

Remains of Four Found at Colombia Crash Site

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 30, 1999 -- A U.S.-Colombian search team recovered remains of four Americans aboard a U.S. Army reconnaissance plane that slammed into a mountain July 23 while on a counter-drug mission, DoD spokesman Navy Rear Adm. Craig Quigley said.

Quigley told reporters at a July 29 briefing the identities of those found were not known. The remains were flown to the Colombian capital of Bogota, where forensic experts will try to identify them. One American and two Colombians also aboard the aircraft were still missing at the time of the briefing.

The five Americans are the first killed in an aviation accident while on a counter-drug mission in Colombia, according to Army spokesman Capt. Jack Miller of the U. S. Southern Command in Miami.

"We continue to search for the other three we know to have been on board the aircraft," Quigley said. "The search and recovery party is still on the ground continuing to work, but the weather is not in our favor."

Wreckage was spotted Sunday about 7,500 feet up the mountainside, but thick clouds and steep jungle terrain hampered rescue efforts.

Quigley said DoD is investigating the cause of the plane crash. He ruled out hostile fire from communist guerrillas in the area.

The aircraft that crashed was a RC-7 reconnaissance plane, a modified De Havilland commercial aircraft. Quigley said it is well-suited for the kind of counter-drug surveillance missions flown in Colombia. It was packed with sophisticated eavesdropping and photographic equipment to gather information on drug traffickers' movements and to photograph illegal drug crops.

Quigley said the United States assists the Colombians in the counter-drug mission "because it's to everyone's interest that we do whatever we can to stop the production, distribution and export of illegal drugs. We work closely with the Colombian government and their national police to provide training, intelligence support, equipment to do what we can to stop the flow of drugs out of Colombia."