

ALBERT SCHAUFELBERGER

Situation: Complacency leads to death of LCDR Schaufelberger.

At 6:30 PM on 25 May 1983, leftist insurgents assassinated LCDR Albert Schaufelberger while he waited for his girlfriend near a university in San Salvador. Schaufelberger had established a routine of picking her up at the same time and location several times each week. He had further increased his vulnerability by removing a bullet-resistant shield from the driver's window of his embassy-provided sedan because the air conditioner was not working.

As the deputy commander of the US Military Assistance Group, Schaufelberger was responsible for force protection briefings for incoming personnel. He was the first US military casualty in El Salvador since trainers began arriving in 1980.



[Schaufelberger's inattention to basic defensive measures cost him his life. Even trained professionals must adhere to basic standards and procedures for personal protection.](#)



LCDR Schaufelberger, 33, was a US Navy SEAL and Deputy Commander of the US Military Group advising the Salvadoran Military. Since arriving nine months earlier, he had also served as security officer for the 53 US military advisors in El Salvador.

Only days before his death, Schaufelberger was photographed at the La Union naval base where he supported naval operations against insurgents in the Gulf of Fonseca. Schaufelberger commented to journalists that the insurgents "know who I am, and where I live," noting that his house had recently received drive-by gunfire.

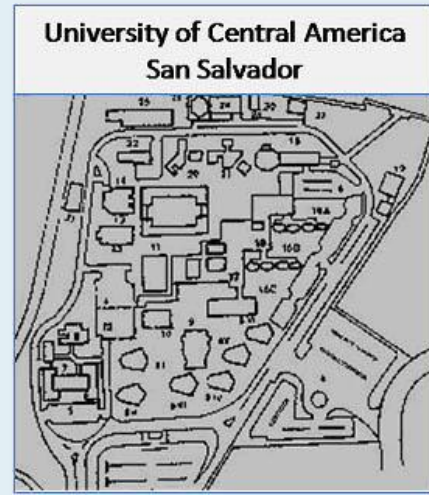
Schaufelberger, a bachelor, had been dating an employee of the Central American University, Consuelo Escalante Aguilera, for months and established a pattern of picking

her up from work at the same location in his embassy-provided car. While he did not come every day, the time was always between 6:30 and 6:40 PM.

Consider both your on-duty and off-duty vulnerabilities. Stay vigilant for indications that the threat environment is worsening and make appropriate changes in your exposure. Do not become complacent when facing a sustained threat. Remember that some personal protective measures may be inconvenient, but they are designed to protect you.

On May 25 at his usual time and place, Schaufelberger honked the horn of his armored Ford Maverick. Ms. Escalante Aguilera stepped out of her office and noticed a white Volkswagen microbus stopping near Schaufelberger's car. Three men got out; a fourth man stayed with the vehicle. One man armed with a revolver walked behind the victim's car to stop Ms. Escalante. The second gunman stood security while the third gunman ran to the open window of Schaufelberger's car and fired four rounds into the left side of the victim's head.

Schaufelberger's car lurched forward, striking another car. He carried a revolver while driving, but did not have the opportunity to use it. Some observers said Schaufelberger was either listening to or speaking on a radio and did not notice the approaching gunman. Reportedly, the assassin calmly reached in the driver's window and turned off the embassy-car's ignition, then instructed passersby to remain calm. The assassins then jumped into their vehicle and escaped.



The detailed planning of this attack was made possible by Schaufelberger's predictable pattern of activities. Don't be predictable. Don't be an easy target.



Soon after the attack, El Salvador's leading insurgent group (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional – FMLN) took credit for the murder. The voice of the FMLN, Radio Venceremos, broadcast: "One of our units in the metropolitan command, the Clara Elizabeth Ramirez command, assassinated on 25 May the second in command of the North American military advisors. We advise the

other North American advisors that El Salvador will become a Yankee tomb." In 1993, this claim was accepted as factual by a "Truth Commission" established by the United Nations.

At a time when threat indications were increasing, LCDR Schaufelberger established a predictable pattern of travel. He reduced the armored protection of his car to minimize discomfort for himself and passengers, and he was evidently not alert at the moment of the attack. He perhaps had become acclimatized to the heightened threat environment.

This experience confirms that even highly trained individuals can make deadly mistakes and misjudgments. Personal safety in a threatening environment requires constant vigilance and self-discipline.