

THE NATIONAL STADIUM , SANTIAGO

IT'S USE AS A CONCENTRATION CAMP 1973

11th September 1973 : Military coup in Santiago.

12th September 'El Mercurio', right-wing newspaper, reports over 1,000 people killed or injured so far.

16th September Associated Press reports 'Three thousand prisoners are being held in two stadiums in Santiago. According to reliable sources, many prisoners, including foreigners, have been sentenced to death and executed.'

18th September France Presse reports that the body of Victor Jara, famous folk singer, had been identified in the crematorium. He had been arrested immediately after the coup, detained in the National Stadium and tortured in front of other prisoners before being machine-gunned to death.

23rd September Associated Press : General Gustavo Leigh, member of the junta and commander of the air force, announced that about 7,000 prisoners were being kept in the Stadium awaiting interrogation.

8th October France Presse : Colonel Ewing, General Secretary of the junta, admitted that 10,000 people had been imprisoned since the coup.

9th October Ivonne Delien, a Belgian recently returned from Chile, reported information from employees of the Santiago Institute of Forensic Medicine that the Institute had been sent 'ten thousand corpses' by the beginning of October. Almost all of them had been buried in common graves.

16th October UPI : Fifteen court-martials began to try 1,200 prisoners of the concentration camp of the National Stadium.

6th November Reuters : According to the current Minister for the Interior Bonilla, the prisoners in the National Stadium were being moved to other places.

7th November ADN : General Bonilla stated that 736 of the National Stadium prisoners would be moved to the Chacabuco concentration camp in the desert area of Antofagasta province.

11th December DPA-Associated Press : The Swedish Ambassador in Chile, declared persona non grata by the junta, told a press conference in Stockholm that by then 15,000 people had died a violent death, and that 7,000 were under arrest.

27th December France Presse-Latin : It was officially announced that 302 supporters of the former government were being held in the stadium at Concepcion.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

Manuel Perez, Venezuelan film-maker : 'Then I was transferred to the National Stadium where I witnessed a scene that Dante could have conceived. I saw hundreds of victims with faces swollen from beating. Those who fell and could not get up were killed on the spot. At night we would hear automatic fire and then the lorries which carried away the corpses.'

Juan Alarcon, Bolivian student : 'During the night we could not sleep because of the powerful floodlights. At the slightest noise, we immediately heard the sound of guns to threaten us. We were very badly treated, we had food only once a day. Only after three days could I go to the toilet. In the bathroom, together with another comrade, we could see the walls covered with fresh blood and bits of brain. I never thought I would ever see such a thing in my life..'

Adam and Patricia Garret Schesch, US citizens who had been in Chile 3 years :

'We were eyewitnesses to the shooting of four hundred to five hundred prisoners in groups of 30 or 40, at the National Stadium where we were detained.'

Dina Cabrera, Yugoslav citizen : Dina Cabrera was sent from the Defence Ministry to the National Stadium, where she was questioned by a Major Lopez. 'Where are my children ?' repeated Dina. Sometimes the Major answered that they had been in a car accident, sometimes that they were living comfortably, and sometimes that they were in prison, depending on his mood. In the evenings Major Lopez sat down at his desk and, knitting his brow, began to write. He had to make up the lists of prisoners to be shot the next night.

'The National Stadium became a terrible hell, with blood, hunger and tortures being the rule. We, the fourteen women prisoners, were kept in one crowded cell together with 70 men. Whenever a person fell down, he was not given any aid. One day an Argentine doctor who was among the prisoners tried to help a woman who had fainted. After this he disappeared without a trace. Doctors appeared at the stadium only once when the junta allowed journalists to enter it and even staged a TV show. Of the 25,000 prisoners not more than 1,000 people were in the stadium field, that day, while the others were hidden from the eyes of strangers!

The hangmen often amused themselves. One day a gang of criminals armed with knives was brought to the cell where the women were kept..... One night all the searchlights were put out and the shooting started in the stadium. In this connection the papers reported that 'terrorists' had tried to free the prisoners.

'My tortures lasted almost a whole month until I was finally ordered to leave the concentration camp.'

'Missing' - the documentary novel by Thomas Hauser

'Built in 1935, the National Stadium suited the Junta's needs to perfection. Virtually escape-proof by virtue of surrounding fences and impregnable walls, equipped with locker rooms for prisoner interrogation and torture, it soon became the symbol of oppression for a nation. Over half the seven thousand prisoners held there in the weeks following the coup were maltreated. Water was forced up the nose of prisoners. Beatings and the application of electric shocks were common. American citizens were subjected to the same treatment as others.

Joseph Francis Doherty was a young Maryknoll priest, who had arrived in Santiago in July 1973. Five days after the coup, he was seized by Chilean troops at the home of a fellow missionary, brought to the National Stadium, and placed in a cell with seventy other detainees. That night, in a corridor outside the cell, several dozen prisoners were forced to run a gauntlet past soldiers who clubbed them as they ran. As Doherty watched in horror, one inmate fell and was shot in the chest when he failed to rise. He died minutes later. By noon the following day, 153 prisoners, sleeping in shifts of three hours each on the concrete floor, occupied the cell. Next to Doherty was an Argentine who had been seized the day before, His glass eye had been ripped from his face during interrogation and salt poured in the open wound.

For three days, Doherty languished in his cell, shut off from the sun, fed nothing but bread and water. On Wednesday 19th September, his captors removed him to the Stadium's outdoor soccer field for an hour of fresh air, and he was transferred to a smaller cell with eight prisoners. The following morning, at 4am, Doherty was awakened by a series of shots coming from the far end of the Stadium. 'Machine-gun fire lasted ten to fifteen minutes', he recalls, 'after which I heard the sound of pistols. Then the machine-gun fire began again followed by more pistol shots. The pattern continued until 5am.' Later that day, six new prisoners were added to the cell. One of them told of witnessing mass executions in the Stadium that morning.

'Where in the Stadium ?' Doherty asked. The prisoner pointed in the direction of the earlier gunfire. 'How many people were executed ?' 'Four hundred... five hundred... What the hell do numbers mean ? I don't think we'll be allowed to leave here alive after what we've seen.' '