

BOWLES'S NEW AND ACCURATE MAP OF THE WORLD, OR TERRESTRIAL GLOBE, laid down from the BEST OBSERVATIONS and NEWEST DISCOVERIES; particularly those of the celebrated CIRCUMNAVIGATORS; Illustrated with a variety of useful PROJECTIONS and GEOGRAPHICAL DEFINITIONS, TABLES, and PROBLEMS: With an easy and familiar Explanation of the most curious and interesting Phenomena in the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM.

THE WORLD, OR TERRESTRIAL GLOBE, by made in the SOUTH SEAS, by ANSON, BYRON, WALLIS, BOUANVILLE, COOK, and REPRESENTATIONS of the HEAVENLY BODIES: the most approved ASTRONOMICAL and of the most curious and interesting Phenomena in the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM.



Honduran Military Implements Narco-Strip Bombing Campaign

BRENDA FIEGEL

Open Source, Foreign Perspective, Underconsidered/Understudied Topics

The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is an open source research organization of the U.S. Army. It was founded in 1986 as an innovative program that brought together military specialists and civilian academics to focus on military and security topics derived from unclassified, foreign media. Today FMSO maintains this research tradition of special insight and highly collaborative work by conducting unclassified research on foreign perspectives of defense and security issues that are understudied or unconsidered.

Author Background

Brenda Fiegel is an Intelligence Analyst and the Editor of the Latin American Operational Environment Watch at the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. FMSO conducts open-source and foreign collaborative research, focusing on the foreign perspectives of understudied and unconsidered defense and security issues. Her specific research expertise includes “US/Mexico foreign relations,” “US/Mexico border security threats,” “Mexican and Central American violence/extremist groups to include drug cartels” and “Conflict resolution and peacekeeping in Mexico and Central America.” She has lectured on these topics in professional military education settings, at Interagency Security Conferences, at Customs and Border Patrol Facilities, and at academic forums.

Previous Publication: This paper was originally published in Dialogo Digital Military Magazine on March 28, 2015. It is being posted on the Foreign Military Studies website with permission from the publisher.

FMSO has provided some editing, format, and graphics to this paper to conform to organizational standards. Academic conventions, source referencing, and citation style are those of the author.

The views expressed are those of the author and do not represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government

Honduran Military Implements Narco-Strip Bombing Campaign

La Mosquitia is located in the easternmost part of Honduras along the Mosquito Coast and is known for its lush rainforests and diverse indigenous populations. Cut-off from urban society, this region extends across 32,500 square miles, has few roads, and is best accessed by air and water routes. In spite of its difficult access by land, its location is geographically perfect for receiving aerial drug shipments from countries in South America, which is why the area is home to more than 200 clandestine airstrips, as reported by Honduran newspaper *El Heraldo*.ⁱ In fact, the same source reports that nearly 79 percent of all narco flights originating in South American countries use the Mosquito Coast as a drop-off point for cocaine shipments. Still, the Honduran Military continues to conduct widespread efforts to destroy the airstrips in the region in order to curb the influx of narco flights. As part of this effort, the National Inter-Institutional Security Force (FUSINA for its Spanish acronym), which is comprised of Military and police, follows a four-phase systematic approach to eradicating landing strips. According to *El Heraldo*ⁱⁱ, these phases include identification of airstrips, seizure, movement of explosives to destruction site, and the actual bombing. In employing this method, FUSINA reportedly destroyed 48 clandestine airstrips in 2014 as part of Operation Morazán. The majority of these was located in the Brus Laguna sector of Gracias a Dios Department, per a source cited by local newspaper *La Tribuna*ⁱⁱⁱ.

Identification

Clandestine landing strips are most commonly built in remote-access areas within the dense Honduran rainforest, including Brus Laguna, Ahuas, and Puerto Lempira. The principal means that Honduran authorities use to discover these strips include aerial reconnaissance, ground patrols, and the collection of human intelligence. Once detected, FUSINA operatives in

Gracias a Dios get the exact geo-coordinates so they can plan a destruction mission if deemed necessary.

Site Preparation

Once an airstrip is identified, explosive experts and support staff assigned to the 1st Engineering Battalion dig three 90-centimeter holes in a triangular formation. Soldiers then place 50 pounds of ANFO (ammonium nitrate/fuel oil) in each hole and attach a 45-foot slow-burning fuse to a detonation cord, which is wrapped around two dynamite cartridges and a one-pound bar of explosive emulsion and placed on top of the ANFO. Finally, they cover the hole, leaving only the slow-burning fuse visible.^{iv}

Ready to Bomb

The non-essential support staff retreats 200 meters from the blast zone before the explosives experts light the fuse and move back to join the others. At the two-minute mark, smoke comes off the slow-burning fuse as the fire advances to the explosives, and the whole area begins to smell like explosive powder. A minute later, it detonates, leaving behind craters measuring approximately 18x7 meters and rendering the airstrip unusable by traffickers. Depending on the length of the landing strip, the Soldiers may need to repeat this process six or more times.^v

Destruction Complete

In a perfect world, bombing a single airstrip would be enough to impede traffickers from rebuilding in the area, but this not true here, since they consider those airstrips essential for operations and quickly move to rebuild them. *El Herald* reported on a popular strip in Brus Laguna that was bombed by Honduran authorities on three separate occasions last year. If the traffickers plan on rebuilding a bombed airstrip, they generally allow the ground to settle for a

few days before doing so.^{vi} At that point, hundreds of workers are hired to work during the night to meticulously repair the holes and ensure a smooth landing strip.

Future Operations?

Operation Morazán will continue in 2015, according to Honduran authorities. In fact, two clandestine airstrips have already been destroyed in the Brus Laguna sector of Gracias a Dios since the start of the year. As they continue to destroy clandestine airstrips, Honduran authorities hope to block strategic routes used by traffickers to move drugs, weapons, and humans through national territory, according to *La Tribuna*.^{vii}

ENDNOTES

ⁱ “Honduras: Así destruyen las "narcopistas" (The Destruction of Narco Air Strips in Honduras).” El Heraldo. Accessed from <http://www.elheraldo.hn/alfrente/795661-209/honduras-as%C3%AD-destruyen-las-narcopistas>

ⁱⁱ “Fusina destruye 50 narcopistas.” La Tribuna. Accessed from <http://www.latribuna.hn/2015/02/11/fusina-destruye-50-narcopistas/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} “Honduras: Así destruyen las "narcopistas" (The Destruction of Narco Air Strips in Honduras).” El Heraldo. Accessed from <http://www.elheraldo.hn/alfrente/795661-209/honduras-as%C3%AD-destruyen-las-narcopistas>

^v Ibid

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} “Fusina destruye 50 narcopistas.” La Tribuna. Accessed from <http://www.latribuna.hn/2015/02/11/fusina-destruye-50-narcopistas/>