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SPECIAL INQUIRY
INTO FACTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES
OF INCIDENT IN SAN SALVADOR INVOLVING
DEATH OF FOUR U.S. MARINES
ON JUNE 19, 1985

DECLASSIFIED IN PART
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By sp, NARA, Date 7/11/05

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SPECIAL INQUIRY
INTO FACTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES
OF INCIDENT IN SAN SALVADOR INVOLVING
DEATH OF FOUR U.S. MARINES
ON JUNE 19, 1965

PRIVATE

The Secretary of State on June 20 instructed the Inspector General to conduct a Special Inquiry under the provisions of Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 into the facts and circumstances surrounding the death on June 19, 1965 of four members of the U.S. Marine Security Guard Detachment assigned to the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador, El Salvador. The Marines were killed at a public place by Salvadorean leftist guerrillas. The objective of this Special Inquiry was to determine whether any U.S. Government official or officials had been negligent in the discharge of their official duties in protecting employees of the U.S. Government at a diplomatic mission overseas.

The members of the Special Inquiry team were Ambassador Robert M. Sayre, Senior Inspector, and Inspector Daniel R. Reilly, of the Office of the Inspector General, Department of State, and Colonel A. Murphy McElroy, from the Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Marine Corps. The team proceeded to San Salvador on June 21 and departed on June 24. While there it conducted interviews with all appropriate members of the U.S. diplomatic mission. The team was assisted by George H. Larson, Associate Director of Security from the U.S. Embassy at Panama City, Panama, and Victor G. Dawidoff, Jr., Office of Security, Department of State. The latter two were in San Salvador to determine the precise facts regarding the murder of the four Marines and to assist in evaluating security procedures of the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador.

The Special Inquiry team also reviewed the incident and the security program of the Department of State with appropriate officials in Washington, D. C.

A draft report of the special inquiry was distributed for comment to appropriate officials on July 19 and a final report was submitted to the Inspector General on August 5.

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CLASSIFIED BY: SAYRE, ROBERT M.
DECLASSIFY ON: OADR

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SPECIAL INQUIRY
INNO FACTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES
OF INCIDENT IN SAN SALVADOR INVOLVING
DEATH OF FOUR U.S. MARINES
ON JUNE 19, 1982

OVERVIEW

Four members of the U.S. Marine Security Guard (MSG) Detachment stationed at the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador were killed by leftist guerrillas on June 19 at about 9 p.m. while eating at an outdoor restaurant in the Zona Rosa area in the city of San Salvador, El Salvador. Also killed were two American business representatives and seven non-Americans.* There were at least eight other members of the U.S. mission staff and three dependents in the restaurant area at the time.

The four Marines who were later killed took seats on the sidewalk at Chili's cafe, an exposure which a U.S. Embassy security guideline cautioned against, but which was still common practice among mission personnel. They and other members of the mission staff had established a regular pattern of eating at these restaurants, which permitted hostile surveillance. Available evidence strongly suggests that the Marines were directly targeted. There has been some suggestion that the failure to observe mission security advisories against eating at tables on the sidewalk at these restaurants was the probable cause of the murder of the Marines. The Special Inquiry team finds that the regular pattern of going to open air restaurants by mission members, including the Marines, was more likely the probable cause for the incident than the regular pattern of mission members eating at tables on the sidewalks.

The mission has a fairly extensive security program directed primarily at the "hardening" of office buildings and providing protective security for the movement of key mission officials. The mission also had a rather comprehensive program with the objective of advising mission members about off-duty security measures. This program was originally mounted in response to the civil war situation in El Salvador and, more

*Although there were conflicting reports in the press as to the total killed in the cafe by the terrorists, 13 victims actually died in the attack.

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recently, tightened following intelligence estimates which indicated that the guerrillas seeking to take over the Government of El Salvador had set up operations in San Salvador and planned to attack American mission personnel.

The pleasant atmosphere and accommodations in San Salvador coupled with the fact that there had not been a direct attack against mission personnel since May 1983 "conspired" to lull mission personnel into a false sense of security. It was post policy to disrupt substantive activities as little as possible and to maintain life as normal as possible at the post.

Specifically, the Special Inquiry team finds that, at the time the incident occurred, mission management in San Salvador had a security program in effect for the employees of the mission which was reasonably related to the security threat and the pattern of terrorism and violence in El Salvador. The MGC Detachment was equated to the civilian staff, which is common practice in the Foreign Service, and thus there is no basis for distinguishing between civilian management and the MGC command structure in assessing responsibility. In hindsight, this equation was an error in judgment in the circumstances in San Salvador. All military personnel attached to the mission should have been considered equally threatened and security guidelines applied accordingly.

More generally, the facts and circumstances of the San Salvador case underline the need for the Department of State and the Foreign Service to change their approach to security. The present approach is to avoid to the maximum extent possible disrupting normal activities at a post and to carry out security programs with this in mind. A much higher security awareness is required at Critical and Serious High Threat posts. The Department should take immediate steps to develop the criteria for such posts called for in its own statement on "General Principles on Security of USC Personnel at Overseas Missions" (A-1225, October 14, 1982). In addition, a major deficiency has been, and continues to be, inadequate resources to provide security consistent with the threat and to back up the security program with a strong and clear command structure. The team considers that Washington's priority and awareness toward the security needs and concerns of the field have been significant factors in the field's approach and its ability to deal effectively with security. The Department recently acted on resource needs, and has under active consideration recommendations on security organization. The team, therefore, makes no recommendations on these two points.

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In assessing responsibility of mission management, the inspectors find that chiefs of mission have been charged with responsibility for the direction, supervision, and coordination of all U.S. Government employees at diplomatic missions but have not been given commensurate authority. Prompt steps are needed to remedy this major deficiency. The team also makes recommendations on other deficiencies, including the administration of danger pay allowances, that were encountered in conducting this Special Inquiry.

Taking into account all the facts and circumstances in this case, the team does not find a basis for the Secretary of State to convene a Board of Inquiry to fix responsibility on any official in San Salvador, either civilian or military under the operational control of the Secretary of State, for negligence in connection with this incident.

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SPECIAL INQUIRY
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ON JUNE 19, 1983

1. INCIDENT

On June 19, 1983 at about 9 p.m. in the Zona Rosa cafe district of San Salvador, El Salvador, guerrilla terrorists shot and killed four members of the MSG Detachment stationed at the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador.* Also killed in this incident were two American business representatives and seven persons of other nationalities. Also present in the restaurant area were at least two other Marines, three members of the U.S. Navy Construction Battalion (SeaBee) Detachment, a member of the U.S. Military Group (MILGP) with a dependent, and at least three other members of the Embassy staff, one with two dependents.

The six MSG's had arrived at the restaurant area in an armored mission vehicle at about 8:30 p.m. The Marines debarked and the mission vehicle departed. The four Marines who were later killed took seats on the sidewalk at Child's cafe, an exposure which a mission security guideline cautioned against, but which was still common practice among mission personnel. At about 9 p.m. a truck arrived on the scene and parked in front of the restaurant. Patrols did not pay particular attention to the truck as this type of vehicle is normally used by the Salvadoran military in checking for drugs or when involved in other law enforcement activities. Six to 15 armed persons dressed in uniforms similar to those worn by the Salvadoran military got out of the truck and headed straight for the table at which the four Marines were seated. When within about five or 10 feet of the table, the group, armed with automatic weapons, knelt and opened fire on the Marines, killing the four.

*The four U.S. Marines who died in the incident were Sergeants Thomas F. Handwork and Bobby J. Dickson, and Corporals Patrick R. Kwiatkowski and Gregory Howard Weber.

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Available evidence indicates this was a leftist guerrilla group engaged in a deception operation. After the attack, the armed group turned its guns on the crowds. It is alleged that shots were fired from inside the restaurant and the group's response was to use suppressing fire to escape. Investigators have found no basis for this allegation. There were also allegations that there was fire from the Salvadorean national policeman stationed across the street at the Brazilian Ambassador's residence, but this has been determined to be incorrect. A vehicle of the local airline (TACA) that passed by at the time was fired upon by the guerrillas; the presence of this vehicle may have prompted the firing into the restaurant. The guerrilla group which committed the murders escaped, but it is believed at least one of them may have been killed, and possibly two injured by fire from the guerrilla group itself. The investigation is continuing.

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DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
1. report	re El Salvador (4 pp., including annex I, II, and III) P 7/11/85 M1402 #3	n.d.	F2, P1
2. memo	Robert Sayre to Malmberg re use by the U.S. government of private American citizens to discharge official duties (2 pp.)	7/1/85	F2, P5 B2
3. memo	Malmberg to Sayre re policy on dependents at high threat risk posts (2 pp.)	7/31/85	F2, P5 B2
4. annex	annex to report in item #1 (4 pp.)	n.d.	U1
5. memo for record	re Marine casualties in San Salvador (1 pp.) P 8/20/85 NLSF96-004/1 #72	6'85	U1 B7 B6
6. memo	re terrorist attack in El Salvador (1 pp.)	n.d.	U1
7. cable	268343 (2 pp.)	6/26/85	P1, P5
8. summary	of Reagan telephone conversation with Duarte (1 pp.)	6/21/85	U1
9. memo	of Reagan conversation with Duarte (2 pp.)	6/21/85	P1
10. memo	re terrorist attack in El Salvador (1 pp.) P 7/11/85 M1402 #7	n.d.	P1 B1
11. memo	North and Berglund to McFarlane re presidential telephone call from President Duarte (1 pp.)	6/21/85	P1
12. memo	attachment to item #11 from McFarlane re recommended telephone call to Duarte (1 pp.)	n.d.	P1

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1	REPORT	RE EL SALVADOR (M1402 #3)	38	ND
7	CABLE	260343Z JUN 85 (M1402 #6)	2	6/26/1985
13	MEMO	NORTH TO MCFARLANE RE RESPONSE TO TERRORIST ACTS (M1402 #8)	3	ND

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