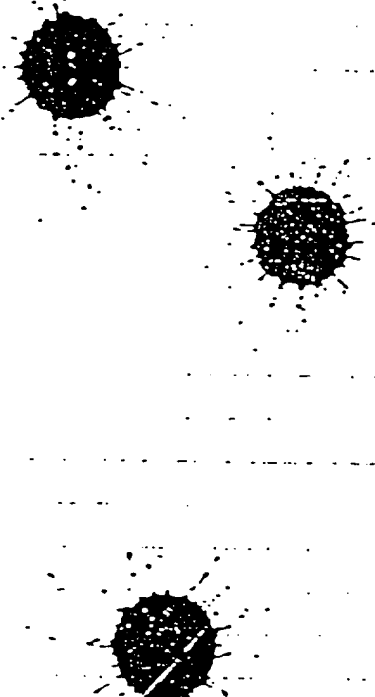


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Weekly Situation Report

# INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM



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~~5 August 1981~~

APPROVED FOR RELEASE APRIL 1997  
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### American Priest Slain in Guatemala

Father Stanley F. Rother, an American missionary priest in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala, was murdered in his bedroom in the parish house at approximately 0400 hours local time on 28 July. The sole witness to part of the murder, Francisco Bocel, who is the brother of Father Rother's former assistant, stated that three tall men wearing civilian clothes and ski masks entered his room and asked where Padre Francisco was. The men, who spoke Spanish and were "Ladinos" (non-Indian), had looked in the upstairs rooms before entering Bocel's room. They placed a gun to his head and ordered him to call Father Rother, who was sleeping downstairs. (Father Rother had not slept in his bedroom upstairs since he returned from Oklahoma City in April after leaving Guatemala in January because of death threats.) Bocel refused the order, but they forced him downstairs where he knocked on the door and told Rother that some men wanted to see him. When Rother opened the door, the men jumped him and ordered Bocel to return to his room and lock the door. Bocel heard noises of a struggle, followed by two shots. After staying in his room about 20 minutes, during which time he heard the men going through the house, Bocel found Rother's body on the floor. He then ran to the back of the church property where the nuns and an American nurse were staying. The nurse determined that Rother was dead.

Medical personnel stated that two bullets had entered Father Rother's head. One bullet entered the lower jaw and remained lodged in the bone on the opposite side. The second bullet, which caused the death, entered the left temple and passed through the head, leaving a large hole on the right side. A slug and a casing found at the scene indicated that the bullets were 9mm of Smith and Wesson manufacture. The priest had bruises on his body, probably inflicted by the attackers, and on his hands.

A motive for the murder is still unclear even though three men have been arrested in connection with the crime. The three in custody have admitted to an attempted robbery. If robbery were the motive, only a small amount of cash was taken from a petty cash box and such items as a transistor radio, calculator, and hunting knife were left in place. Effects in Rother's room, other than an overturned end table and lamp, were in order. Rooms in the rest of the house "appeared" to have been ransacked; drawers had been pulled out and the contents emptied on the floor but boxes and a chest had not been touched. The unanswered question is why in a robbery attempt the men would specifically ask for Father Rother, as Bocel testified.

Rother spoke fluent Cachiuel, one of the major local dialects, and spent 13 years working among the Txutujil Indians. In January, a parishioner warned the priest that he was in "extreme danger" and that he

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should leave immediately. On 28 January, Rother and his Indian priest assistant, Father Pedro Bocel (Francisco's brother), left Guatemala for Oklahoma City. In April Rother returned to Santiago Atitlan believing that things had quieted down for him, but Bocel remained in semi-hiding in Guatemala City because he was still marked for execution. In an April interview, Rother believed that the troubles in the area began in January 1980 when a group of guerrillas took over the town. As a consequence, military patrols entered the area and were believed to have established a network of "orejas" (ears/informers). In October 1980 the Guatemalan Army set up a camp close to Santiago Atitlan. In the ensuing months, according to Rother, people would be taken away and either be killed or disappear.

The missionaries in the area working with Rother were not known to be social activists and had scaled down their socially oriented programs. The work of the clinic in which Rother had been involved was transferred to Project Concern, and he no longer ran the co-op farm nor the school that translated the Bible into the Indian dialect. Radio Atitlan, which had been funded by the Oklahoma Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, had been shut down. In recent months, Rother had been occupied solely with pastoral work.

Guatemalan President Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia has ordered a full investigation and promised his cooperation. Whether a right-wing death squad was responsible for Rother's murder remains to be seen. It seems unlikely, however, that Lucas or other high-level government officials would have sanctioned the murder of a U.S. priest when the Government of Guatemala is trying to improve relations with the U.S. Government.

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NOTE

**Clifford Bevens Remains a Hostage in Guatemala**

Clifford Bevens, the American manager of the Guatemalan subsidiary of Goodyear Tire Company who was kidnapped on 7 December 1980, remains in the hands of his captors. (See the issue of 10 December 1980.) (U)

Recent raids on safehouses belonging to the Organization of People in Arms (ORPA) by Guatemalan officials turned up documents that indicate ORPA was responsible for the kidnapping. The documents do not provide leads as to the location of Bevens, and there is no current information on the status of the negotiations. The amount ORPA has demanded for his release is US\$10 million. Bevens is the only U.S. citizen currently being held hostage anywhere by a terrorist group.

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