

FARC Commander arrested in disappearance of three New Tribes missionaries

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Police in Colombia have arrested a commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) who is suspected in the 1993 kidnapping and disappearance of three U.S. missionaries.

Officials say that the police have strong evidence that José Milciades Urrego ordered the kidnapping of New Tribes Mission's missionaries Rick Tenenoff, Mark Rich, and David Mankins. Urrego is also wanted for his alleged role in swapping drugs for arms with criminals in Panama. Urrego was arrested at an upscale shopping mall near Bogotá on December 1.

The missionaries, Richard Tenneoff, David Mankins and Mark Rich of the Sanford Florida-based New Tribes Mission, were kidnapped in 1993 from their mission station in Panama and were held in the Colombian jungles before they were reported killed.

In October, 1999 the FBI joined local military groups and government officials in a massive search of a river bank in the jungles of Colombia's Choco province to search for the bodies of the three. A guerrilla defector had told authorities that the missionaries were killed and buried along the river. Over 600 holes were dug, but no remains were located.

Mission officials have reported no verified contact with the missionary's captors since a year after their disappearance.

Over two years ago the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) reported that they had no information about the men and believed that they had been captured by a renegade band of former FARC guerrillas and had been executed.

At the time of the kidnappings, Urrego was commanding FARC fighters in the border zone where the missionaries disappeared.

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