

10 Dec. 1989

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Managua, Nicaragua

Tel: 505 2 70089

Detective Inspector Webster
International and Organized Crime Branch
Metropolitan Police
New Scotland Yard
Broadway
London Southwest 1
Great Britain

Dear Mr. Webster,

The following is in response to our recent telephone conversation about the killing in November of Mr. David Blundy. For the record, I am Newsweek Magazine's Contract Photographer in Latin America and the Caribbean. An American citizen, I've been working in Latin America since 1977, and have been based in Nicaragua since 1983.

The following are my best recollections of a stressful, rapidly-changing incident. Please do not interpret these recollections either as Newsweek Magazine's official response to your query, or as a complete version of what happened that day. These are the details as I remember them:

On the morning of David's death, myself and two colleagues arrived at an intersection in the "Mejicanos" working-class district of San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, shortly after 7 a.m. With me in a rented taxi were a Mexican and a Chilean photographer. Just minutes after our arrival, a second group of journalists -- Mr. Blundy and two American correspondents -- arrived at the same intersection. The two groups were separate but aware of each other's presence at the intersection. We were dispersed at the scene.

The intersection and surrounding area that morning apparently had been the scene of fighting between government forces and anti-government guerrillas. At least two cars were strewn in the intersection, apparently having been used by guerrillas as barricades during the clash. When we arrived, there was no shooting, but government troops who controlled (and this is a relative term) the zone were tense.

The six of us began to work. Myself and the Chilean photographer began to move (see diagram) in the northwestern direction to talk with government troops, asking for their commander, in a bid to ease tension. The Mexican photographer was 30 or so ^{feet} behind us, along the southern wall of the intersection.

David was in the center of the intersection. The two American correspondents were in the general vicinity. I don't recall their exact location, since my back was to them when the firing began and then the positions were quickly changed as we began taking cover.

Only minutes after we began to move about in the area, a single shot rang out and was followed by a short burst of automatic weapon fire. I believe that all the firing we heard was coming from a northern, northeastern direction (see diagram) and that all the fire probably came from a single gunman.

Upon hearing the fire, the journalists took cover: Myself and the Chilean along the wall at the north side of the intersection; the Mexican along the southern wall; the Americans on the ground in the intersection behind the cars. David was flat on the ground in the middle of the intersection.

At first we did not know that David was wounded. Seconds elapsed and one or more of the journalists closest to David saw that his forehead was bloodied. There was shouting that David was hit. We three photographers moved along the southwestern side of the intersection and across the street to get to David.

We yelled "We are journalists. Don't shoot," in Spanish. We waved white flags in the air as we approached David.

With the help of an unidentified Salvadoran civilian (some civilians had been moving freely in the area before the shooting began) the two photographers and I (each grabbing one of David's arms or legs) began to pull him in a southerly direction out of the intersection and down the street to where our cars were parked.

I heard David say, "Get me outta here." This was the first and last thing I heard him say.

There was another burst of gunfire (again, apparently coming from the same direction) and we were forced to abandon our efforts for a few seconds and to take cover behind the vehicle located in the southern part of the intersection. We waved the white flags, again screamed that we were journalists, not to fire, and when the shooting subsided, returned to the job of pulling David from the scene.

Once we were about 40 yards south of the intersection (and this is a bit downhill from the spot where David was hit) a van used by a Spanish television crew approached to help us remove David from the area and to a hospital.

We placed David in the van and began to race to the hospital. David was semi-conscious in the van, growing more pale during the drive, which lasted probably about six minutes.

When we arrived at the Rosales Hospital, David was taken immediately into the Emergency Ward for examination. The physicians began to check his forehead -- everybody being under the impression that David had been grazed by a bullet to the forehead.

However, during the exam, David was noticed to be bleeding from the right shoulder. The bleeding -- at least externally -- was not very profuse.

David was then X-rayed to determine the location of the bullet but even after the X-ray the physicians were unable to determine the location of the projectile. Then he was given a second exam (I don't know what this was) and the physicians determined that the bullet had entered the right shoulder, passed through the right lung, and lodged itself in David's spine. One of the physicians told me at that point that David was in "grave" condition and that, if he survived, he probably would be paralyzed from the chest down.

At this point Mr. Ian Murry of the British Embassy in San Salvador (a good friend of David's) had assumed the task of dealing with the situation. I left the hospital and was informed by a friend a few hours later that David had died.

As I believe I told you over the phone, I feel it is impossible (without an eyewitness as to who actually fired the shot that killed David, or without a confession -- both of these possibilities being highly improbable) to determine who killed David, or why. However, it is natural that these

questions arise, and I can offer the following as partial response:

- David was a tall man (particularly in relation to Salvadorans), standing in an open spot. Although the area was the scene of some pedestrian traffic, David was still a relatively easy target.
- On one hand we were close to government troops, and one would think that government troops would not fire on their own positions. This leads to the conclusion that the gunman was a guerrilla.
- On the other hand David was wearing a dark blue shirt, similar to clothing worn by some of the anti-government guerrillas. This leads us to believe the gunman was a soldier.
- Consider the nature and location of the fire. As I've stated, the fire seemed to be coming from the same area, perhaps even the same gunman. It seemed to have originated less than a block away -- within or very close to the perimeter of government soldiers. Furthermore, I do not recall having heard contesting fire from the nearby soldiers, as one would expect the soldiers in our area to have responded to guerrilla sniper fire. Could it be that the gunman -- either knowing or not that David was a journalist -- was a soldier inside the perimeter held by the troops and shot David, thereby not drawing fire in response from his fellow soldiers?
- Finally, consider the atmosphere in which the incident took place. As in many other places where we work -- but even moreso in El Salvador -- journalists are routinely accused of manipulating the truth. During the rebel offensive that began Nov. 11, pro-government media accused foreign journalists of alleged sympathy for the guerrillas. A week or so after David's killing, a Salvadoran photographer working for Agence France Presse (AFP), was cut down by gunfire -- almost certainly from government troops -- while working in a conflictive zone accompanied by other journalists and by Red Cross workers, the group clearly identified as non-combatants.

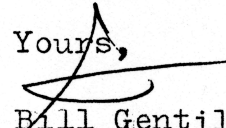
Having said all of the above, I feel that David was killed by Salvadoran government forces. But I stress, these are my recollections under a tense and very rapidly-moving situation. Please do not interpret these recollections as complete in detail or decisive in ascertaining the truth. One of the saddest -- and perhaps the most maddening -- aspects of El Salvador is that so many killings like this one go unsolved and unpunished.

I hope this letter has been of some assistance to you. As I told you during our telephone conversation, I am willing to assist your probe in any way possible. I will be in New York City the first week of January 1990.

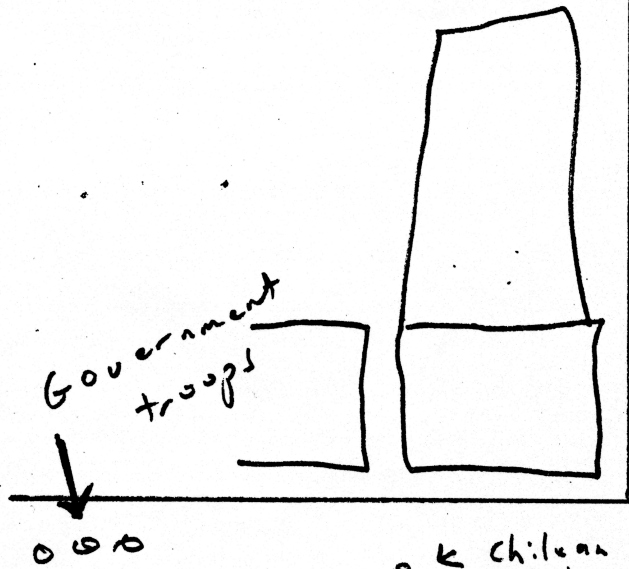
Please feel free to call me at my home in Managua, or if you have trouble doing so, through Newsweek's Chief Picture Editor, Mr. Guy Cooper, in the New York office: Tel. (212) 350-4619.

My condolences to David's family.

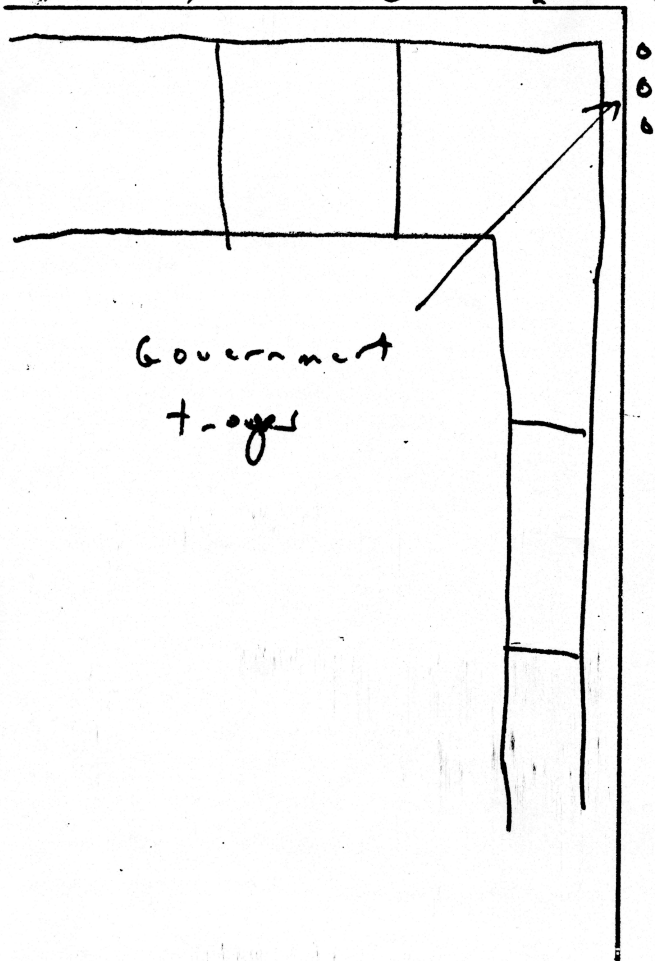
Yours,


Bill Gentile

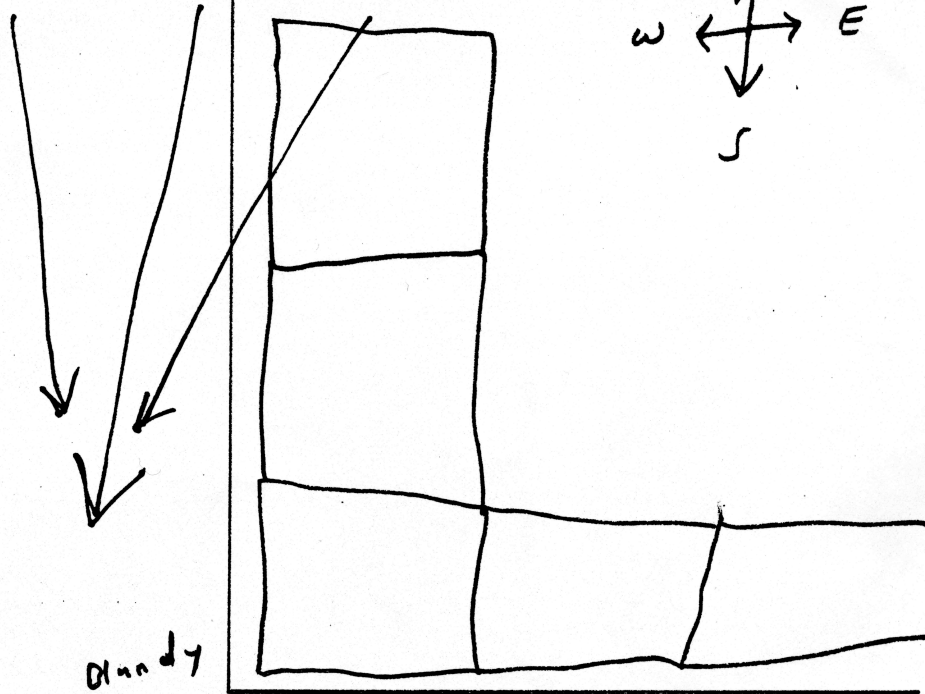
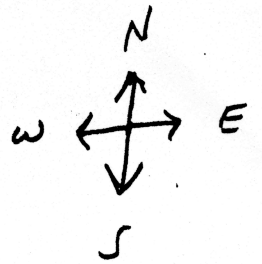
Newsweek



← Chilean photographer
← Gentile
Mexican Photos. →



Fire comes from this area.



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