

Argentina

The information below is based on 'Never Again', Report of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), Argentina, issued in 1984¹

C. Torture

2

In nearly all the cases brought to the attention of the Commission, the victims speak of acts of torture. Torture was an important element in the methodology of repression. Secret torture centres were set up, among other reasons, to enable the carrying out of torture to be carried out undisturbed.

The existence and widespread use of different forms of torture is particularly frightening because of the perverse imagination demonstrated, and the character of the people who carried it out, as well as of those who supported its use and employed it as a means to an end. In drawing up this report, we wondered about the best way to deal with the theme so that this chapter did not turn into merely an encyclopedia of horror. We could find no way to avoid this. After all, what else were these tortures but an immense display of the most degrading and indescribable acts of degradation, which the military governments, lacking all legitimacy in power, used to secure power over a whole nation?

We have included the full version of the first of these cases, since it is typical of all of them. From it we can understand both the physical and mental suffering inflicted on the victims. We are quoting it in full to show the extent to which it affected the personality of the person whom the torturers were trying to destroy. In the other cases we mention, we have kept only those parts describing the methods of torture used.

Lastly, we are well aware of, and share, the feeling of dismay which the bald narration we set down here will arouse in torture victims and their families, who were made to suffer so much. We know only too well the anguish that a detailed knowledge of this barbarity causes.

Dr Norberto Liwsky (file No. 7397) is a doctor, married to Hilda Norma Ereñu. They have two small daughters. In 1976, he lived in a community housing estate in La Matanza, Buenos Aires, and worked in the medical dispensary there. Following complaints and action by residents of the housing estate to get legal recognition for their community, there was a raid on the night of 25 March 1976. During this, Cirila Benitez, the wife of the neighbourhood association's president, was arrested. The next day, uniformed forces wrecked several houses and Dr Liwsky's dispensary. They abducted Mario Portela, a housing association representative. He was found dead twelve hours later.

Two years afterwards, when a mass was called to celebrate the freeing of Señora Benitez, several people were kidnapped. On 5 April 1978, at approximately 10 p.m., Dr Liwsky arrived at his flat in Flores, in Buenos Aires city:

[...]

¹ Full text available [here](#)

² Full text available [here](#)

Everything happened very quickly. From the moment they took me out of the car to the beginning of the first electric shock session took less time than I am taking to tell it. For days they applied electric shocks to my gums, nipples, genitals, abdomen and ears. Unintentionally, I managed to annoy them, because, I don't know why, although the shocks made me scream, jerk and shudder, they could not make me pass out.

[...]

In the midst of all this terror, I'm not sure when, they took me off to the 'operating theatre'. There they tied me up and began to torture my testicles. I don't know if they did this by hand or with a machine. I'd never experienced such pain. It was as though they were pulling out all my insides from my throat and brain downwards. As though my throat, brain, stomach and testicles were linked by a nylon thread which they were pulling on, while at the same time crushing everything. My only wish was for them to succeed in pulling all my insides out so that I would be completely empty. Then I passed out.

[...]

It was only several days later that, by moving the blindfold slightly, I could see all they had done to me. Before that it, had been impossible, not because I didn't try to remove the blindfold, but because my eyesight had been so poor. It was then for the first time that I saw the state of my testicles ... I remembered that as a medical student I saw, in the famous Houssay textbook, a photograph of a man who, because of the enormous size of his testicles, wheeled them along in a wheelbarrow! Mine were of similar dimensions, and were coloured a deep black and blue.

Another day they took me out of my cell and, despite my swollen testicles, placed me face-down again. They tied me up and raped me slowly and deliberately by introducing a metal object into my anus. They then passed an electric current through the object. I cannot describe how everything inside me felt as though it were on fire.

3

Sometimes the victims were not only taken to the limits of endurance, but did not even understand what they were being asked - as could happen to anyone who was totally unfamiliar with the jargon used by the torturers. Antonio Horacio Mifio Retarozzo (file No. 3721), was abducted from his workplace in Buenos Aires on 23 August 1976. It was the usual sequence of events. First they took him to Police Station No. 33. Then he tells us:

In the station, things began normally. I was first questioned about my full name, nom de guerre (I didn't know what that was), my rank in the orga (again, I didn't know what they were talking about) and then I was offered a passport, flight ticket and a thousand dollars to leave the country. Not knowing what they were asking me about and refusing to reply, the dialogue came to an end and 'persuasion' began. I was blindfolded and the beatings started.

[...]

At the headquarters I was taken straight to the parilla (grill). That is, I was tied to the metal frame of a bed, electrodes were attached to my hands and feet, and they ran an

³ Full text available [here](#)

electric prod all over me, with particular savagery and intensity on the genitals.

Following continuous ill-treatment and death threats, Miño Retamozo was taken to the 29th Rural Infantry Regiment.

I arrived With a star billing, since in their view I was the one who had planned the attack on the regiment.

They began to work on me early on Monday, and continued morning, noon and night. For the first few days, in between sessions, I was tied naked to a bed, with a guard beside me and without food. At night I would be taken to a corridor and thrown down alongside the other prisoners, who didn't know what to do, wanting to move away from me through fear of being mistaken for me and taken away in my place. At night the 'female voice' would arrive, a well-known officer of the Gendarmeria (Armed border police used in rural areas) who spoke in falsetto. The first thing he would do was to stroke one's testicles in anticipation of the pleasure of his task.

As he was having dinner on 20 January 1976, Santos Aurelio Chaparro was abducted from his house in Ingenio la Florida, Tucumán province. The kidnappers were in three cars. Some were in military uniform, others were dressed in civilian clothes. He recognized the place they took him to as the Tucumán Police Headquarters. He says they kept him in a room with other prisoners, and declares (file No. 5522):

... That on the second day of being illegally held in those conditions, two people took him to a smaller room where they stripped him and tied him to a bed known as the 'grill'. They attached wires to his head and began to torture him with electric current. They applied the electric prod all over his body, with preference for the genital and pectoral areas, and on the head, mouth, gums, etc. He was tortured for about two hours, then they took him away to another room in the same building, where a group of people subjected him to a brutal beating. This continued for several hours, until he lost consciousness. He was then taken to the room where he had first been held. This form of torture was carried out every day for twenty days, (File No. 5522.)

In the testimony of Enrique Rodríguez Larreta (file No. 2539) we find new ways of applying torture. We will include only the essential paragraphs of his statement:

The following night it was my turn to be taken to the top floor, where I was interrogated under torture, as were all the men and women there. I was stripped naked and was hung by the wrists with my arms behind me some 20 or 30 centimetres from the ground.

At the same time they put so me kind of underpants on me, which had several electrical terminals in them. When they were connected, the victim received electric current in several places at once. This device, which they called the 'machine', was switched on during questioning, while they hurled threats and abuse at me, hitting me in the most sensitive parts.

The ground below where the prisoners were suspended was very wet and covered in coarse salt crystals, with the aim of intensifying the torture should the person manage

to rest his feet on the floor.

With the testimony of Carlos Hugo Basso (file No. 7725), Argentine (currently in exile), we return to the now notorious La Perla and La Ribera camps. Basso was abducted on 10 November 1976 in the Alto Alberti district of the town of Córdoba. Following the usual procedure, with blows and a journey on the floor of a car under his captors' feet, they arrived at the secret detention centre.

They opened a door which, from the noise it made, was probably metal. One of those taking me warned me that I was shortly to meet the 'Priest', who would be in charge of 'taking my confession'. This person they called 'Priest' must have been quite big since as soon as I went in he grabbed me by the sides and lifted me in the air ... Afterwards they beat me with sticks and a hammer which they used to smash my fingers whenever my hands were on the floor. They undressed me and tied my hands and feet to a bed-frame they called a 'grill'. For what must have been about an hour they applied electric current to the most sensitive parts of my body: genitals, hips, knees, neck, gums. ... For the neck and gums they used a tiny instrument with several points, directly connected to the mains supply of 220 volts. I could see under my blindfold that every time a discharge was produced, the light of a small bulb over the 'grill' dimmed. During this time I heard one of the torturers being addressed as 'Gringo'. Afterwards somebody applied a stethoscope to my chest and they untied me. I found I couldn't walk, but they dragged me 20 or 30 metres to a mattress in a large room, against a wall, where I remained until the following day.

Néilson Eduardo Dean, Uruguayan, married, abducted at 10 p.m. in the Almagro district of Buenos Aires on 13 July 1976 (file No. 7412), says in the essential parts of his testimony:

Once there, we were put in various rooms. With my wrists handcuffed behind my back, eyes blindfolded, and bleeding profusely, a new wave of blows began. After half an hour I was taken to a room on the top floor. There they stripped off all my clothes, handcuffed my wrists behind my back again and began to throw buckets of water over me. Next they put wires around my waist, thorax and ankles. They tied a rope or chain to the handcuffs and pulled my arms up as high as they could without dislocating them. I was in that position, literally hanging at a distance of about 30 centimetres from the floor, for a Period of time which is not possible to determine in hours, only in terms of pain. Because of the great suffering induced by this form of torture, one loses all track of formal time.

Later the torturers slackened the rope some 20 centimetres, enough to enable me to touch the ground with some difficulty and rest my arms a little - actually, any notion of rest was illusory, since when I tried to touch the floor and succeeded I started to receive electric shocks. It's really very difficult to express in words all the agony these shocks produce. I think it's only possible to offer a tragic caricature of what it was like. Two things might prove useful as examples and give some idea; some actual physical events and some sensations. As to the physical effects, I feel there are two which will show you the extent of the torture:

(a) After torture, the soles of the feet were burnt and layers of hard skin would form, which peeled off later. Obviously the skin was burnt from the electric shocks.

(b) During the application of electricity, one would lose all control over one's senses, such torture provoking permanent vomiting, almost constant defecation, etc.

(c) As for sensations, electricity begins to rise up the body. All the parts with wires attached to them feel as though they are being torn from the body. Thus, at first, it's the feet which feel as though they are being torn off, then the legs, testicles, thorax, etc. These torture sessions went on for a period of five days, increasing in Intensity. During the last few days they repeated all the above methods and, in addition, inserted wires into my anus, testicles and penis. These practices were carried out in a diabolical setting; the torturers, some drinking, others laughing, hitting and insulting, tried to extract from me the names of Uruguayans living in Argentina who opposed the current regime governing my country.

I noticed that officers of the Uruguayan Army participated directly in these interrogation and torture sessions. Some said they belonged to a group called OCOA (Anti-subversive Operation Coordinating Organization).

4

In the testimony of Juan Matias Bianchi (file No. 2 669), resident in Campana, Buenos Aires province, we find a new sadistic variant of sexual perversion:

On 4 March 1977 at 3 a.m., four individuals claiming to be military personnel appeared at the victim's house, with black stockings covering their faces.

At one point he was lifted up, taken along a corridor and ordered to undress. He was thrown on a bunk and told: 'Listen, I'm "The German".' He could hear women and men screaming. 'The German' tried to stick a length of pipe in his anus. He heard another voice telling the German to leave him alone, then this person said to him: 'See, I'm "The Spaniard" and I rescued you from this fellow busting you by sticking the bar up you.'

They stretched him out naked and tied him down with leather thongs. 'The Spaniard' told him to talk applying electric current to his ankle, burning his muscles so badly that he still bears the mark. He was also questioned by a woman. 'The Spaniard' then applied the prod to his armpits, where he also still has scars. 'The Spaniard' was laughing and said to the woman, 'Since you like the privates, you carry on.'

Then he felt the woman grab his penis and pour in a sort of caustic liquid, as a result of which he has had problems with micturition.

⁴ Full text available [here](#)