

■ **GREEK MURDER** As detectives arrive to investigate the shooting of a military attaché in Athens, Britain begins a review of embassy security

'These wicked men have destroyed my family'

BY PAUL WOOD
in Athens

THE WIDOW of Britain's murdered military attaché to Greece paid a tearful, dignified and eloquent tribute to her husband yesterday, describing him as a soldier committed to peace and hoping his killers would be found so that others would not suffer her agony.

Flanked by her two teenage daughters, Heather Saunders emerged to make her statement outside the gates of their home in the leafy diplomatic quarter in the north of Athens.

Her hands shook as she gripped the piece of paper with her lines, addressing a throng of Greek journalists in her appeal for anyone with knowledge of Brigadier Stephen Saunders' killers to come forward.

"Stephen was my life, and our lives were so deeply entwined that today I stand before you half the person I was yesterday morning. Stephen was a wonderful loving man. He was a man committed to peace and, throughout his 35 years in the Army, he never raised his gun to kill anyone. In fact, in the past I know he hesitated once, when someone opened fire on him in Northern Ireland, in case he hit an innocent bystander.

"I only hope the people that



Heather Saunders, the widow of Brigadier Saunders, left, after appealing for information on her husband's killers, with her daughter beside her AP/Yannis Kolesidis



carried out this cowardly act on an unarmed man simply travelling on his way to work, will realise the total devastation they have caused. Not only have they killed my husband, they have destroyed me and my family," Mrs Saunders said.

Brigadier Saunders, 52, was ambushed by two gunmen on the November 17 organisation on Thursday morning, as he was driving to his work at the British embassy through rush-hour traffic. Police said the men on a motorcycle shot him through the window of his car.

For many British diplomats, Athens is something of a reward after a hardship posting elsewhere, or the last place to go at the end of a long career. Most leave with a deep love for the place and there is little anti-Greek sentiment.

Mrs Saunders said: "I would like to thank the Greek people for all their help and support at this awful time. The Greek people are not responsible for what happened yesterday but for the sake of the future of Greece these wicked men must be brought to justice." November

17 said in a statement yesterday that Brigadier Saunders had been a coordinator of Nato's bombing in Yugoslavia. But British officials described this as nonsense, saying he had been with the UN observer mission in Iraq when Nato's air action in Kosovo began.

Security for the embassy is now being reviewed, but British officials are loathe to copy the Americans by taking to living in fortified homes, accompanied by armed bodyguards.

The British Minister for Defence Procurement, Baroness

Symons, had been at an official dinner with Brigadier Saunders the night before he died. Along with embassy staff, she cried yesterday at the loss of a colleague who was well liked and respected for his grasp of the job.

A familiar sight at official dinners and embassy cocktail parties, the brigadier was known as a warm and charming member of the British diplomatic corps, with a ready sense of humour. He would appear in full uniform, complete with gold braid, to swear in new

members of the 1st Athens British Brownies.

Mrs Saunders said: "Stephen was a forgiving man. As yet I cannot forgive the perpetrators of this horrible crime. But God may help me to forgive in time. We must make sure this never happens again."

Brigadier Saunders had served several tours in Northern Ireland before meeting and marrying Ulster-born Heather Kell in 1983, when they were stationed together in Lisburn.

Mrs Saunders' brother, Steve Kell, said yesterday that

the couple had been looking forward to the brigadier's retirement in three years' time

■ Greece, which has yet to form a security strategy for the 2004 Olympics in Athens, vowed yesterday to take all possible measures to protect people at the games, in response to the murder of Brigadier Saunders.

A meeting of the Greek cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, Costas Simitis, discussed counter-terrorism measures and ways to modernise the Greek police, Dimitris Reppas, a government spokesman said.

Scotland Yard team in Athens to hunt murders

BY PAUL WOOD

A TEAM of detectives from Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist branch arrived in Greece yesterday to assist police investigating the murder of Britain's defence attaché, shot dead in Athens on Thursday.

November 17, a far-left group, claimed responsibility for killing Brigadier Stephen Saunders, saying it had targeted him because of his role in Nato's bombing of Yugoslavia last year, which it described as a "Nazi crime".

The terrorist group sent a 13-page justification of the murder to *Eleftherotypia*, an independent, left-wing newspaper, which published the document in full yesterday, as it has often done in the past.

The document also criticised what it termed "the level of barbarity" of Western democracies, likening the Nato offensive to Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia. The statement added: "The armies of the United States and other big Western countries are composed of mercenaries - professional killers who carry out attacks against people. Each and every one of us has the indisputable right and obligation to strike them wherever they can and in every way."

British military observers dismissed the statement that Brigadier Saunders had been a co-ordinator of the Nato air action against Yugoslavia as "nonsense," saying he had been with the UN observer mission in Iraq when the bombing over Kosovo had started.

The Foreign Office said it was reviewing security at all British embassies. "Whenever anything like this happens, we do have another close look at our security measures, not just in Athens but worldwide," a spokesman said.

November 17 has been linked to 22 previous killings and more than 150 attacks since its first action, in 1975, when it killed the CIA station chief in Athens. But in more than 25 years, not one member of the group has ever been brought to trial.

Greek authorities reacted angrily yesterday to claims by a former CIA director, James Woolsey, that current or former members of Greek governments were protecting them.

No foolproof way to keep diplomatic staff safe from terrorists

A DAY after the murder of its military attaché in Athens, Britain yesterday embarked on a major review of security at embassies around the world - but experts could offer no foolproof remedies to avoid a repetition.

The fear now, partly borne out by the fatal attack on Brigadier Stephen Saunders by the November 17 terrorist group, is that after the measures taken by the United States to improve safety at its

BY RUPERT CORNWELL

missions abroad, its most reliable ally, Britain, has now become the target of choice for armed extremists.

"Following the August 1998 attacks on its embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, the US has significantly strengthened security arrangements for its diplomats. They're very hard targets now," Colonel Terry Taylor, deputy director of the International In-

stitute for Strategic Studies, said. "By comparison, Britain must look a pretty soft touch."

In fact, tragically proven fears of IRA attacks have long since turned British embassies, in Europe especially, into mini-fortresses. The real security problem lies in protecting diplomats outside the embassy and in their homes.

"If we going to achieve this, we have to provide bullet-proof cars and bodyguards, not just for ambassadors but for every-

one," one diplomat argued yesterday. "The costs would be great, and even then you wouldn't get 100 per cent security."

Brigadier Saunders was provided with neither a bodyguard nor a special car.

Another option would be to move staff in higher-risk countries into purpose-built and fortified residential compounds, as the Americans do in many places. But this would only further cut off diplomats from the

normal life of the country they are supposed to be watching and reporting on.

And if the diplomats were better protected, terrorists might turn their fire on more vulnerable local British targets. "You tighten security on the obvious guys - and then what happens to the people from DFID [Department for International Development] or the British Council?" asked one official. "How can you guard a library?"

Even before the killing of Brigadier Stephen Saunders, security at British embassies was under regular review; the arrangements in Athens had been looked at as recently as March - even though the Foreign Office will not say if any deficiencies were found.

In fact, comparatively few British diplomats have been murdered while on service in recent years.

The most dramatic incidents were the murders by IRA car

bombs of Christopher Ewart-Biggs, ambassador to Ireland, in Dublin in 1976, and of Richard Sykes, ambassador to the Netherlands, in the Hague in 1979.

In 1984, the diplomat Percy Norris was killed in Bombay, and Kenneth Whitty, director of the British Council in Athens, was killed by the Abu Nidal Palestinian terrorist group. Since then the only diplomat to be killed abroad was Graham Gibson, in Kenya in 1996.

Franco-German deal to give more power to Berlin

BY IMRE KAIKAS
in Mainz

FRANCE has conceded for the first time Germany's claim to the biggest stake in EU decisions. This represents a fundamental shift in the traditional power balance of the union as Germany and France will no longer be equal partners. If the principle is translated into votes - as Berlin seeks - Germany's voice will count for more than any other of the current "Big Four".

Germany has long argued that its equal status with Britain, France and Italy failed to reflect its population. Largely for reasons of national prestige, France has up to now resisted German demands for a bigger say.

The deal came as Germany and France forged a common front yesterday in their effort to push forward far-reaching EU reforms.

The two countries' leaders, who met in the German city of Mainz, announced they had agreed on "all principal subjects" of European integration. Their common agenda will serve as the basis for the upcoming six-month French presidency of the union.

The new blueprint tries to skirt around sensitive objections to giving Germany more votes by inventing the "double majority" principle. There would be two votes on important matters, the first counting each country as one vote, and the second totting up the national populations behind each



Schröder: Persuaded the French to concede power

member. Whatever the construction, though, Germany's vote would be worth 25 per cent more than any other country's.

"It's a difficult balance to strike," Chancellor Gerhard Schröder admitted after his talks with President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. "The size of the population must be taken into consideration, while at the same time the interests of the small countries must also be respected."

Agreement on this crucial point would remove obstacles blocking a reform of EU's cumbersome decision-making process. More issues would be decided by qualified majority, though the two countries failed to spell out the exact limits of this practice. Britain is not alone in fearing that Franco-German plans would water down their veto for the sake of efficiency.

This would certainly be the case in tax harmonisation. Lon-

don is already resisting the imposition of an EU-wide tax on savings.

Some of the Franco-German plans will attract less controversy, even in London. The French presidency will try to make Europe more manageable after the admission of new members in the East. With a view to expanding the membership from 15 to 20 states, the blueprint foresees each country nominating just one commissioner. At present the big countries have two.

But as more decisions are set to reflect the member countries' populations and the fewer can be vetoed, the smaller states will experience a sudden drop in their influence. The Franco-German vision will therefore be viewed with suspicion outside the charmed circle of the big countries.

Sensitive to this, France and Germany this time decided not to publish a joint initiative, lest it be regarded by the rest of Europe as a "Diktat". The proposals, both countries assert, are in any case still evolving.

That explanation may also be a way of papering over the cracks. France and Germany may have drawn closer together in recent months, but there are differences of emphasis in many areas, and outright hostility in others. Talks about co-operation in defence have been strained by pointed remarks from Paris lamenting Germany's commitment and lauding British pragmatism.

Leading article,
Review, page 3.