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Where Is Luis Alberto Gundelman?

By Laurence Leamer

KENNINGTON, Md. — Luis Alberto Gundelman no longer exists. He was taken prisoner in Chile last September.

When I met Luis in the winter of 1970 on a trip to Chile, I remember thinking that no matter what kind of Government the country might have Luis would get along. Salvador Allende Gossens' socialist Government had just taken over. Much of the middle class was afraid. Luis's parents had left the country. Luis's brother had left the country. He had taken his wife, my sister-in-law, with him. My wife's family had left as well.

But Luis wasn't worried. He was a big, bearded fellow with an exuberant manner. He figured that politics would take care of itself and he would take care of himself. He would go on studying and enjoying life. And so he did.

When the generals overthrew Dr. Allende in September, 1973, Luis continued living much as before.

One morning last September two men came to Luis's apartment. They identified themselves as policemen. They took Luis away. Luis's friends and relatives went to the police. They asked what Luis was being charged with. But the police said that they had no knowledge of any Luis Alberto Gundelman.

Luis's mother returned to Chile. She

knew people high up in the regime. She hired one of the best lawyers in Santiago. She used every contact she had. But the Government said they had no knowledge of any Luis Alberto Gundelman.

Luis's brother asked me to help. I telephoned the Chilean Ambassador, Walter Heitmann, and listened politely as he lectured me: "It's you journalists who are causing all the trouble. It's all lies, lies, these stories of torture and false arrests. Lies . . . we'll find out if this story is true, if this . . . this Gundelman . . . why that's not even a Chilean name!"

Weeks later I received a message from the embassy saying that the Government had no knowledge of any Luis Alberto Gundelman.

I got in touch with Senator J. W. Fulbright, and the Senator's office wrote Secretary of State Kissinger. Several weeks later I received a copy of a letter to Mr. Fulbright saying that the United States Embassy had learned informally that Luis was detained in the Tres Alamos prison in Santiago. He was said to be in good health. A copy of the letter was mailed to Chile. Luis's mother showed it to various officials but they said that the letter was a forgery.

My brother-in-law had begun to get desperate. He had no idea where to turn. He spent his evenings sending off scores of letters to Congressmen, international organizations, educators, industrialists, anyone. Then early this

year he contacted two political prisoners who had just been flown out of Chile. They said that they had been in a cell near Luis's. They said that he had a tumor on his leg. They said that his health was falling.

In April a new Chilean Ambassador arrived in Washington, Manuel Trucco. I telephoned him and he invited me to see him that afternoon. He said he would call Chile and get this straightened out right away. Ambassador Trucco is a very charming man. He is trying to improve Chile's image in Washington. He put through the call to Chile, dramatically reading Luis's name. The ambassador said not to worry. He would have an answer within a week.

One week went by. Two weeks. Three weeks. Finally, I got through to the Ambassador. He said that a curious thing had happened. He had received two answers. One part of the Government said that Luis was in detention. Another part said that they had no knowledge of any Luis Alberto Gundelman. From this I assumed that Luis was being held by the hated Agency of National Intelligence, in effect a *gestapo*.

Ambassador Trucco said that all the information had been forwarded to Miguel Schweitzer, the new Minister of Justice, and that he would look into the case now. Luis's mother went to see Mr. Schweitzer. He asked her for the names of the two former prisoners who had seen Luis. When she did

not give him the names, he said that he could not help.

By now no one had seen Luis alive for several months. Luis's mother and his relatives began to fear that he had been tortured until he died, or had been executed. Then last month an item appeared in the Chilean newspapers. The bodies of Luis Alberto Gundelman and Jaime Robotnam Bravos had been found in a charred car near Pilar, Argentina, outside Buenos Aires. They bore a sign "Executed by MIR," the underground revolutionary organization in Chile.

Luis's mother flew to Buenos Aires. She went to see the body. She saw that it was not her son. Luis had scars on his left hip from a childhood operation. He had far more fillings in his teeth. And the identification card had his name misspelled.

Luis's mother flew back to Chile. She went to see the Minister of Justice. Even he doubted the evidence. Luis's relatives were filled with horror. They knew what lengths the Government had gone to in staging all this. They knew that the Chileans must have had support outside the country to create such an elaborate ruse. They were afraid for Luis's mother and for her life.

Finally, Luis's mother decided to leave. Not because she was afraid for herself. But because she too now feared that Luis Alberto Gundelman, her son, no longer existed.

Laurence Leamer is a writer.