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Victim Shot By Guerrillas In Argentina

By Joseph Novitski
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BUENOS AIRES, April 12 — Argentine guerrillas, for the first time in six years of underground urban warfare, today kidnapped an American official, Alfred A. Laun, a cultural affairs and information officer in the provincial capital of Cordoba.

After 15 hours in the hands of a leftist terrorist organization, provincial police said that Laun had been released, wounded but alive, on a downtown Cordoba street.

Consular officials in Cordoba said that Laun had been taken to a nearby private clinic for medical treatment, in critical condition.

Laun, a 36-year-old career officer in the United States Information Service, was wounded, apparently seriously, during the kidnaping. Provincial police reported that he was shot when he resisted nine commandos — one of them a woman — who burst into his home at about 8:30 this morning, a sunny, nationwide religious holiday.

An Argentine reporter who visited the house where Laun, a bachelor, lived alone, said in a telephone interview that there was a large bloodstain on the living room floor.

The People's Revolutionary Army, an organization of Marxist-Leninist terrorists, announced in a communique sent to Cordoba newspapers and radio stations that it had seized Laun for interrogation on "his ties with the CIA."

Robert Hill, the U.S. ambassador to Argentina, flatly denied that Laun had any connection with the CIA.

"I can assure you that he was a USIS employe," Ambassador Hill said during an interview in his office at the heavily guarded downtown Embassy here.

Mr. Laun is a very competent officer," Hill said. He had worked before in Saigon, Thailand and the Dominican Republic.

It was apparently these previous assignments that attracted the attention of the People's Revolutionary Army, better known in Argentina by the acronym ERP, the most active and most extreme of five urban guerrilla bands in Argentina. The ERP said in its communique that Laun had been taken to a "people's jail" for "questioning on his activities before coming to Argentina, in Vietnam, Brazil and Santo Domingo."

Laun had not served in either Brazil or Bolivia, but his other assignments have been in countries where the official role of the United States has been consistently

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condemned by the Latin American left.

The ERP communique acknowledged that Laun had been wounded, Argentine newsmen in Cordoba said, but did not report on his condition. Latin urban guerrilla organizations have often, in the past, called on medical members to treat kidnap victims.

Radio antennae installed on the roof of Laun's house on the high ground 15 miles north of Cordoba in the town of Unquillo might also have attracted the guerrillas' attention.

Provincial police reported that a short wave radio transmitter and receiver had been taken from the house by the kidnapers. Embassy officials here explained that Laun was a ham radio operator. His hobby, the officials acknowledged, had not been discouraged despite the sensitivity and activity of the extreme, anti-American Left in Argentina.

Ambassador Hill said that American officials in Argentina had received an unspecified number of threatening telephone calls in the past week or ten days.

The ERP has collected almost \$20 million in ransom from foreign companies in the past five years. Last March 13, the Argentine subsidiary of the Exxon corporation paid \$14.2 million to ransom Victor Samuelson, a 36-year-old American refinery manager kidnapped in December. Samuelson, however, has not yet been released and reliable sources report that Exxon's foreign executives have been living in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay across the river plate, since the ransom was paid.

Cordoba, an industrial city of 900,000 on the dry western plains of Argentina, has been a center of power for the Left since 1968. It is a city racked by almost constant political violence involving urban guerrillas and foreign companies, as well as the warring Left and Right wings of President Juan Peron's amorphous political movement.

Last month, in a provincial coup d'etat, rebellious right-wing police forced the resignation of Ricardo Obregon Cano, the elected provincial governor who had been identified with the Peronist Left.

Laun was assigned to Cordoba as branch public affairs officer shortly after his arrival in Argentina in September, 1972. He was one of two U.S. officials living in the city.

This afternoon, after the kidnaping, the four remaining U.S. officials living outside Buenos Aires were instructed to be very careful for the rest of the Easter holidays ending Monday.

"I would say security is as tight as you could have it in Buenos Aires," Ambassador Hill asserted. "But, unfortunately, it is not so tight outside the capital."

There was no public reaction to the kidnaping from Peron's government, which is officially engaged in a police campaign to eliminate urban guerrillas and unofficially busy with a purge of the Left wing of the Peronist movement. However, the Cordoba police spread a dragnet around the city, the Foreign Ministry in Buenos Aires expressed its official regret to Ambassador Hill, and a ranking inspector of the Argentine federal police telephoned from his holiday retreat to offer the U.S. Embassy assistance.

Two Embassy officials flew to Cordoba. But no ransom was demanded for Laun, and none could be paid, according to the United States policy of several years standing that official Americans kidnapped overseas will not be ransomed.



Associated Press

Alfred Laun: Held by Guerrillas.