

The unquiet death of Charles Horman

Chilean court reenacts stadium execution of American journalist

By Bill Vann
17 May 2002

Gunshots rang out once again in Santiago's National Stadium May 14, nearly 30 years after the Chilean sports facility was turned into a center of torture and execution by a US-backed military junta that overthrew the elected government of President Salvador Allende.

This time the bullets were blanks, fired by court officials reenacting the execution of Charles Horman, a US citizen who was put to death in the stadium after his arrest by the military on September 18, 1973, just seven days after the CIA-orchestrated military coup.

Horman was one of an estimated 10,000 workers, students, political activists and others rounded up by the military regime of General Augusto Pinochet and jammed into the soccer stadium to be beaten, tortured and gunned down.

Chilean Judge Juan Guzmán, who has attempted unsuccessfully to bring Pinochet to trial for human rights crimes, is conducting a full-scale investigation into the killing.

The execution of Horman, a 31-year-old filmmaker and journalist who came to Chile out of sympathy for the social reforms enacted by the Allende government, was the subject of a book by Thomas Hauser, *The Execution of Charles Horman*, and was subsequently portrayed in the 1982 Costa-Gavras film, *Missing*.

The reenactment carried out by Judge Guzmán took nearly four hours. The court has compiled detailed testimony on the functioning of the junta's stadium concentration camp, where prisoners were brought in military trucks, buses and other vehicles from throughout the Chilean capital. Upon arrival, they were forced to run down a corridor leading into the stadium past a gauntlet of soldiers, who beat them with the butts of their rifles.

Many were beaten unconscious, while others were subjected to excruciating torture. Some were placed on the stadium's field and machine-gunned to death, as other prisoners looked on in horror from the crowded bleachers.

Among those returning to the stadium with Judge Guzmán were an American couple, Adam Schesch and Patricia Garret, who spent eight days there in 1973. Soldiers beat Schesch severely, breaking his ribs.

The court, meanwhile, has obtained the testimony of retired Chilean military personnel, including witnesses to Horman's execution.

Also summoned to the stadium was Frederick Durban Purdy, who was the US counsel in Santiago during the coup. Purdy is a resident of Chile—the former diplomat has found a second career as the author of a series of books entitled *Chilean Wines for Gringos*—and was thus unable to brush off a court order like some of his former superiors. Purdy has been designated by the court as an *inculpado*, or accused, because of testimony by other Americans who were present in Chile at the time about his refusal to provide assistance to those being hunted down by the junta.

Most prominent among those whom Guzmán has attempted to question is ex-US secretary of state Henry Kissinger. Recently declassified documents have linked Kissinger to the killings of Horman and a second US citizen, Frank Teruggi, who was also dragged into the stadium and executed, attorneys close to the case say.

One such State Department document, dated August 25, 1976, declared: "The GOC [Government of Chile] might have believed this American could be killed without negative fallout from the USG [US government]."

"There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest 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. At worst, US

intelligence was aware that GOC saw Horman in a rather serious light and US officials did nothing to discourage the logical outcome of GOC paranoia.”

In other words, the CIA fingered Horman, along with others, to the Chilean military and made it clear that it would have no objection to his murder.

Charles Horman’s widow, Joyce, said that the new investigation substantiated the persistent speculation that Horman was killed because he knew too much. The day before the military’s seizure of power, he had visited Viña del Mar, the site of a Chilean naval base, meeting US military personnel who were involved in the preparation of the coup.

In an interview with the Chilean radio station *Radio Cooperativa*, Joyce Horman said a former Chilean intelligence agent, identified as Rafael González, had come forward during the probe to establish that the execution was a joint decision of the Chilean junta and US officials.

The order for the killing was given in the office of General Augusto Lutz, then chief of Chilean army intelligence, in the presence of a US military officer, according to his account.

“They decided that Charles had to be eliminated because he knew too much,” Joyce Horman said. “He [González] was present when they said that Charles had to disappear because he knew too much. The Chilean said that there was an American official in the room.”

US complicity in the killing was strongly suggested by the extraordinary efforts of the US embassy in Santiago, as well as officials in Washington, to cover up the circumstances surrounding Horman’s execution.

Lawyers for Kissinger have insisted that the State Department, rather than he personally, should answer Judge Guzmán’s subpoena. The Bush administration has made no official response.

Judge Guzmán has made it clear that if Washington continues to stonewall his request for information on the US role in the case, he will seek an order for Henry Kissinger’s extradition to Chile.