

The Washington Merry-go-round

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WASHINGTON — Without a murmur of formal protest from the U.S. Government, an attractive, 31-year-old American art teacher was brutally tortured last month by Chilean Air Force officers in an insect-infested prison.

The young university instructor was threatened with death, forced to ride with breasts bared through the streets and thrown on a bed where she was menaced with rape. She was subjected to obscene questioning, catapulted down stairs while blindfolded, deprived of water, denied sleep and forced to stand until she almost collapsed.

When 13 days of this treatment failed to draw a false confession from her, the "officers and gentlemen" of Chile's Air Force told her she was being taken to an infamous torture center where prisoners were known to have been given electrode shocks on the most sensitive parts of their bodies, stretched on racks and immersed in human excrement.

Faced with a journey from which she might not return, she finally broke and signed a prepared pack of lies on October 24th.

Chilean junta leader Gen. Augusto Pinochet has assured the world that torture no longer exists in Chile. Yet this incredible story of torture by a regime now seeking \$85 million a year in U.S. aid has been sworn to by Amy Conger, now in Chicago.

Except for a partially paralyzed thumb, the art history teacher, whose specialty is the gentle 15th-century painting school of Fra Angelico, appears to be recovering.

In long talks with my associate Les Whitten and in extensive affidavits, she has spoken eloquently of her agony.

"I was brutally arrested October 11th about 7:00 p.m. by four men in street clothes with submachine guns," one affidavit states. She was told she might be killed, then was "tightly handcuffed and literally thrown in a car."

During the ride, one of the officers pulled her sweater over her head. "Needless to say I felt conspicuous passing through the city bare-breasted," she said.

Although she was blindfolded throughout much of her 13-day interrogation, she was able to learn that "several of these Air Force officers had studied in the United States." She identified two of them as a "Lt. Col. Ceballos" and a "Col. Horacio Ibaiza." Ceballos spoke excellent colloquial English, she said.

Her relentless questioners sought to wrench from her a confession that she knew "undesirable" Chileans. This, she said, could refer to almost any of the 44 per cent of Chileans who had supported

cups of water each day to drink, 900 calories of food, a perfect starvation diet.

"The bathroom had running water for only about 15 minutes a day to serve the needs of about 60 prisoners. The unflushable toilets were teeming with flies and brimming with great quantities of blood and excrement.

"The three stalls were calf high with newspaper which had served as toilet paper," she swore. All around her, guards were "nervously playing and experimenting with submachine guns, cocking them, changing to automatic," and ironically, "a cassette player (constantly) repeated Joan Baez's 'Happy Birthday.'"

Other prisoners were tortured while she was blindfolded, she said. "I heard horrible, prolonged screams in the night... I learned to peek around my blindfold..."

"I saw two officers slugging and kicking an 18-year-old... I heard his sharp, quick screams of 'No!' and afterwards, long cries of 'No!', like a dying animal. Finally, he confessed to anything they suggested." Afterwards, he was dragged off to the dreaded Direccion de Inteligencia Nacional for still more torture.

She saw the youth when he returned, "his chest covered with black and blue marks and with inflamed red points. His face was totally without color, white as plaster — it seems, anemic because of blood loss. He had a deep cut about five inches long, open and unbandaged on the inside of his left arm," she said in her affidavit.

"Another young man returned from his trip (to the torture center) with discs broken in his spinal cord, and another in a wheelchair with a broken leg."

Finally, she said, she "confessed" falsely to knowing "subversives." At about the same time, she said, word of her arrest reached the American consul in Santiago, Fred Purdy. He began working for her freedom right away, but it took him 30 hours before the Chileans were willing to release her.

By that time, "the nerve in my left thumb (was) disabled due to the tightness of handcuffs... I had acquired an impressive vaginal discharge, I was somewhat black and blue, incredibly filthy...badly dehydrated, nine pounds lighter and with protein and cholesterol levels abnormally low."

The shocked Purdy took her to her apartment which had been totally ransacked. In a pathetic effort to cheer her up, he observed, "You're not much of a housekeeper, are you?"

Shortly thereafter, she left Chile. The United States has yet to make a formal protest, as was made in the case of American citizen Fred Morris who was tortured at about the same time in Brazil.

FOOTNOTE: Ms. Conger told us that only her American citizenship kept things from being worse. "I was fortunate... Another young woman was arrested and raped three times while awaiting her trial. She became pregnant and wished to get an abortion, but the prison doctor informed her she 'should feel honored and proud to have been made pregnant by the saviors of the country.'"

the late Chilean Socialist president Salvador Allende.

"They threatened me with rape and to send me to the Direccion de Inteligencia Nacional, a military group specializing in brute physical torture, particularly electric shock, the rack, choking or drowning in excrement."

At one point, she was led blindfolded to the head of a stairs. She plunged down 10 steps and thereafter was in fear whenever she was being led blindfolded through the corridors of the Academia de Guerra prison.

"I stood for hours and hours against a wall," she attested. "They gave me two