

Chilean prosecutor charges ex-US officer in 1973 murder of American journalists

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A judge in Chile last week issued an indictment against a retired US Navy officer in connection with the arrest, torture and murder of two American journalists, Charles Horman and Frank Terrugi, in the wake of the CIA-backed military coup led by Chilean Gen. Augusto Pinochet that toppled the government of President Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973.

Judge Jorge Zepeda has charged Capt. Ray Davis (retired) with providing the Chilean secret police with intelligence that led to the abduction and murder of Horman and Terrugi and with failing to take any action to stop the killings. At the time of the coup, Davis was the chief of the US Military Group at the American embassy in Santiago. The judge has filed a motion with the country's Supreme Court to seek Davis's extradition from the US.

The slaying of Horman and Terrugi, who were supporters of the Allende government, was carried out as part of a savage wave of repression that saw tens of thousands of people tortured and executed and hundreds of thousands more forced into exile by a US-supported dictatorship that went on to rule the country for 17 years.

The crime became known to a broad public in the US and internationally with the 1982 release of the Costa Gavras film *Missing*, which dramatized Horman's father's search for his missing son and his ultimate realization that the US government was itself deeply implicated in his murder.

Both Horman and Terrugi had worked as free-lance journalists for the American Information Source (FIN), which was sympathetic to the Allende government. Horman had also worked as a screenwriter for the Chilean state film agency. At the time of his death, he was reportedly investigating US involvement in the coup that toppled the Allende government and led to

the death of the Chilean president.

In his indictment, Zepeda states that US agents had branded Horman's work for the state film company as "subversive," a charge that was repeated by Chilean secret police agents who abducted, tortured and murdered him. He also states that "there are presumptions that following the covert operations that (Davis) completed in Chile, designated against Charles Edmund Horman Lazar, he decides to not annul the decision of the material authors of this death, despite having the possibility of doing it."

The indictment states that given his "coordination with Chilean agents," Davis had been "in a position...[to] prevent the murder."

This charge was previously substantiated by US State Department documents declassified in 1999. One of them, a 1976 memo drafted by three department functionaries, described the Horman case as "bothersome" because of media attention and congressional investigations. The memo stated that the Chilean junta had reason to believe that "this American could be killed without negative fall-out from the USG [US Government]."

It added: "US intelligence may have played an unfortunate part in Horman's death. At best it was limited to providing or confirming information that helped motivate his murder by the GOC [Government of Chile]. At worst, US intelligence was aware the GOC saw Horman in a rather serious light and US officials did nothing to discourage the logical outcome of GOC paranoia."

This is a deliberate understatement of the real US role, which included feeding intelligence to the Chilean secret police agency DINA that served to stoke the junta's "paranoia" and concurring with the secret police that Horman's activities were "subversive,"

under conditions in which so-called subversives were being rounded up, tortured and shot by the tens of thousands.

All but a handful of CIA and US military documents on the case remain classified, 38 years after Horman's murder, and those that have been released were heavily redacted. There is strong evidence, however, that US military and intelligence agents had their own reasons to back Horman's execution.

Horman had met Davis in the resort town of Viña del Mar, near the Chilean port city of Valparaiso, during the coup. Davis gave the 31-year-old American a ride back to Santiago on September 15. He was subsequently arrested at his home. It appears that the two met not merely by chance, as US intelligence had been monitoring the activities of Horman and Terrugi in the period leading up to the coup.

Valparaiso had served as key base for both the Chilean military coup plotters and the US military and intelligence officials who were supporting them. While in Viña, Horman had spoken to several American operatives and taken careful notes documenting the US role—vehemently denied by Washington—in the overthrow of the Allende government.

Zepeda, who took charge of the case eight years ago, also indicted a retired Chilean general, Pedro Espinoza Bravo, in the murders. Brigadier Espinoza was the number-two man in the infamous DINA secret police apparatus of the Chilean junta. He is charged with direct participation in the interrogation of Charles Horman in the offices of the Ministry of Defense before Horman was murdered.

Espinoza was already found guilty and sentenced to a prison term of just five years for his part in organizing the 1976 assassination of Orlando Letelier, who had served as foreign minister, defense minister and ambassador to the US under Allende. Both Letelier and his American aide Ronni Moffitt were killed by a car bomb planted by Chilean agents. The chief of DINA, Gen. Manuel Contreras, testified in 2005 that the CIA had directly supported Letelier's assassination.

Another ex-Chilean intelligence officer, Rafael Agustín González Verdugo, was previously convicted in connection with the case. He testified that Horman had been subjected to interrogation and torture at the Ministry of Defense before being executed. His body was subsequently moved several times to prevent its

discovery.

Frank Terrugi was reportedly taken from his home in Santiago to the National Stadium, which in the wake of the coup was turned into a concentration camp for over 10,000 political prisoners. Like many others there, he was shot to death between September 21 and September 22.

There is little likelihood that the Obama administration will extradite Davis or any other US official implicated in the Horman-Terrugi murders and the other mass crimes carried out in Chile. Successive administrations have shielded former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, whose extradition has been sought by Chilean prosecutors for his involvement in the coup and support for subsequent repression.

Obama himself tapped Jeffrey Davidow to serve as his chief adviser at the 2009 summit of the Americas in Trinidad. During the 1973 coup in Chile, Davidow was the political officer at the embassy in Santiago—a post that frequently serves as cover for CIA operatives—and was himself intimately involved in the Horman affair.

In Chile, the Association of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees issued a statement supporting Judge Zepeda's indictment of the ex-US officer. "This is important if the criminality of the governments of the United States and their responsibility for genocide in various countries on the continent begins to be established juridically before the world," said the organization's president, Lorena Pizarro.



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