



HONDURAS

Poisoned Food

May 10-12, 1971

... kills 37 of the Presidential Honor Brigade; 123 others are hospitalized.

Value of U.S. Assistance\$1,127

DETAILS:

Massive food poisoning took place in Marcala, an outpost 50 miles west of Tegucigalpa, among a company of the Presidential Honor Brigade, who were there for training.

Investigation revealed that "Baygon", a carbamate insecticide spray, had been used three weeks prior to the outbreak to spray the inside of a food storage room. All of the food had been removed prior to the spraying but was replaced in the room after three hours. It was believed that the insecticide had contaminated the sugar.

Subsequently, it was determined that Parathion, an organic phosphate poison used as an insecticide, had been identified to have contaminated the bread. Samples of biscuits from a batch served on May 10 and 11 were later analyzed at U.S. facilities in Panama and found to contain 790 ppm Parathion and 60 ppm Methyl Parathion per biscuit. Depending on an individual's body weight, it was determined that one or two biscuits with such a concentration could be fatal.

On May 10, 30 men became violently ill and on May 11 another 126 were stricken. By May 12, 160 cases had been reported. Some died at Marcala. Many of the victims were evacuated to San Felipe Hospital in Tegucigalpa.

ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF HONDURAS AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Patients were treated locally, and the Honduran Air Force, assisted by the U.S. Military, evacuated the seriously ill to Tegucigalpa. The U.S. Military reported that local physicians had performed an outstanding job in treating the victims.

The Honduran Minister of Health took an active interest in the investigation to determine the cause of the poisoning.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT:

A U.S. Army helicopter, assigned to Honduras in support of the Organization of American States, had stopped in Marcala on May 11. The pilot was requested by a U.S. Army Officer on duty in Marcala to take eight seriously ill Honduran soldiers to Tegucigalpa for treatment. While it was still enroute, a radio message was sent to Tegucigalpa asking that when the helicopter arrived it be returned immediately to Marcala to pick up nine others. Subsequently, many more became ill and were evacuated by the Honduran Air Force.

During the night of May 11, many of those who became ill were treated successfully by two U.S. Army medics.

On May 12, the U.S. Military Group in Honduras learned of the poisoning and that insecticide was suspected. The USMILGP coordinated helicopter transportation to Marcala of members of the Honduran Joint General Staff, who were investigating further into the cause of the tragedy.

On May 12, the Honduran President requested medical assistance from the U.S. through the MILGP. The USARSO Surgeon's Office in Panama was contacted by the Mission radio phone to permit medical consultation between local doctors and the USARSO Surgeon.

The American Ambassador exercised his disaster relief authority to commit A.I.D. contingency funds, and on May 13, three

U.S. Military doctors and two Medics arrived in Tegucigalpa to provide medical assistance. They brought with them approximately 250 pounds of medical supplies that were urgently needed since local supplies had been almost depleted.

The team met with hospital officials, examined and interviewed approximately 70 patients. Three members returned to the Canal Zone on May 14. Two remained to collect samples of blood and foodstuffs and departed on May 15. The samples were analyzed at Gorgas and U.S. Public Health Poison Examination Centers. Consumed bread was found to have been contaminated with insecticide.

Costs to the A.I.D. contingency fund for these operations were.

Five personnel TDY	\$ 257
Medical supplies	390
Aircraft flying time	480
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	\$1,127

The following is quoted from a report by the USMILGP: "The performance of the two US Army medics, SSG Phillips and SGT Kessler, was exemplary, and certainly resulted in the saving of life the first night of the crisis."

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY U.S. VOLUNTARY AGENCIES:

None.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY OTHER NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

None.