

Killers of IWW member Frank Teruggi sentenced in Chile



Frank Terrugi. Photo: progressive.org

In February 2015, two former Chilean military intelligence officers were convicted of the murder of IWW member Teruggi and another American, Charles Horman. Teruggi and Horman were kidnapped, tortured and murdered during the military coup in Chile in 1973.

Frank Teruggi, an IWW member from Chicago and a native of Des Plaines, Ill., was kidnapped, tortured and murdered during the military coup in Chile in 1973. On Feb. 4, 2015 two Chilean military intelligence officers were convicted of the murder of Fellow Worker (FW) Teruggi and another American, Charles Horman. Brigadier General Pedro Espinoza was sentenced to seven years in the killings of both men. Rafael González, who worked for Chilean Air Force Intelligence as a “civilian counterintelligence agent,” was sentenced to two years in the Horman murder only. Espinoza is currently serving multiple sentences for other human rights crimes as well. A third indicted man, U.S. Naval Captain Ray Davis, head of the U.S. Military Group at the U.S. Embassy in Santiago at the time of the coup, has since died.

Teruggi, 24, and Horman, 31, had gone to Chile to see and experience the new socialist government of President Salvador Allende. FW Terrugi participated in protest marches in Santiago following the unsuccessful June 1973 military attempt referred to as the “Tanquetazo” or “Tancazo.” FBI documents show that the agency monitored him, labeling him a “subversive” due to his anti-Vietnam war activities, and participation in assisting draft evaders. FBI files also list his street address in Santiago. Chilean soldiers later dragged him out of this house when he was arrested.

Judge Jorge Zepeda’s ruling stated that the murders of Horman and Teruggi were part of “a secret U.S. information gathering operation carried out by the U.S. Military Group in Chile on the political activities of American citizens in the United States and in Chile.” Sergio

Corvalán, a human rights lawyer working for the Horman and Teruggi families on the case, told reporter Pascale Bonnefoy of the *New York Times* that he felt the ruling confirmed what the families had long believed— that Chilean military officers would not have acted against them on their own. They must have had an “OK” from U.S. Officials.

The families of Teruggi and Horman were awarded a cash settlement. Under Chilean law, a mandated appeal process must occur before final action is taken. Janis Teruggi Page, Frank Teruggi’s sister, told Costa Rica’s *The Tico Times*:

“Joyce Horman [Charles Horman’s widow] and I still have an appeals process to get through, which may last six more months. Page said that she and Horman would like the U.S. government to look into these killings more thoroughly. “We are now asking the U.S. Navy, the State Department and the CIA to investigate on the basis of the information (in Judge Zepeda’s ruling) pointing to U.S. officials, especially Captain Ray Davis.”

Documentation published by Peter Kornbluh in his book “The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability” confirms that Frank and his roommate, David Hathaway, were taken from their home at 9 p.m. on Sept. 20, questioned at a nearby Carabineros station and then delivered to the national stadium, which had become a holding tank, torture chamber and execution site for thousands of activists and others simply caught up in the frenzy of coup. Hathaway survived the ordeal. Chilean journalist Pascale Bonnefoy Miralles, who has covered the Teruggi case for a number of years, in her book “Terrorismo de Estadio,” quotes a Belgian named André Van Lancker, also tortured in the stadium. Van Lancker was told by other detainees that they saw Frank Teruggi during an interrogation in the stadium. He was beaten and tortured with electric shocks, then killed by a machine gun. The torturers realized they had gone “too far,” she reports, and were afraid of having problems with the U.S. government, so they kept Frank’s name off the lists of prisoners. His body was later left in a public street, where it was discovered the following day, Sept. 21, just after 9 p.m., and brought to the morgue.

For days, the Teruggi family did not know what had happened to their son. Steve Brown who covered the story extensively for the *Daily Herald Suburban* newspapers in Chicago, remembers interviewing FW Teruggi’s father, Frank Teruggi, Sr., who was trying to get more information and help from the U.S. government:

“He was disturbed. . . that there wasn’t more attention being given to this thing (by the Nixon administration).” This should not have been a surprise, however, as just before the coup against the Allende government, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger declared “I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its people. The issues are much too important for the Chilean voters to be left to decide for themselves.”

This month’s sentencing followed a ruling last June by Judge Zepeda that found that Teruggi and Horman, in separate incidents, had been killed by Chilean military officials based on information provided to them by U.S. intelligence operatives in Chile. Judge Zepeda’s investigation, which began in 2000, asserted that the targeted killings were part of “a secret United States information-gathering operation carried out by the U.S. MILGROUP in Chile on the political activities of American citizens in the United States and in Chile.”

A report published in September 2000 by the U.S. Intelligence Community report affirmed that the CIA “actively supported the military Junta after the overthrow of Allende.” But, in spite of this admission, much of the specifics of the U.S. role remain obscured.

“After 14 years of investigation, the Chilean courts have provided new details on how and why Charles Horman and Frank Teruggi were targeted and executed by Pinochet’s forces,” said Peter Kornbluh. “But legal evidence and the verdict of history remain elusive on the furtive U.S. role in the aftermath of the military coup.”

Kornbluh is a senior analyst at the National Security Archive, an independent non-governmental research institute and library located at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., that has been collecting and analyzing documents about the U.S. role in the Chilean coup since the mid-1980s. In June 2000, they released electronic documents (<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB33/index.html>) relating to the deaths of Teruggi and Horman. These documents and others were part of the evidence reviewed by Judge Zepeda.

In 2011, Zepeda, a Chilean special investigative judge, indicted and attempted to extradite former U.S. Navy Captain Ray Davis. Davis, it was later discovered, had left the United States in 2011 and was living secretly in Chile, where he died at the age of 88 in a nursing home in April 2013—before he could be located by authorities. His death leaves many questions unanswered.

The 1982 film “Missing” portrays Ray Davis (called “Capt. Ray Tower” in the movie) and other U.S. Embassy officials as being much more involved in the coup and its aftermath than the U.S. public was aware. In an attempt to gain more understanding of what had happened to his son, Frank Teruggi, Sr. joined a delegation that traveled to Chile from Feb. 16-23, 1974. The group, called the Chicago Commission of Inquiry into the Status of Human Rights in Chile, stated in its report (excerpted and printed in the New York Review of Books on May 30, 1974): “The Embassy of the United States seems to have made no serious efforts to protect the American citizens present in Chile during and after the military takeover.”

The importance of Judge Zepeda’s ruling, and the fact that it clearly indicts a U.S. official for having a role in these deaths, may help to move the investigations forward, but the full extent of involvement by the U.S. government in these events may never be known. After the sentences were announced in February, Frank Teruggi’s sister, Janis Teruggi Page, told journalist Pascale Bonnefoy in the New York Times, “Frank, a charitable and peace-loving young man, was the victim of a calculated crime by the Chilean military, but the question of U.S. complicity remains yet to be answered.”

Frank Randall Teruggi was buried in a cemetery in Des Plaines, Ill.. According to newspaper reports at the time, more than 100 friends and family members attended, and the late South African exiled activist poet Dennis Brutus wrote this poem for the occasion:

FOR FRANK TERUGGI
(Killed in Chile, Buried in Chicago)

A simple rose
a single candle
a black coffin

a few mourners
weeping;
for the unsung brave
who sing in the dark
who defy the colonels
and who know
a new world stirs.

More about Teruggi, and Horman and the story of their murders can be found at <http://www.progressive.org/news/2014/09/187856/other-911-seeking-truth-about-frank-teruggi> and http://www.hormantruth.org/ht/bio_teruggi.

With excerpts from the Associated Press and internet files.

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