

# Tortured to Death in Uruguay

## 22 Known Cases

After the public scandal of the officially-corroborated death under torture of Luis Carlos Batalla in 1972, no measures are known to have been taken by the authorities of Uruguay to redress the practice of torture in that country. However, steps were taken to prevent other cases from reaching public knowledge. Arrests have been denied, investigations stopped, relatives and doctors threatened and intimidated, requests for autopsies refused, bodies shot or thrown out of windows to simulate armed confrontation or suicide. Despite all this, reliable reports, supported by circumstantial evidence and numerous testimonies, have made it possible to identify 22 victims who, up to November 1975, have lost their lives at the hands of Uruguay's torturers. Their names should become a symbol for the numerous other prisoners, known and unknown, who are today suffering similar violations of their most fundamental human rights.

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**Luis Carlos BATALLA**  
*died 25 May 1972*



*Luis Carlos Batalla taken after his death*

arrested on 20 May 1972 and died five days later in a military barrack (*Batallón de Infantería* Number 10, city of Treinta y Tres). The official death certificate read "acute anaemia caused by liver rupture".

The arrest was not acknowledged officially until the case was brought up in parliament. Summoned by the chamber of deputies, the minister of defence admitted on 22 June 1972 that the autopsy proved that Batalla's death had occurred under abnormal circumstances. A member of parliament who witnessed the autopsy, Deputy Sosa Díaz, testified that he saw huge bruises, cutting wounds and other signs of torture all over the body. The case and parliamentary inquiry received great publicity and the minister of defence declared that the executive and the armed forces deplored the event and would sanction the perpetrators and take measures to prevent similar occurrences in the future. However, no such sanctions are known to have been imposed against those responsible for Batalla's death. Furthermore, this was only the first publicly known case of a long list of deaths under similar circumstances which occurred in the years that followed. In no other case, however, was the cause of death officially and publicly acknowledged.



*Tortured body of Luis Carlos Batalla*

**Edison MARIN**  
*died 3 June 1972*

An agricultural worker and member of the MLN, he was among 106 prisoners who escaped from prison on 6 September 1971. He was recaptured and tortured

1 This was the first and last death under torture to be admitted officially. Batalla, a 32-year-old building worker and father of two, was a Christian Democrat and an active member of the Broad Front (a coalition of center, independent and left-wing parties). He was not known to have been engaged in any illegal activities. It is believed that he was interrogated in an attempt to extract names of persons whom he thought might be linked with the *Tupamaro* guerrilla movement (National Liberation Movement—MLN). No charges were brought against him, either before or after his death. He was

at a military barrack (*Regimiento de Caballería* Number 4, Montevideo). After severe torture—it is reported that he was staked to the ground and his body was torn by dogs—he died at the military hospital, where he had been held incommunicado.

**Hector Lorenzo JURADO AVELLANEDA**  
*died 15 July 1972*

A Methodist priest, he died at the military hospital a few days after his arrest. The official communiqué said he had committed suicide with a knife at the moment of capture. Although the results of the autopsy were not made public, it was reported that it revealed numerous signs of ill-treatment in addition to a bullet injury and a cutting wound.

**Carlos ALVARIZA**  
*died 23 July 1972*

A medical doctor and the father of three children, he was 38 years old. He was a member of the MLN and was arrested on 5 June 1972. He died under torture at the *Batallón de Infantería* Number 14 (at the military school). The official communiqué claimed he had tried to escape and had fallen from a height of four meters. It did not mention the date of the incident nor the result of the autopsy. Testimonies indicated that he was subjected to severe torture, including bouncing the body, which was hung from the feet, against a wall. It was reported that he was thrown from the roof on 23 July—the final day of a truce, allegedly proposed by the military to the *Tupamaro* guerrillas, which lasted from 30 June to 23 July.

**Roberto GOMENSORO**  
*died 12 March 1973*

A student of agronomy and 23 years old, he was a member of the Federation of Uruguayan University Students and of the Broad Front. He was arrested on 11 March 1973 by a military patrol and the next day it was claimed that he had escaped. After insistent inquiries to military officials his wife obtained, in April 1974, a death certificate dated shortly after the arrest. The body was never traced.

**Oscar Felipe FERNANDEZ MENDIETA**  
*died 25 May 1973*

An agricultural worker and member of the Communist Revolutionary Party, he died in custody at a military barrack in Durazno (*Regimiento* Number 2 *de Caballería*). The military doctors certified that he had died of a heart attack, but could not explain the numerous marks and bruises all over his body.

**Gerardo ALTER**  
*died 22 August 1973*

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An Argentinian, this 27-year-old member of the Argentinian Marxist guerrilla movement, the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), was arrested by the Uruguayan military together with Walter Hugo Arteche (see below). They were taken to a military barrack (*Batallón de Infantería* Number 1, Florida), where both died on 22 August 1973. It was announced officially that they had died in an armed confrontation. However, the official death certificate said "acute lung oedema", a contradiction which suggests they died as a result of torture. There was no indication that a gun battle ever took place. The bodies, wrapped in burlap, were buried by the military in the Cemetery of the North.

**Walter Hugo ARTECHE**  
*died 22 August 1973*

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A militant of the MLN and 27 years old, he was arrested by the military together with Gerardo Alter. Both died and were buried in the same way (see above).

**Hugo Leonardo DE LOS SANTOS MENDOZA**  
*died September 1973*

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A young student of agronomy at the University of Montevideo, he was arrested and interrogated for suspected connections with the MLN. He was not accused of any crime. He was taken to a military unit (*Regimiento de Caballería* Number 6) where he died under torture. This is one of the few cases which became public knowledge and was taken to the courts. The body was returned to the family with a certificate citing lung oedema as the cause of death. A relative, who was a professor of medicine, and other witnesses saw the marks of beatings on his body. An autopsy was performed by faculty members of the medical school in the presence of legal authorities and was corroborated by the Medical Institute of the Judiciary (*Instituto Técnico Forense del Poder Judicial*). It proved beyond doubt that he had not died of lung oedema. Furthermore, the body was covered with signs of severe beatings and mutilation as well as marks apparently caused by electric shocks and evidence of extremely strong blows about the head. The real cause of death was fractures. The case was taken to the highest civilian judicial authorities but, on 29 August 1974, the government ordered a halt to the investigation by declaring it a "military secret", on the grounds that the investigation might "endanger the security of the state".

**Gilberto GOWLAND (or COGHLAN)**  
*died 19 December 1973*

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Worker and leftwing militant, he was allegedly tortured in five or six different military units. Near to death, he was taken to the military hospital, where he died after a few hours.

**Aldo PERRINI GUALO**  
*died 5 March 1974*

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The father of two children, this 34-year-old grocer in the town of Carmelo was arrested on 26 February 1974 for interrogation concerning suspected connections with the MLN. He died on 5 March 1974 at a military unit in the town of Colonia (*División de Infantería* Number 4), apparently while being subjected to the "submarine", a method of torture where the victim's head is plunged in water or excrement until near drowning. No intervention by the civil judge or autopsy were allowed. Neighbours testified that he was a peaceful citizen without known political activities.

**Laura RAGGIO**  
**Silvia REYES**

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*both died 21 April 1974*

Students and MLN militants, they were 20 and 19 years old respectively. They were arrested during a house search in Montevideo. In the same operation another girl, Diana Maidanik, received 35 shots when she opened the door of the house. Although the authorities claimed the three girls had died in cross-fire, neighbours saw Miss Raggio, Miss Reyes and two men being carried away by the security men. The next day the bodies of the two girls were delivered to the families. Besides bullet injuries, the bodies showed signs of beatings and there were areas of the skull where large strands of hair had been pulled out.

**Alberto BLANCO**  
*died 12 May 1974*

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He was one of the young men captured together with Laura Raggio and Silvia Reyes (see above) on 21 April 1974. On 12 May 1974, relatives were informed that he had died during an armed confrontation with the military. When the relatives collected the body in Montevideo, they were reportedly made to sign a promise not to open his coffin, to bury him within four hours, and not to ask any questions. The funeral personnel who prepared the body for burial said that it had no legs.

**Nibya SABALSAGARAY**  
*died 29 June 1974*

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A member of the Young Communists Union (UJC), this 24-year-old teacher was arrested in Montevideo on 29 June 1974. She was taken to a military unit (*Regimiento* Number 5 *de Ingenieros, Sector Transmisiones*), where she died reportedly after being subjected to the "dry submarine", a method of suffocation with a plastic bag over the head. Only ten hours after her arrest, her relatives were informed that she had "committed suicide". Despite witnesses' reports that her body showed signs of torture, requests for an independent medical examination were refused. Strong protests from the national teachers federation and other organizations yielded no results.



**Anselmo GARCIA** 16  
*died 12 August 1974*

A bankworker (at *Banco de Seguros*, Montevideo) and a trade union leader, he was arrested and tortured twice. When released in August 1974, he travelled to Buenos Aires, but died shortly afterwards apparently as a consequence of the severe torture he had received.

**Horacio MUJICA** 17  
*died November 1974*

A young militant of the MLN, he died in a private clinic (*Sanatorio* Number 2 *del Sindicato Médico*) in November 1974. Reportedly, he died as a consequence of his delicate state of health which resulted from the severe torture he received during detention earlier the same year. It was reported that he was released because he was dying and the authorities wished to avoid responsibility for his death.

**Ivan MORALES** 18  
*died 22 November 1974*

Married with three children, he was 26 years old. He was arrested by plainclothed personnel on 20 November 1974. Two days later, the body was delivered to a mortuary agency with the family's address and a notice that he had committed suicide. During the funeral services, witnesses could see that he was disfigured by beatings and that he had a coarsely sutured cutting wound in the neck.

**Amelia LAVAGNA DE TIZZE** 19  
*died 29 April 1975*

Her husband, Mr José Pedro Tizze, was arrested by the security forces on 27 April 1975 at their home in the city of Manantiales. The next day, the military broke into the house and took 58-year-old Mrs Tizze. A few hours later, their daughter, Mrs Amanda Tizze de Rezzano, was requested to collect the body of her mother at a military unit in Laguna del Sauce (*Batallón de Ingenieros* Number 4). Official information was that Mrs Tizze had poisoned herself during the house search. Relatives were forbidden to open the coffin and the burial took place immediately. A few days later, the daughter and her husband, Mr Hector Rezzano—parents of two small children—were also arrested. Later, Mr Rezzano appeared in court and showed marks of torture. Meanwhile, the widowed Mr Tizze is reported to have attempted suicide. The three are still detained in military barracks.

**Alvaro BALBI** 20  
*died 30 July 1975*

A student of medicine, he was married with four children and another about to be born. He was 32 years old and a business employee, an amateur musician and a

member of the Communist Party. Arrested with other workers during a meeting on 29 July 1975, he was reportedly taken to the offices of the police intelligence services in Maldonado Street (*Dirección de Información e Inteligencia* Number 6 *de la Policía, Celle Maldonado*), in Montevideo, a known torture center. His wife tried unsuccessfully to establish his whereabouts. Two days later, 31 July, the body was delivered with the official explanation that he had suffered an asthma attack. However, the signs of torture were evident—fractures, liver rupture, burns and multiple bruises.



*Alvaro Balbi with his four children*

There are indications that he died under the "submarine" torture. When his wife went to the police intelligence center on 30 July, officials denied knowledge of the arrest. However, the estimated time of death indicates that Mr Balbi was not only there at that time but that he had already died.

Mr Balbi was the son of Selmar Balbi, a well-known teacher, union leader and former member of the central committee of the Communist Party. Although nothing was published in the local media about the case, a moving letter from Mr Selmar Balbi, appealing to President Bordaberry to redress these practices, was widely circulated. Mr Selmar Balbi has also filed a complaint at a civil court. However, the case was transferred to military jurisdiction, which suggests an attempt to silence the case. The military judge (*Juez Militar de Instrucción de 1º Turno*) is also in charge of the proceedings against the group of workers arrested together with Alvaro Balbi; they are possible witnesses to his death.

**Carlos CURUCHAGA** 21  
*died 26 September 1975*

A medical doctor in the town of Mercedes, he was 63 years old and a member of the Broad Front. He was arrested on 10 July 1975 and interrogated by the police intelligence service, despite the fact that he suffered from hemiplegia (paralysis of half of the body). The severe torture he allegedly suffered at the hands of the Montevideo political police aggravated his health condition seriously. He was interned in a public hospital under military guard where he died on 26 September 1975.

**Pedro Ricardo LERENA MARTINEZ** 22  
*died 29 September 1975*

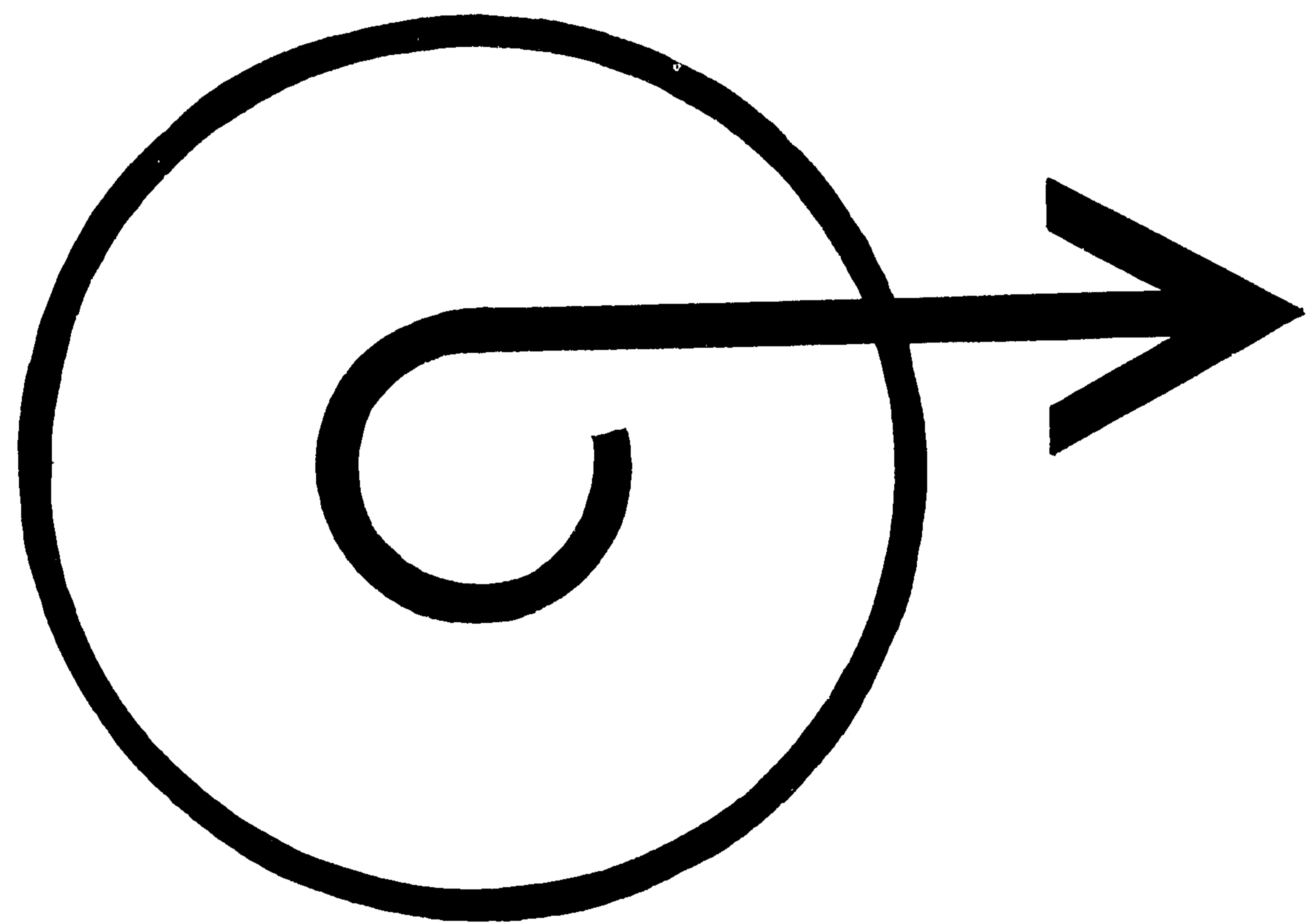
A former public employee, he was 33 years old and married with two children. He was reported to be one of the founder members of the MLN and carried out public political activities until 1972. He was arrested on 25 May 1975 when the



*Pedro Ricardo Lerena Martinez*

armed forces performed a spectacular operation, which resulted in 22 arrested, three injured and three killed, and was kept incommunicado.

On 29 September 1975, his body was delivered to the family with a notice that he had strangled himself. In spite of the prohibition to open the coffin, relatives examined the body and found marks of severe burns all over the body, apparently caused by a soldering pipe, the two hands fractured and the head bandaged. He had lost about 20 to 30 kilograms in weight. No signs of strangulation were found (characteristic signs are cyanosis and a protruding tongue). It is not yet clear whether he died at *Batallón de Caballería* number 4 or *Batallón de Caballería* Number 9.



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