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(SLAIN AMERICAN

ATHENS (UPI) -- THREE MASKED GUNMEN SHOT AND KILLED RICHARD WELCH, THE AMERICAN CHIEF OF CIA OPERATIONS IN GREECE, IN A 30-SECOND ASSASSINATION TUESDAY THAT POLICE CALLED A "VERY PROFESSIONAL JOB."

WELCH, 46, WAS FINGERED BY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ATHENS NEWSPAPER THE NEWS WHICH PRINTED A LIST OF WHAT IT CALLED CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY AGENTS IN GREECE -- ALONG WITH THEIR STREET ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS.

THE NEWSPAPER ACTION REFLECTED LEFT-WING RESENTMENT AGAINST THE CIA WHICH HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF HELPING A GROUP OF ARMY COLONELS ORGANIZE THE 1967 COUP THAT SET UP A DICTATORSHIP IN GREECE.

AN ORGANIZATION CALLING ITSELF THE UNION OF OFFICERS STRUGGLING FOR THE NATIONAL IDEAL TODAY CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MURDER AND THREATENED TO ASSASSINATE OTHER CIA AGENTS.

"FROM NOW ON YOU WILL HEAR OF US OFTEN," MEMBERS OF THE GROUP SAID IN TELEPHONE CALLS TO ATHENS NEWSPAPERS. POLICE SAID THEY HAD NOT HEARD OF THE ORGANIZATION BEFORE.

WELCH, ASSIGNED TO THE U.S. EMBASSY AS FIRST SECRETARY, WAS RETURNING FROM A CHRISTMAS PARTY AT THE HOME OF AMBASSADOR JACK KUBISCH WHEN THE GUNMEN DROVE UP IN A BLACK CAR AND OPENED FIRE.

"IT WAS A VERY PROFESSIONAL JOB," A POLICE INVESTIGATOR SAID. "ONE BULLET, THE FATAL ONE, WE BELIEVE GOT HIM IN THE STOMACH, THE SECOND IN THE CHEST. THE THIRD, WHICH WE FOUND HERE, MISSED HIM."

POLICE OFFICIALS DECLINED TO SPECULATE ON THE IDENTITIES OR MOTIVES OF THE KILLERS. THEY SAID NEITHER WELCH'S WIFE, KIKI, NOR THE CHAUFFEUR SAW THE ASSASSINS CLEARLY.

"THE CHAUFFEUR HIT THE GROUND THE MOMENT HE HEARD THE SHOTS AND DID NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO SEE ANYTHING," THE INVESTIGATOR SAID.

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25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

*These comments represent the initial and tentative reaction of the CIA Operations Center and of the appropriate analytic component in the Agency.*