

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
MESSAGE CENTER

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Authority: EO 13526
DIA FOIA & Declassification Services Offices
Date: Oct 17, 2018

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FM (b)(3):10 USC 424 (b)(3):10 USC 424
TO RUEKJCS/DIA WASH DC/ (b)(3):10 USC 424
INFO RUEHC/DEPT OF STATE WASH DC/ARA/DS-6A
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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ L/WINTEL/NOFORN/0947 DEC 76 STATE FOR ASST
SEC BRAY

THIS IS (b)(3):10 USC 424

1. AR
2. (U) ARMY COLONEL ESCAPES TERRORISTS
3. N/A
4. 1976, DEC 7-8
5. 1976, DEC 7-8

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6. (b)(3):10 USC 424

7.

8.

9. 1976, DEC 14

10. N/A

11. (b)(3):10 USC 424;(b)(6)

12.

13.

15. 1. (~~NOFORN~~) MUCH OF THE INFORMATION THAT FOLLOWS WAS

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PROVIDED BY SECRETARY OF THE PRESIDENCY, BG JOSE VILLAREAL DURING A LUNCHEON IN HONOR OF MR. CHARLES E. BRAY, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR LATIN AMERICAN AFFAIRS ON 9 DECEMBER. ADDITIONAL DETAILS HAVE BEEN DRAWN FROM EXTENSIVE MEDIA REPORTING AND OTHER SOURCES ON COL PITA'S DRAMATIC ESCAPE.

2. (S//NOFORN) DURING THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF 7 DEC 1976, COL JUAN A. PITA ESCAPED FROM A TERRORIST PEOPLE'S PRISON WHERE HE HAD BEEN HELD CAPTIVE FOR SIX MONTHS AND NINE DAYS. COL PITA, WHO HAD BEEN APPOINTED INTERVENTOR OF THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOR, WAS KIDNAPPED BY A GROUP WHICH CALLED ITSELF THE MARXIST LENINIST COMMUNIST PARTY ON 30 MAY 76 NEAR LA PLATA WHILE RETURNING HOME WITH HIS FAMILY FROM A SUNDAY OUTING (b)(3):10 USC 424

3. (S//NOFORN) ALTHOUGH COL PITA WAS NOT TORTURED, HIS SIX MONTHS PLUS IN CAPTIVITY WAS MARKED BY SOLITUDE, DEPRIVATION, AND SUB-HUMAN LIVING CONDITIONS. HE WAS JAILED IN A 2 X 2 X 2.5 METER SUBTERRANEAN CELL WITHOUT ADEQUATE LIGHTING OR VENTILATION. SANITARY FACILITIES WERE NON-EXISTENT AND HE WAS UNABLE TO BATHE FOR THE DURATION. THE COL WAS FORCED TO EXIST MAINLY ON SCRAPS OF FOOD LEFT OVER BY HIS CAPTORS AFTER THEY HAD EATEN. HE LOST OVER TWENTY POUNDS DURING THE ORDEAL. THE ONLY MEDICAL ATTENTION WHICH HE RECEIVED WAS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING HIS CAPTURE, THE GUERRILLAS BROUGHT IN ONE OF THEIR PHYSICIANS TO ATTEND TO HIS HEAD INJURIES IN ORDER THAT HE MIGHT BE TRIED BY A "PEOPLE'S COURT." COLONEL PITA APPEARED BEFORE THE "REVOLUTIONARY TRIBUNAL," ON TWO OCCASIONS: FIRST, A SESSION LASTING ABOUT FOUR HOURS; AND SECOND, A GRUELING EIGHTEEN TO TWENTY HOUR SESSION. THE TERRORISTS FILMED THE PROCEEDINGS, BUT IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER THEY USED MOVIE FILM OR VIDEO TAPE. DURING THE FILMING COL PITA WAS ONLY PERMITTED TO ANSWER "YES" OR "NO," BUT WAS PERMITTED TO PROVIDE MORE DETAILED ANSWERS WHEN "OFF CAMERA." HE WAS FOUND GUILTY BY THE GUERRILLAS FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE PEOPLE AND WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH. HE WAS SUBJECTED TO THREE MOCK EXECUTIONS BY FIRING SQUADS IN WHICH THEY FIRED ROUNDS CLOSE TO HIS HEAD. THROUGHOUT THE ORDEAL, PITA WAS CONTINUALLY THREATENED WITH DEATH.

4. (S//NOFORN) THE TERRORISTS ATTEMPTED TO BRAINWASH THE COLONEL DURING HIS CAPTIVITY. FOR THE FIRST FEW MONTHS THE ONLY READING MATERIAL WHICH HE WAS PROVIDED WAS SUBVERSIVE LITERATURE, WHICH HE REFUSED TO READ. ALSO, AFTER HIS "TRIAL" HE WAS TOLD THAT HE COULD WRITE LETTERS TO HIS FAMILY. HE REFUSED TO DO THIS STATING THAT, SINCE HE

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HAD BEEN SENTENCED TO DEATH, SUCH LETTERS WOULD ONLY RAISE FALSE HOPES, ONLY IN THE FINAL WEEKS OF HIS CAPTIVITY WAS HE PROVIDED WITH NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, AND A TRANSISTOR RADIO.

5. ~~(C/NOPORN)~~ COL PITA'S ESCAPE APPARENTLY WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY A COMBINATION OF EVENTS, FIRST, THE TERRORISTS BECAME MORE CARELESS IN THEIR VIGILANCE AND LEFT HIM UNGUARDED FOR SHORT PERIODS, SECOND, A SERIES OF HEAVY RAIN STORMS SOFTENED THE EARTH PERMITTING A LARGE BOULDER TO FALL AGAINST THE WEAKENED WALLS OF HIS UNDERGROUND PRISON. THUS, ON 7 DECEMBER, COL PITA WAS ABLE TO ESCAPE BY TUNNELING THROUGH A DETERIORATING WALL DURING THE ABSENCE OF HIS GUARD. ONCE FREE HE ARMED HIMSELF WITH ONE OF THE TERRORISTS SUBMACHINE GUNS AND FLED, CLAD ONLY IN PAJAMAS AND WITH HAIR DOWN TO HIS SHOULDERS, TO A NEARBY ROAD. THERE HE COMMANDEERED A TRUCK AND HAD IT TAKE HIM TO THE 601ST COMMUNICATIONS BATTALION IN CITY BELL, ONLY A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY. TROOPS FROM THE 7TH INF REGT IMMEDIATELY WERE SENT TO THE GUERRILLA HIDEOUT, BUT HIS CAPTORS HAD ALREADY FLED. NEIGHBOURS, WHO HAD NO IDEA THAT THE OCCUPANTS OF THE HOUSE WERE SUBVERSIVES, TOLD MILITARY OFFICERS THAT THEY NOTICED THE OCCUPANTS FRANTICALLY SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING AROUND THE HOUSE AND THEN NOTICED SEVERAL PERSONS DEPART IN A GREAT HURRY.

6. ~~(C//NINTEL/NOPORN)~~ COLONEL PITA WAS IN REMARKABLY GOOD PHYSICAL CONDITION, ASIDE FROM HIS WEIGHT LOSS, AND WAS MENTALLY ALERT. HE REPORTEDLY EXERCISED IN HIS CELL EACH DAY AND NEVER GAVE UP HOPE OF RETURNING TO HIS FAMILY. SHORTLY AFTER HIS LIBERATION HE MET WITH PRESIDENT VIDELA, A LIFE LONG FRIEND, REPORTEDLY, HE TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT HE HAD ALWAYS BELIEVED IN GOD, BUT NOW HE BELIEVED MORE STRONGLY THAN EVER SINCE HE WAS CONVINCED THAT HIS MIRACULOUS ESCAPE WAS GOD'S ANSWER TO HIS PERSONAL PRAYERS AND THOSE OF HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

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