

December 11, 2006

## Augusto Pinochet, Dictator Who Ruled by Terror in Chile, Dies at 91

By JONATHAN KANDELL

Correction Appended

Gen. Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, the brutal dictator who repressed and reshaped Chile for nearly two decades and became a notorious symbol of human rights abuse and corruption, died yesterday at the Military Hospital of Santiago. He was 91.

Dr. Juan Ignacio Vergara, head of the medical team that had been treating him, said he died at 2:15 p.m., a week after being hospitalized and undergoing angioplasty and another operation after an acute heart attack. Dr. Vergara said his condition degenerated sharply yesterday morning, and he was moved to the intensive care unit, where he died.

General Pinochet seized power on Sept. 11, 1973, in a bloody military coup that toppled the Marxist government of President Salvador Allende. He then led the country into an era of robust economic growth. But during his rule, more than 3,200 people were executed or disappeared, and scores of thousands more were detained and tortured or exiled.

General Pinochet gave up the presidency in 1990 after promulgating a Constitution that empowered a right-wing minority for years. He held on to his post of commander in chief of the army until 1998. With that power base, he exerted considerable influence over the democratically elected governments that replaced his iron-fisted rule.

He set limits, for example, on economic policy debates with frequent warnings that he would not tolerate a return to statist measures, and he blocked virtually all attempts to prosecute members of his security forces for human rights abuses. Through intimidation and legal obstacles, General Pinochet sought to ensure his own immunity from accountability and in fact was never brought to trial. But in an astonishing turn of events nearly a decade after he stepped down, he was detained in Britain and then, on his return to Chile, forced to spend his retirement years fighting a battery of legal charges relating to human rights violations and personal corruption.

During those last years he lived in near seclusion, mostly at his home in Bucalemu, about 80 miles southwest of Santiago, scorned even by many of his former military colleagues and conservative civilian ideologues. Many were disillusioned by revelations that he held, at the least, \$28 million in secret bank accounts abroad.

"The humiliation Pinochet has gone through is probably a better outcome than any trial could have achieved," said José Zalaquett, Chile's foremost human rights lawyer.

He won grudging international praise for some of the free-market policies he instituted, transforming a bankrupt economy into the most prosperous in Latin America. They included removing trade barriers, encouraging export growth, privatizing state-owned industries, creating a central bank able to control interest and exchange rates without government interference, cutting wages sharply, and privatizing the social security system. Many elements of the so-called Chilean model were widely emulated in the region.

He appointed military officers as mayors of towns and cities throughout Chile. Retired military personnel were named rectors of universities, and they carried out vast purges of faculty members suspected of left-wing or liberal sympathies.

The press was censored, and labor strikes and unions were banned. A fearsome security apparatus known as the National Intelligence Directorate, or DINA, persecuted, tortured and killed Pinochet opponents within Chile and sometimes beyond its borders. A government-commissioned report issued in 2004 concluded that almost 28,000 people had been tortured during the general's rule.

Military governments were the rule rather than the exception in Latin America in the 1970s. Whether right wing, as in Argentina and Brazil, or left wing, as in Peru, military dictators came to power promising to impose economic discipline but departed, after some initial success, with the economy in disarray.

General Pinochet proved to be the exception. Though no economic expert, he had at his service a team of technocrats who, months before the coup, put together a radical plan to overhaul the country's battered economy. Some had studied with the Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago and embraced his notions of free-market forces and monetarism.

But economic transformation was slow and painful. Mistakes by the general's economic team provoked a deep recession in the early 1980s that left more than a third of the work force without jobs. The poor survived with the help of soup lines and temporary employment in public works projects that paid less than the minimum wage.

Attempts at strikes or other forms of protest were ruthlessly put down by General Pinochet's secret police.

That repression gave the free-market policies time to take hold. Since the mid-1980s, Chile's gross domestic product has grown an average of more than 6 percent a year, the most impressive performance in Latin America.

#### A Steady Rise in the Army

There were few hints in General Pinochet's early life that he harbored either political ambitions or ideological convictions. The son of a customs inspector, he was born into lower middle-class circumstances on Nov. 25, 1915, in the Pacific port city of Valparaíso. He graduated from the military academy in Santiago in 1937 and rose steadily in the officer corps. He was already a general, and only 55, when he was given the important post of commander of the Santiago army garrison in 1971.

It was a crucial moment in President Allende's term. Elected the year before with only 36 percent of the vote, Mr. Allende, a physician, had pressed ahead with a Socialist program to nationalize mines, banks and strategic industries, split up large rural estates into communal farms, and impose price controls. The measures soon resulted in steep declines in production, shortages of consumer goods and explosive inflation. A general strike paralyzed Santiago in late 1972, and General Pinochet, as garrison commander, was called on by Mr. Allende to impose a state of emergency in the capital.

This was the first time most Chileans became aware of the tall, broad-shouldered army officer with a brusque mustache on his unsmiling face. General Pinochet imposed a curfew, ordered the arrest of several hundred demonstrators on both the left and the right and announced, "I will not tolerate agents of chaos no matter what their political ideology."

His seemingly neutral stance convinced Mr. Allende that he was an officer who could be relied on to observe the Chilean military's century-long tradition of loyalty to civilian government. In August 1973, he appointed General Pinochet commander in chief of the army.

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Less than three weeks later, the armed forces overthrew the government. The presidential palace, known as La Moneda, was bombed and strafed by the air force. Mr. Allende shot himself rather than surrender, according to his personal doctor.

Aside from battles at some factories in the Santiago suburbs, there was little resistance to the overwhelming firepower of the military units that fanned out across the country. Tens of thousands of Allende sympathizers were rounded up and brutally interrogated. A majority of the killings took place in the first three months, long after resistance had ended.

In most cases, prisoners from a slum or agrarian community would be executed as a means of terrorizing their neighbors into accepting military rule. The killings were often cynically, and falsely, justified as cases in which prisoners were shot while trying to escape.

The images that most shaped the outside world's low opinion of the military administration were scenes of Santiago's main sports stadium filled with prisoners, and by the public appearances of General Pinochet, eyes hidden behind dark glasses, face set in a scowl, arms folded defiantly across his chest. Although a majority of executions, jailings and cases of torture took place shortly after the 1973 coup, serious human rights abuses waxed and waned over the next 17 years.

By the late 1980s, the economic prosperity General Pinochet created had lulled him into assuming that in free elections he or his chosen candidate would receive the grateful support of a majority of Chileans. But by then most were either too young to remember the Allende years or too confident about the strength of the economy to believe that only an authoritarian government could ensure growth and stability.

#### Free Elections Ended Rule

In 1980, a new Constitution backed by the Pinochet government made the armed forces "guarantors of institutional stability," giving them a nebulous role as political arbiters. It included several other limitations to unfledged democracy. But in a 1988 plebiscite, an ample majority of Chileans voted against an attempt by General Pinochet to stay on as president for eight more years.

In presidential elections a year later, the former dictator's candidate was handily defeated by Patricio Aylwin, a centrist Christian Democrat supported by parties of the left. In 1993, another Christian Democrat, Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, was elected president by an even greater margin.

To the delight of the Chilean business community, foreign investment, which had been stunted during the years the government was regarded with international opprobrium, poured back into the country, and Chilean products were welcomed everywhere abroad. Officials of the new Christian Democratic administration were not inclined to tinker with the roaring economic machine they inherited from the Pinochet administration.

"We may not like the government that came before us," Alejandro Foxley, who was finance minister under Mr. Aylwin and is foreign minister today, said in a 1991 interview. "But they did many things right. We have inherited an economy that is an asset."

With the transition to democracy going so well, even General Pinochet's admirers hoped he would settle into a quieter period. Instead, he staged unannounced military maneuvers or placed his troops on sudden alert and gave notice that he would not tolerate attempts to prosecute his era's human rights violators. "The day they touch one of my men, the rule of law ends," he warned in 1991.

In a rare exception, he stood by as two subordinates were convicted of ordering the murder of Orlando Letelier, foreign minister in the Allende government. Mr. Letelier was killed by a car bomb in Washington in September 1976, along with an American colleague, Ronni Moffitt. The incident, considered the worst act of

Those violations were well documented by the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, a nonpartisan group appointed by Mr. Aylwin to investigate the killings and disappearances carried out under the general's 17-year dictatorship. The commission's report cited victims by name and described the ghastly circumstances of their deaths by firing squads, beatings, mutilations, drownings and electrocutions. In all, the report attributed at least 3,200 killings and disappearances to the Pinochet security forces.

General Pinochet scoffed at his human rights critics. Asked about the discovery of a mass grave of his government's victims, he was quoted in the Chilean press as joking that it was an "efficient" way of burial.

#### Legal Battles to the End

Protected by personal security squads, the general also continued an active social life. He was feted by wealthy admirers on his birthday and on the anniversary of his coup. He was often invited to speak at luncheons given by political supporters and leading businessmen. When he finally stepped down as army chief, he joined the Senate as an unelected, permanent member, apparently intending to grant himself further immunity from prosecution.

But the general did not count on the determination of jurists abroad to bring him to justice. In October 1998, while recuperating in a London clinic from a back operation, he was arrested by the British police in response to an application from a Spanish judge seeking the general's extradition to Madrid to stand trial on charges of genocide, torture and kidnapping.

A 16-month legal battle ensued, ending with a decision to send him back to Chile in March 2000 because his physical and mental ailments made him unfit to stand trial. Days after his return, Ricardo Lagos, the first Socialist to be elected president since the 1973 overthrow of Mr. Allende, assumed office.

For the rest of his life, the general had to fight off lawsuits and accept the humiliation of constant news reports about widespread brutality under his rule. President Lagos allowed the hundreds of criminal complaints filed against General Pinochet to run their course in the courts. He was succeeded in March 2006 by another Socialist, Michelle Bachelet, a former political prisoner and exile. Her father, an air force general loyal to Mr. Allende, was jailed by his colleagues, tortured and died in prison.

General Pinochet spent his final years in near seclusion, with his wife, the former Maria Lucia Hiriart Rodríguez, 84, with whom he had two sons, Augusto and Marco Antonio, and three daughters, Lucia, Verónica and Jacqueline. They all survive him.

In rare public remarks, he continued to insist that he enjoyed the gratitude and wide support of Chileans. But polls indicated that well over half of his compatriots believed that he should have been prosecuted for his human rights crimes.

*Larry Rohrer and Pascale Bonnefoy contributed reporting from Santiago, Chile.*

Correction: December 13, 2006

A front-page obituary on Monday about Gen. Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, the Chilean dictator, omitted credits. The correspondents Larry Rohrer and Pascale Bonnefoy both contributed from Santiago, Chile.