

PARAMILITARY GROUP THAT CAUGHT 15 ALIENS PLANS MORE PATROLS

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Body

Members of a paramilitary group who helped capture 15 illegal aliens near the Arizona-Mexico border Saturday night said they planned to continue and perhaps increase their patrols, despite sharp criticism from a Government official.

There were conflicting reports on the nature of the patrols by Civilian Materiel Assistance, a three-year-old group that has been active in providing aid for the rebels in Nicaragua. Members of the organization, which describes itself as anti-Communist, gave conflicting accounts of the origins of the action.

The episode Saturday occurred while 20 members of the Alabama-based group were on patrol in the Lochiel Valley three miles north of the Mexican border in Arizona, about 30 miles east of the border town of Nogales. Those involved wore camouflaged uniforms and carried weapons including Soviet-made AK-47 assault rifles and American-made M-16s, members say.

J. R. Hagan, the group's regional director for Arizona and Utah, said the patrols existed only to "observe, document, and report" illegal border activity. But other members said that the patrols held the aliens at gunpoint and that the group's other activities included armed incursions across the border into Mexico to look for drug smugglers.

U.S. Official Condemns Patrols

Harold Ezell, regional commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, condemned the patrols, likening them to vigilantes.

"Some kind of commando siege type of activity is something we can't afford to have," Mr. Ezell said. "It's not much better than vigilante activity, and that went out with white sheets."

But Thomas Vincent Posey, who heads the group, said he hoped to expand the patrols across the border.

"Our objective is to stop the flow of drugs into this country, which is helping to fund Communist operations in Central America," he said. "If you're going to fight Communism, you have to fight it on both fronts."

Civilian Materiel Assistance, which recently changed its name from Civilian Military Assistance, says it has 5,000 members in all 50 states and 7 foreign countries.

Involvement in Nicaragua

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It has gained some degree of prominence in the past because of activities in behalf of the rebels in Nicaragua.

Mr. Posey, a former marine who owns a produce business in Decatur, Ala., said the group last year provided \$4 million in supplies for the rebels. Two members of the group were killed two years ago when their helicopter was shot down near the Nicaraguan border with Honduras.

The Saturday operation, according to Mr. Hagan, who was involved, was part of efforts to help report illegal activities, particularly possible drug smuggling, to immigration officials.

Official Encouragement Disputed

Mr. Hagan, who said he manages a Tucson-based company that does investigations, collections and repossessions, said the group began the patrols to help provide information for law-enforcement officials. He said no government official asked for or encouraged the patrols, but he said local immigration and law enforcement personnel were alerted to them.

Mr. Posey said, however, that the patrols began after an immigration official, whom he declined to name, requested them.

Mr. Ezell of the immigration service said that he strongly doubted whether any immigration officials would have encouraged patrols. And he said there was no room at the border for similar private operations.

"There is no place for any kind of a quasi-border patrol," he said. "Maybe there's room for it in Lebanon, but this is America."

Details of Episode Unclear

Mr. Hagan said the incident Saturday began when patrols from the organization came upon two vehicles that had crossed the border and broken down. He said the group alerted immigration officials and did no more than shine spotlights on the aliens who made no attempt to flee.

But Mr. Ezell said border patrol agents were told by members of the organization that the aliens were apprehended after a "firefight."

And two members of the group, unhappy with its involvement, told a different story from Mr. Hagan.

Use of Booby Traps Reported

They said the group's activities included armed patrols several miles inside Mexico. And they said the aliens' vehicle broke down because it came in contact with booby traps set up by members of the group.

They said the patrols were supposed to serve a purely informational and reportorial function.

"But suddenly, when we showed up on the spot, everything changed," one member said.

They said that weapons were fired and that the aliens, who included women and children, were detained at gunpoint for about 90 minutes before border patrol officers arrived.

Members of the group said they believed it was important for the organization to continue providing assistance to officers trying to halt the entry of drugs into the country. But they said they were distressed by the incident Saturday.

"I left because I did not want to terrorize innocent people who are coming here to help feed their families, " one member said.

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