA-led Massacre in Honduras



Tegucigalpa, October 24 (RHC)-- A newly-released video shows the moment that agents with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration opened fire on a boat in Honduras in 2012, killing four civilians -- including two pregnant women.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's five-year attempts to defend the deadly raid alongside Honduran forces resulted in a major scandal in May of this year following an investigation that revealed officials took part in a systematic cover-up meant to conceal their role in the deaths of four civilians along Honduras' Mosquito Coast.

However, a new video unearthed by ProPublica through a Freedom of Information Act request shows how the Honduran anti-drug unit led by DEA agents fired on unarmed passengers in Ahuas being transported by taxi boat at 2 a.m., resulting in four deaths, two of which were pregnant women, and three injuries.

The DEA attempted to deceive the U.S. Justice Department by burying the evidence of the May 11, 2012, events that led to the deaths of the two women, a 14-year-old boy and a man.

The DEA claimed that a gunfight occurred after a taxi boat carrying a dozen civilians collided with a canoe carrying the DEA-Honduran drug unit and large amounts of cocaine came under fire from passengers.

However, the video shows flashes of muzzle fire that emanated from the anti-drug team, according to forensic expert Bruce Koenig.

The events took place as a result of Operation Hammer, a joint operation between the DEA and Honduran security forces meant to interdict drug shipments to the north.

Video reveals a chaotic scene where an attempt to raid traffickers with four helicopters goes awry when the canoe carrying cocaine is shoved into the river by fleeing drug traffickers.

A water taxi traversing the river then appeared and inadvertently collided with the canoe, which had been boarded by members of the anti-drug team. The agents then began firing at the terrified passengers, even as they attempted to flee by jumping into the river from the deck of the boat.

DEA personnel on helicopters hovering nearby even told a Honduran door gunner to target the civilians. At one point in the video, an eight-second stream of high-caliber fire toward the helpless passengers is clearly seen.

While the DEA asserts that the Honduran agents opened fire in self-defense after being fired upon, the video shows only one flash of light originating from the civilian vessel. According to Koenig, the flash may have been a result of a bullet striking the boat's engine, which was found to have been pierced by a bullet.

The Department of Justice didn't fail to note the inconsistencies in the DEA agents' recounting of the event, yet the DEA hasn't yet retracted its view that the massacre took place after the agents were fired upon.

A group of four bipartisan senators has accused the DEA and State Department of "repeatedly and knowingly misleading members of Congress and congressional staff."

"The DEA convinced themselves of a false version of events due to arrogance, false assumptions, and ignorance," Tim Rieser, an aide to Senator Patrick J. Leahy who spent years investigating the case, told ProPublica and the New York Times.

Speaking to reporters, survivor and boat operator Hilda Lezama said that she remains stricken with chronic "extreme pain" from the wounds she suffered during the events of the night.

"I can't afford to support my daughters," she said. "We still don't know why this happened."

The video is damning evidence of the U.S. role in the drug war which has concentrated largely on iron-fisted military measures while showing little regard for the costs borne by civilians.

DEA personnel who served at the time and oversaw the operations, however, continue to claim that the anti-drug personnel who participated in the massacre are "American heroes" whose presence in the region was necessary to "bring the rule of law to an area governed by the cartels."

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