Chapter Thirteen
Whiskey and Pills

HE DRANK two glasses of whiskey, brim-full, when he came back from the first flight. He drank each down in one long gulp and slept until the next day. This medicine brought him more consolation than the naval chaplain's words. But it didn't numb him enough. Later he gave up alcohol for psychopharmacological drugs. Whether with whiskey or sleeping pills, the hardest thing was getting through the night. As soon as he fell asleep, he relived the flight. While he was throwing the naked bodies out the hatch, he missed his step and fell. That day in 1977 a member of the crew had managed to hold him back. But as soon as he fell asleep, he was devoured by empty space. Before he reached the ocean's waters, he would wake up.

Nevertheless, it took many years before Scilingo began to question the order that sent him on that flight. His initial criticisms were of other matters that seemed more serious to him at the time.

Everything that was seized during the house searches was stored in a warehouse at the school. Careful records were kept. According to regulations, an object could be taken out only for a task force's operational requirements or in order to help the widow of a dead colleague. One day Scilingo went to the storeroom to get a drill he needed for the auto shop and discovered it wasn't there.

"But there used to be two or three of them," he complained, to no avail.

He began to observe that the control of those goods had become much laxer. He brought the subject up with his superiors, and they told him it was not his concern. He was also critical of the excessive amounts of money being spent on automotive services. Vehicles were not being taken care of, and luxury features were requested that were unheard-of for cars used in covert operations. He even received complaints because the auto shop delivered a car that was missing a strip of metal trim on one side and another with a flaw in its upholstery. Intelligence vehicles had top priority, though they were not always used for intelligence tasks. All requests and complaints were conveyed to him by the officer in charge of the parking lot, Lieutenant Vaca, his companion during the first flight, with whom Scilingo was developing a reciprocal antipathy.

According to Scilingo, the prisoners were stripped naked before they were thrown out of the plane, but the first corpses that appeared in Uruguay were clothed. "That was really fucked up, the worst atrocity. The guy who did that flight went crazy. He couldn't take it and asked to be discharged," Scilingo says, by way of an explanation. He doesn't want to elaborate.

"Before I talk about that I have to check on something."

"*What?*"

"A name."

"*When you went into the torture chamber and saw Lieutenant Vaca's woman lawyer . . .*"

"I'm not going to tell you anything more until I've checked on that name."

"*Did they throw her out clothed? And not only clothed, did they throw them out while they were conscious?*"

"Once I'm sure of that name we'll talk about this again."

Scilingo was starting to become a troublesome figure. He was transferred from the Navy School of Mechanics in 1978, to the frigate *Liberty*, where he was in charge of propulsion and electricity. Then he was put in charge of engines on the destroyer *Storni*, was made second in command of the *Sobral*, a dispatch boat, and was subsequently put in command of a torpedo launcher in Tierra del Fuego, at the utmost end of the earth. He rose to the rank of lieutenant commander without any problem. He carried out his duties like anyone else, without calling attention to himself, and he was never reprimanded. But inside him, nothing would ever be the same as before the flight.

At the Puerto Belgrano naval base, he crossed paths with the former chief of intelligence of ESMA again. Commander Jorge Acosta drove through the officers' district in a Mercedes Benz, and his house was being renovated by a team of decorators. What had become of Admiral Mayorga's gold watch?

From Tierra del Fuego, Scilingo was transferred to a desk job as an aide to the director of the Military House of the Presidency. He arrived at the Pink House two days before Videla retired, and remained there under the military dictators Viola, Galtieri, and Bignone and for the first five months of President Alfonsín's administration. Those were the years when the economic euphoria known euphemistically as the "easy money" came to an end, the years of the Malvinas war, the collapse of the dictatorship, and the revelations about unidentified corpses in the press—which was suddenly observing things as if it had just arrived in a foreign country—the years of the "Final Document of the Military Junta . . . ," the military's autoamnesty and its repeal, the investigations of the Commission on the Disappeared, the

trial of the former military leaders, and the first charges against Astiz. The disappeared and those who had made them disappear occupied center stage in the country's political arena. Scilingo's ghosts had now become corporeal.

But he also had other worries, which he brought up with his boss. His experience as an electrician had been acquired on technological systems that were now outmoded, and his operative background was also too out of date to allow him to play a role within a modern unit. The fact that his technical and operative skills were not current could jeopardize his future. He wanted to be transferred to a post that would train him in the new systems or to a unit in the Antarctic. Five months later, with high hopes, he received an order transferring him to the Argentine navy's only aircraft carrier.

Born in Bahía Blanca, home of the country's largest naval base, Scilingo was one of three children. His father was a small-time builder, and his mother was a schoolteacher. For him, a career in the navy had been the obvious ambition from the start. Now his lengthy posting behind a desk at the Military House of the Presidency was not going to ruin that career, which still seemed to him to be the best and only one possible.

Scilingo was supposed to take the entrance examination for the Navy School of War in order to take the staff course, and he did not feel up to it. Three weeks before the exam, he notified the chief of the naval arsenal that his schedule and duties at the Military House of the Presidency had not allowed him to prepare for it, and he requested a year's deferment in order "to have the same chance as the rest of the officers taking the exam."

The arsenal chief rejected the request. There was very little time to look into the case before the exam, and the request was unprecedented. Moreover, passage through the School of War had ceased to be a requirement for occupying command posts or being promoted. Scilingo was urged to redouble his preparations in the two weeks remaining before the exam. A

copy of his request and of the response to it were sent to the School of War.

Scilingo took the exam. Later he met with the school's staff. They asked him why he had requested a deferment since he was well prepared (which was how he learned he had done well on the exam). He decided to speak frankly.

"The real story is this: when I'm under stress I get blocked because of an incident that happened when I was at ESMA during the war against subversion," he said.

He told them about his nightmare. After an interminable silence, a superior officer advised him, "You should see someone about that."

"I don't know if I need to see anyone," he answered, surprised.

"We suggest you see someone," the officer repeated.

On his return to Puerto Belgrano, he found his commanding officer in a bad mood. "I think you talked too much at the School of War."

"Why do you say that?"

"You brought something up that's going to cause you some problems," his boss answered, handing him an order to undergo psychiatric evaluation.

At the Naval Hospital he was given a series of tests. The result: he was not ill nor was he suffering from psychiatric problems that would render him unfit for duty. Nevertheless, in a confidential memo barely eighty words long, he was told he had not qualified for entrance to the Navy School of War. With a profusion of capital letters typical of naval prose, the memo said that he was "permanently not recommended for directive functions," and was "recommended to remain on active duty." This meant that his career would end with no further promotions because he had been "definitively excluded from the front ranks of lieutenant commanders who will be considered by the Qualifications Board." Right about then, the public hearings in the trial of the former military leaders had

concluded, and the judges were evaluating the evidence and drafting their ruling.

In the navy, the decisions of superiors are not questioned. Scilingo could ask only that the decision be reconsidered. He explained that in his various posts he had received high ratings. He wrote that no one had ever objected to his ethical or professional qualities, his personality, his leadership capacity, his performance in general, and his psychological and physical aptitude for duty. He had always been recommended for command functions, his record was clean, and he had never even received a verbal reprimand. He also tried to put his dialogue with the staff of the Navy School of War in perspective: his nerves had been jangled by fatigue, overwork in his position as aide to the director of the Military House of the Presidency, the loss of his annual vacation, and the situation the country and the navy were in following the rise to power of elected officials who were putting the former military leaders on trial.

He said that during that interview he had referred to an "atypical" and "strictly personal" problem. It had been overcome and had never affected his professional conduct. The file he submitted included the test results declaring him psychiatrically exonerated and the favorable reviews of his direct superiors "with respect to my aptitude for command or directive functions."

But not even in this bureaucratic memo, written to beg that his career not be cut short, was he able to omit the facts that had frightened his superiors. "This situation originated in an event that occurred during a flight made in a Skyvan plane belonging to the Argentine coast guard in the year 1977, in which, while carrying out activities related to the war against subversion and while the plane's hatch was open, I lost my balance and was about to fall out into empty space, an event that was prevented by the rapid intervention of a member of the crew," he wrote.

He had passed through a bad time, but now he was back on his feet and he wouldn't let his tongue wag again in front of anyone, friend or stranger, was the implicit message. Three weeks later he had his response, which was even shorter than the initial notification. Now he was "temporarily not recommended for directive functions." In other words, he would not be promoted this year, but he could be considered for promotion the following year. No doubt remained as to what the problem was that had made him seem untrustworthy in the eyes of his superiors.

A few days later, the Federal Chamber condemned Videla and Massera to life imprisonment without possibility of parole and discharged them from the armed forces, as the agents of multiple homicides aggravated by the defenselessness of the victims, illegal detentions exacerbated by threats and violence, torture, and torture followed by death and robbery.

The ruling described the "criminal plan" adopted by the former military leaders which consisted of "apprehending suspects, keeping them secretly in captivity under inhuman conditions, subjecting them to torture in the name of obtaining information, and finally turning them over to the courts or the National Executive Power, or else eliminating them physically."

In their defense, the military leaders admitted, in the same terms as in the "Final Document," the possibility that excesses may have been committed, which were justified by the existence of an unconventional war. The Federal Chamber's response to this was that "the seriousness of the guerrilla problem and the difficulty of combatting it cannot be admissible reasons for committing acts that demonstrated absolute contempt for human dignity." According to the judges, "killing an enemy on the battlefield and in the heat of battle bears no resemblance whatsoever to applying cruel torture to helpless people within the calm security of four walls." The court maintained that not even blind obedience could excuse those who obeyed the orders to commit atrocities, whatever their rank. "Respect for the person of the captured enemy constitutes an essential rule, which cannot be absent from the mind of any member of the military

and which has been consecrated by international norms and domestic law."

The court was punishing the kidnappings, the tortures and the secret killings. Meanwhile, the navy was reprehending those who mentioned those acts, even among colleagues. Massera was supposed to spend the rest of his life in jail; meanwhile, Scilingo could go on with his career because, once more, he had recovered his balance just before falling.

But Scilingo had another surprise in store for his superiors: he voluntarily requested retirement. He couldn't stand the silence any longer.

Chapter Fourteen
A Subject of No Importance

HIS SUPERIOR on the aircraft carrier was Captain Jorge Osvaldo Ferrer, who listened to him without expression or comment. After Scilingo's request for reconsideration was accepted, Ferrer was the first to learn that Scilingo was thinking of asking for retirement. Ferrer said only that he would try to facilitate the process.

When Videla demanded that his actions during the dirty war be vindicated, Scilingo wrote his first letter. By then, Ferrer was an admiral and the chief of staff of the navy. He did not even acknowledge receipt of the two letters Scilingo sent him.

Ferrer and the assistant chief were out of the country when Scilingo sent his first letter. The director of personnel at that time, Fausto López, was third in command. The day the letter was received, a close friend of Scilingo's was about to assume a command post in Puerto Belgrano. He was forced to postpone the celebration of his new command and go to Buenos Aires to

find out what Scilingo was trying to accomplish with his letters. The friend had trouble carrying out the mission.

"I've been ordered to ask you if you want money," he confessed in embarrassment.

"Don't get involved in this," Scilingo answered.

Fausto López then summoned Scilingo to a meeting and warned him that it was inappropriate for him to mention such matters.

"What are you trying to achieve?" López asked.

"The only thing I want is an answer."

"What you are doing is dangerous. Think of your family. You could lose your naval benefits."

"To me, it was unacceptable for the navy to think I had made a mistake or had some problem with the flights, that I couldn't acknowledge to my superiors that at a given moment the subject was disturbing to me. If I hadn't told the truth to my superiors—not my enemies, my superiors, staff officers—it's likely I would still be on active duty and my name would be sent to the Confirmation Committee," Scilingo reflected. As soon as possible, he dropped the naval benefits and took out private medical insurance.

When he learned that he could not hope for answers from his former superiors and comrades, he began to seek them outside the navy, but without much more success. Just as he had told Ferrer and Menem he would, he went to the prosecutors' office of the Federal Chamber. "I don't know what I was looking for. Someone who would pay attention to the matter. I'm not saying I need to make a public confession or justify myself—that's not it at all. I want to get out from inside me something I did, which my superiors have made me think was something bad."

He was heard by Luis Moreno Ocampo, who had been the prosecutor of Videla, Massera, Pernías, and Astiz and had then sided in favor of the constitutionality of the pardons. "I went to talk to him because I needed to understand why this was not

being brought to light once and for all. Moreno Ocampo was stretched out in a big leather chair with his feet on a little table. He was very attentive, but it didn't go any further than that. Something's happening here that might be difficult for a lot of people to understand, but the reality is that this subject, I don't know if it's taboo, but everyone wants to forget about it." He told his story and showed the documentation. He says that Moreno Ocampo listened to him and suggested he go to a publisher. "I got the impression he didn't care."

The former prosecutor remembers the conversation differently. "He came with his wife. First he said he had only taken a few prisoners out to finger their comrades in the street. Then later he said he had also taken part in kidnapping. And when it was his turn to participate in a flight, he discovered that the man he had kidnapped was on board the airplane. Despite the injection, the prisoner woke up to semiconsciousness, resisted being thrown out, and almost dragged him down with him into empty space. After the Due Obedience law and the pardon there was no possibility of opening up a judicial investigation. He asked me to put him in touch with *Somos* magazine, but I didn't want to get involved. His motives were very mixed: the memory kept him from sleeping, the navy was conducting a preliminary hearing on something he had done, and he also wanted money for telling his story."

Scilingo went to *Somos* magazine. He knew its editor in chief, to whom he had given some documents obtained at the Pink House which were used in a series of articles on the Malvinas war. He says the editor in chief answered that the flights were "a subject we don't deal with." But not because it was of no importance to them: the navy was informed of his visit to the magazine. "It seems they weren't interested," Scilingo was mocked.

The former editor of the magazine denies this. He says Scilingo offered to tell his story for ten thousand dollars, which he needed in order to set up his cable television system; when

they asked for some time to think it over, he disappeared saying he would go to *Noticias* magazine.

And that is what Scilingo says he did: "I was met by a young lady who directed me to another young lady who said she was the assistant editor or something like that, and she told me I might want to write a letter to the editor." In any case, Scilingo's principal concern, when his confessions were recorded as the basis for this book, was to make it known that he was not speaking out of self-interest: "I haven't sold out." He requested only legal support in case of any litigation with the navy.

He had tried the navy, the federal government, the courts, and the press. There remained only the Congress. When Pernías and Rolón were summoned by the Senate, Scilingo made copies of all his letters and sent them to each one of the members of the Confirmation Committee. This had no effect either.

"The matter of the disappeared was very important to me. It may be that the navy, the majority of journalists and the majority of the public consider it a subject of no importance," he muses.

With two partners ("they're Jews," he notes) he now exports fermented cider and suede bikinis to Brazil. Scilingo tries to smile, "Maybe I'm mistaken, and you are, too, to waste your time on me."

Part IV
Catharsis

Chapter Fifteen
A Surface Smoothed Down by Death

IN 1981, the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar published the plot of a short story in the *Revista de Occidente* in Madrid:

> A group of Argentines decides to found a city on a promising stretch of level ground, without realizing that most of the land on which they are starting to build their houses is a cemetery of which no visible trace remains. Only the leaders know this, and they keep quiet about it because the place fits in with their plans, because it is a surface smoothed down by death and silence. So buildings and streets go up and life is organized and prospers; very quickly the city reaches considerable heights and proportions, and its lights, which can be seen from very far away, are the proud symbol of those who erected the new metropolis. It is then that the symptoms of a strange unease begin, the fears and suspicions of those who feel that strange forces are pursuing them and in some way denouncing them and trying to drive them away. The most sensitive among them finally understand that they are living on top of death, and that the dead know how to come back, in their own way,

> and to enter the houses, the dreams, the happiness of the city's inhabitants. What seemed to be the realization of one of the ideals of our times—I mean a triumph of technology, of modern life enveloped in the cotton wadding of televisions, refrigerators, movie theaters and an abundance of money and patriotic self-satisfaction—slowly awakes to the worst of nightmares, to the cold and viscous presence of invisible rebukes, of a malediction that is not expressed in words but that taints with its unspeakable horror everything these men built atop a necropolis.

Cortázar said he did not write the story because he found out it had already been written in the book of history. But in a fantastically Cortazarian denouement, history rewrote it fifteen years later.

Scilingo was not mistaken, nor was talking to him a waste of time. The publication of his words had an electrical effect that ran through Argentine society's every cell. Argentina awoke to the worst of nightmares. Scilingo said nothing that was not already known, but the words of an executioner admitting to his crimes in the first person had an extraordinary impact, as if the exhibition of Scilingo's tormented soul were necessary to put an end to the two different versions of Argentine history in circulation, in circulation, so that the narrative of the victims would cease to be that of pariahs and madmen and become the common sense of society.

The Spanish edition of *The Flight* was published in Buenos Aires on March 2, 1995. The country's leading television talk show broadcast excerpts from my recorded dialogues with Scilingo, which were broadcast again the next morning by several radio stations. Their switchboards were jammed by an unprecedented number of calls from the public.

That day, the navy was to pay homage to its patron, an Irish admiral who fought in the nineteenth-century wars of independence. But the chief of staff deserted the traditional ceremony. The admirals remained alone, standing in formation in the street beneath the summer sun, surrounding two army guests who had

been invited to the celebration which could not begin without the chief of staff. Two very high ranking generals, both of them more than six feet, five inches tall, stood out in their green uniforms in the ocean of blue jackets worn by the bewildered men of the navy. A hundred or so journalists pounced on the highest ranking admiral present:

"What will the navy's response be?" they asked him.

He could defend himself only with a phrase that tried to be severe but sounded ridiculous: "No, no microphone soup."

Then he confessed that he didn't know what to say, slammed the door of his car, and left. Microphone soup is a very nourishing dish for young, growing democracies.

Admiral Molina Pico, the chief of staff, had left for the same airport from which Scilingo went on his first flight, urgently summoned by President Menem during a stopover on the campaign trail so that Molina Pico could inform him of what was going on. At the airport, the president maintained that Scilingo was "a scoundrel" whose statements were not trustworthy because he was facing "various charges for falsification, fraud, and car theft." He went on to attribute the publication of the book to "interests linked to the electoral campaign." Molina Pico sent a secret radiogram to his subordinates, in which he recommended that they remain silent in order to keep the matter from resonating any further.

From London, the Holocaust investigator Zygmunt Bauman commented, "What did they expect, that after throwing thirty people alive into the sea he would dedicate himself to cultivating his garden?"

The president and the chief of staff sought to bring down to the level of their own banality a transcendent episode whose richness escaped them. Nevertheless, Scilingo and the disappeared, the role of the military and of the Church, truth and justice, quickly occupied the center of the political debate in Argentina, displacing the issues of the electoral campaign.

The chain reaction started by Scilingo spread to the Catholic Church. In response to his assertion that the method of the flight had been approved by Church authorities and that the chaplains comforted the officers after their missions, various bishops requested forgiveness for the cowardice or complicity of some among them, and the Conference of Bishops maintained that any member of the Church who had supported the actions "would have acted on his personal responsibility, erring or sinning seriously."

The discussion even extended to the activities during the dictatorship of Pío Laghi, the former apostolic nuncio, who would later become the first ambassador of the Vatican to the United States and is now mentioned as a prospective pope. Moved by Scilingo's confession and its extraordinary social repercussions, the wives of two disappeared men revealed that the pope's representative had knowledge of the lists of the disappeared and that a high ranking naval officer had once consulted Laghi on the question of what to do with four dozen *desaparecidos* whom the officer didn't want to kill but couldn't make up his mind to free either.

One of the women was the wife and business partner of the journalist Julián Delgado. Delgado was the editor of several business publications and a supporter of the military government's economic policies, and he fell in the crossfire between opposing factions of the dictatorship for reasons that were not political but financial. His wife said that previously she had taken action only for her husband's sake, but after Scilingo's confession "all the disappeared are important to me. Now I talk about our disappeared. Because there is a problem in this society. It seems as if the disappeared are *them,* not *us*. They are ours, they are us." She explained that Pío Laghi "would have done what was necessary for my husband, he would have taken him out in one of those cars with diplomatic plates, but other people did not have the same luck. And a man who knows that there are forty living people, and who has brought

out some people who have been liberated as a result of many steps he has taken on their behalf, also knows that there are other people, too, many more of them, who haven't gotten out. And since the time of justice has passed, this is the time of truth. I call it my second chance, and it is also many people's second chance, and I don't want to waste it. Before I acted, but I didn't see these things as clearly. I know they are useful, for other people and for the society as a whole, and that's why I can't keep quiet about them."

While on one Buenos Aires radio station Cardinal Laghi explained from Rome that "we didn't know what was happening," a bishop on another station told the story of how, through Laghi's intervention, someone who was "being pursued by the whole army" was able to leave the country. No one tried to explain the nonsensical logic of someone who was working for human rights, saving lives, taking people who were being hunted to the airport, and at the same time didn't know what was going on. From a distance and after many years had gone by, Laghi didn't see how much Argentine society had changed, and he repeated the old official discourse, which was no longer tenable.

Several witnesses had said that the former nuncio periodically played tennis with Massera, and a bishop explained that by citing Laghi's fanatical devotion to the game. To top it all off, the discharged and pardoned former admiral broke his ten-year silence to defend the good name of his tennis partner in the face of so many "slanderous news reports" and attested to Laghi's concern over the fate of "the so-called disappeared."

The flash of illumination finally came from the Church itself, when Bishop Miguel Esteban Hesayne (the same man who had confronted the military and denounced torture as anti-Christian) said in a shattering Easter message that, "lamentably, repentance still has not touched all those it should touch, including the Conference of Bishops itself," which, he claimed, "has

sat down to eat with those we called torturers. We have received them in the heart of the Conference of Bishops so that they could excuse themselves, or rather so that they could try to deceive us by claiming that these were merely excesses. Furthermore, we did not want to receive the mothers of the disappeared, who for a whole day, under the rain, stood at the doors of the Plenary Assembly of the Bishopric. And as we were saying then with another bishop, what must Jesus Christ be saying at this moment, when we do not listen to the pleas of mothers?" Sent out early on Good Friday, Hesayne's letter put an end to the polemic. Profoundly divided, the Bishopric chose to be silent and focus its sermons on a less thorny subject, the social costs of Menem's economic policies.

The pages of the newspapers, radio and television programs, and the forums of Argentines who live outside the country and communicate with each other over the Internet were overflowing with dialogues and reflections on the reappearance of the taboo subject of Argentina's contemporary history. The practice of making people disappear leads to an indefinite torture for their families, whose pain is suspended in time. About a hundred children of the disappeared formed a new human rights organization, the first to be made up of descendants of the victims of the dirty war. Mothers who had encapsulated their pain in reproaches against their children's militancy decided for the first time to find out what had happened to them. Siblings separated after the disappearance or death of their parents met again and told how they had gotten through the years of negation and secrecy.

But the renewed candor to which the society was abandoning itself also needed judicial approbation. Invoking cultural patterns going back to the Stone Age, Sophocles' *Antigone*, and domestic and international law, various family members of disappeared people asked the judiciary to declare a right to truth and to mourning and an obligation to respect the human body. Emilio Mignone, a signatory to one of these presentations,

maintained that this had been part of humanity's cultural patrimony ever since Neanderthal man was buried in a cave on a bed of pine branches and covered with a blanket of flowers. He added that archaeologists and anthropologists recognize in the cult of the dead a sign of humanization that is even more significant than the use of tools and fire. "It is through ritual that death enters the symbolic field, and such symbols are precisely what distinguish us from the rest of the animal kingdom. Those who would deny us the right to bury our dead do nothing less than deny our human condition." On the basis of the official records, he continued, the armed forces should inform each family of the fate of its disappeared member. And that information would also serve "as an official acknowledge of the actions taken by the terrorism of the state."

Thus began a new bout of political arm wrestling. The Federal Chamber in Buenos Aires, which ten years earlier had condemned Videla, Massera and the others, recognized the rights that were invoked, declared that the state had an obligation to reconstruct the past and reveal the reality of what took place during the dirty war, and requested from the minister of defense and the chiefs of staff of the army and navy all the information they possessed on the ultimate fate of the disappeared. Under the pretext of the time that had gone by, all of them answered that when they assumed their posts they had found no records. The chamber then ordered them to reconstruct the lists of the disappeared. The staffs answered that they had no means of doing so. But the army established an office to receive any testimony its personnel might voluntarily wish to offer, in strictest confidence, since the Argentine Constitution prescribes that no one is obliged to testify against himself. The navy, however, questioned the right of the judiciary to give such an order, basing its argument on the division of powers, and said that because of the law of Due Obedience and the pardons, "there is no public action. Let forgetfulness, silence, and forgiveness reign over past events."

However, the armed forces did not remain outside the whirlwind of passions Scilingo had aroused. Two decades later, a new generation of young men and women who are now about twenty years old was embarking on its life, and not only among the families of the victims. At the dinner tables of military families, children asked their parents what they had done during the dirty war. Some of them decided to talk about it outside of their homes as well. The public emotion was so intense that even some news organizations of very long-established conservative tradition, which had supported the military's actions during the dictatorship, picked up the testimony of their horrors and competed for the scoop.

Suffering from a depression diagnosed by psychiatrists at the Military Hospital, discharged after an incident involving an officer, and unemployed, Sergeant Víctor Ibáñez told the hundred-year-old Buenos Aires morning paper *La Prensa* that airplanes and helicopters had also taken off from the first garrison of the army in Buenos Aires with cargoes of political prisoners who were thrown into the sea from low altitude flights. The noncommissioned officers Federico Talavera, of the police, and Pedro Caraballo, of the army, also described to the press in detail the atrocities they saw or committed. Ibáñez was the only one among them who could positively identify half a dozen victims and ask their families for forgiveness. In painful dialogues that the country followed with bated breath through the media, the father of a disappeared teenager told Ibáñez he would never forgive him, another father thanked him for having brought an end to nineteen years of mourning without a tomb, and a mother asked him for information about her son but refused to participate in dialogue with a murderer.

In another news item, General Albano Harguindeguy, a former minister of the interior during the dictatorship, admitted for the first time that the method of murder without law or trial had been institutionally decided upon by the high commands of the armed forces.

The chief of staff of the army, Martín Balza, decided that his turn had come. Stationed outside the country during the worst years of the dirty war, he appeared on television and freely admitted that the army "took power by abandoning the path of constitutional legitimacy," that it went outside the law to fight the guerrilla movement, and that "it unleashed a repression that makes us shudder today." When he began to deliver his mea culpa, he seemed to have read Cortázar's words; he was in favor of "initiating a painful dialogue about the past that was never sustained and that acts like a ghost within the collective consciousness of the country, always returning from the shadows where it occasionally hides." He said that the responsibility lay with the military leadership, a statement that set aside for good the indefensible myth of excesses or mistakes on the part of the lower ranks, and he implied that criminal forms of conduct were ordered vertically through the chain of command. "Priority was given to combatting the adversary on an individualized basis, in some cases locating individual adversaries by obtaining information through illegitimate methods that were beneath dignity, even going so far as to take lives," he added.

The central paragraph of his message postulates a new concept of command and obedience, at a distance both from the stale doctrine of national security and from that of due obedience promoted by former president Raúl Alfonsín. Balza placed the Argentine army in line with those of the countries of the West: "No one is obliged to carry out an immoral order or one at odds with the law and military regulations. Whoever does so commits a criminal act, deserving of the penalty its seriousness merits. Without euphemisms I clearly declare: whoever violates the National Constitution is committing a crime, whoever gives immoral orders is committing a crime, whoever executes immoral orders is committing a crime, whoever employs unjust means to achieve an end he considers just is committing a crime," he said. The journalist on whose program he read his

statement asked him if he had consulted with the president. "No," was his laconic response.

In the newly sensitized climate of social catharsis that followed Scilingo's confession, the television appearance of a general who, instead of reciting commonplaces in a threatening tone like his predecessors, humbly acknowledged the atrocities of the past, received a very warm reception. With the election two weeks away, Menem noticed this sudden change in public feeling toward the armed forces and tried to capitalize on it. He called an urgent press conference in which he said that Balza had spoken at his suggestion. In a 180-degree turnaround, he added that this should be taken into account when the time came to vote. After forty-five days of denying the facts and casting aspersions on those who were describing them, the government launched a huge drive to take advantage of them and ordered the chiefs of staff of the other two armed forces to perform a public self-criticism as well, an order that was reluctantly obeyed by the air force and the navy. Air Force General Juan Paulik admitted that "errors and horrors" had been committed, and Admiral Molina Pico acknowledged that until then the navy had lied about the facts, hiding its use of "a methodology that did not respect the prevailing legal order and the laws of war. These were mistaken methods which gave rise to horrors that were unacceptable even in the cruel context of war. For that reason, we reject them today and we exclude them as a possibility in any future action whatsoever."

Chapter Sixteen
Breaking the Shell

OFTEN IN human history, great secrets are revealed by a solitary conscience, in this case that of a man who slowly freed himself from institutional servitude. When Scilingo lost his balance and was about to fall into the sea together with one of his victims, the military mechanism of depersonalization and dehumanization broke down inside him. For the first time he was able to see the enemy as a human being. Years later, he entered a definitive state of crisis because of his superiors' evasive stance. The military architecture, which tends toward the efficiency of the whole to the detriment of individual liberty, comes crashing down if those who give the orders do not take responsibility for their consequences.

Nevertheless, Scilingo's discourse remained confused. Neither the collective tragedy in which he played a part, the devastating effect it had on his personal life, nor the decision that, to his credit, led him to make a public confession, automatically brought any lucidity to his reasoning. He was overwhelmed with

guilt, yet exonerated the dirty war which in his own words made him into a murderer, and he demanded indulgence for those who had only been carrying out orders. But even Thomas Aquinas (the patron saint of Latin American conservatives) wondered in his *Summa Theologica* if the man who performs a guilty act out of obedience is innocent. And he gave as an example the military subordinate. He answers with no doubt whatsoever that the dictates of one's personal conscience can never be violated. If a superior orders one to say that God does not exist or to insult one's mother, one must disobey or resign from one's position—not two decades later, when one has been destroyed by the consequences of one's actions, but at the very moment of receiving the order.

It isn't only Argentine society that is changing. Scilingo, too, looks like a different man, shaken by the social reaction to his confession.

"President Menem began by discrediting you as a scoundrel..."

"I'm talking about tremendous things that happened in this country, and they give these idiotic responses."

"Then he claimed that your accusation wasn't serious because you didn't identify the victims."

"I already clearly explained that I don't know the identity of the people I threw into the sea. I received a group of prisoners with the order to take them on two flights, but since I wasn't in the intelligence section I didn't know who they were. I'm the first person who's interested in identifying them."

"Finally, he said you should only be talking to your confessor."

"If only things were as easy as that! I already confessed. I talked to a priest at the School immediately after the first flight, and it didn't help me at all. I can't accept that what we did can be justified with biblical parables. No Catholic can say that the story ends once I've confessed. If only everything could be resolved in the confessional."

"Confession may give some individual relief, but there's also a social dimension to this issue."

"Yes. And the president has taken this as a personal problem of mine. No one should talk any more about Scilingo. Though it may be a little egotistical to say so, my public confession has brought me a certain relief. Before, I had a secret I couldn't talk about to anyone. Now I can talk to everyone. But the problem still exists."

"Menem also said that this was an electoral issue."

"Please, it's been ten years at least that I've been trying to talk about this. What's more—who's going to benefit from this in the elections? I'm thinking of voting for Menem, although I'm hurt by his lack of understanding."

"Why are you going to vote for him?"

"As a man he doesn't understand, but that doesn't disqualify him as a head of state. I think that the balance of these past six years is positive."

"What seems positive to you?"

"Basically, the economic stability."

"And the pardon?"

"The president's intentions were good: to close a very painful chapter in our history and reconcile the country. But today it seems to me that all of us who committed those barbaric acts should be in prison. I know it's a little irresponsible to say so now, after the Full Stop law which made that impossible. So we could offer up a true, permanent mea culpa and pay our debt. And the most important effect of that would be on those who remained in the institution, people who are new or who didn't get their hands dirty. It would help them to reflect, as a reminder of what they must not do. The president should order the chief of staff of the navy to inform the country of everything that happened during those years, to give out the list of the disappeared. It did me good to speak, it would also do the society good, and it would do the navy good. Especially the new generations of the military, so they don't continue to bear the stigma of ESMA. Otherwise we can't be sure these things won't happen again some time."

"You say that you feel good now?"

"No. I say that it did me good to speak, that I feel better. But I don't feel good. I'm going to feel bad for as long as I live. This is something that can't be overcome."

"The lists of the disappeared are already known. What is not known are the circumstances under which each victim was kidnapped, the treatment they were given, how they were killed."

"Of course. The lists are known by the families of those who are no longer here and the organizations that compiled them. That's why I say that it's the navy that must give the information. All those who were killed by the subversives are buried, and their families know where. On the other side, no. I've often gone to the Plaza de Mayo, like an idiot, like a coward, hiding behind the trees, to watch the Mothers walking around the plaza on behalf of the disappeared, knowing that I had thirty disappeared people on my conscience."

"During our first conversations, you said that your goal was to save the careers of Pernías, Rolón, and Astiz."

"Yes. I told you that if they promoted others who did the same as they did, it was unjust that they were denied promotion."

"That was a petty and unacceptable motive. No self-respecting democracy can give the green light for kidnappers, torturers, and murderers to reach the top of the pyramid, only because others were promoted before them."

"I used to think that, but I realize that it was a pretext I needed to give myself in order to make the decision to speak. When I told what I had done, something much more important opened up. Remember how I always referred to the methods that were ordered for detaining, interrogating, and eliminating the enemy. It was hard for me to say it in other words."

"What other words?"

"Kidnapping, torturing, murdering."

"And now you can?"

"I just said them. When I started to talk, my state of mind was

still very closed. Before every interview I took a tranquilizer and worked myself into a tough mind-set. I was afraid someone would see me cry, because that didn't seem fitting for a military man. That's why I said that we had won the war, and that confused some people. Someone told me that my position seemed contradictory, that he didn't understand if I regretted what I had done or not."

"What was your response?"

"At that time I was convinced we were doing the right thing. There are people who would rather have a romance novel, who would rather that I say they forced me to do it, that it was against my will or my beliefs. Now almost twenty years have gone by. Of course I have repented. More than that, I'm destroyed by what I did. But I've begun to break the military shell. If I have tears in my eyes I'm not worried that someone might see them. Not only am I feeling like a human being, I'm also beginning to think like an ordinary person. What's more, this has changed my family life. There are things I told you that I hadn't talked about even with my wife. I almost didn't talk to my children at all. Now we talk every day. And at those moments it makes an impression on me all over again that we could have done what we did."

"I'll repeat a question you weren't able to answer before. How was it possible that none of you realized what you were doing at that time?"

"You said we were indoctrinated. That could be. But I think that explanation is insufficient. The only answer is that we were in a state of insanity, we were demented. And I'm not forgetting about the things that the subversive movement was doing, the bombs and the assassinations. But we were an armed force, and we should have acted differently. We could have acted differently."

"What reaction have you had from civilians?"

"I try not to appear in public too much, because I didn't do

what I did so I could be proud of myself or be praised. What will they do next, make me into a hero? I'm no kind of hero. But people who have recognized me in the street have told me to keep doing what I'm doing, not to soften my stance."

"What does that mean?"

"I asked one of them. He told me to keep on with my crusade to establish the truth. I told him that what I was doing wasn't a crusade. If I spoke out it was because I couldn't stand myself anymore. But I know that happens to a lot of people in the armed forces and it happens to the armed forces themselves as an institution."

"Why after almost twenty years are you the only one who is talking?"

"I talked because I felt tormented. And most of those who went through ESMA or the flights must be tormented. They must have the same struggle I have, to talk or not to talk. I don't think there is a human being alive who would be capable of keeping this secret for life. Maybe in the future they won't talk publicly, but at least they'll have to tell their wives about it."

An idea strikes him and makes him change roles. Now he's the one who asks:

"Did I tell you that my sister was with the Montoneros?"

"Never."

"She was a member of the group at the university. With paper, not weapons. She was noble and idealistic. We argued a lot. She made fun of me, told me I didn't understand anything. I tried to convince her to leave the group. She didn't pay any attention to me and kept on. Fortunately nothing happened to her. Afterward we became very good friends, more than just brother and sister."

"And now?"

"She died of cancer at age forty-two."

When he evokes her memory he smiles beatifically, as if he

were still incapable of imagining an encounter between the anonymous victim and the bureaucrat of death aboard a coast guard Skyvan or a navy Electra.

Epilogue

MENEM WAS reelected president, and from Juan and Evita Perón's famous balcony he vented his deepest feelings: "We have triumphed not only over the opposing parties, but also over the press."

His government pressured the Federal Chamber until four of its six judges declared that the laws and decrees protecting the military from prosecution obliged them to close the cases without any further investigation. Official obligation to cast light upon the fate of the disappeared was delegated to the undersecretary of human rights, an office of the Executive Power, which considers the payment of indemnities to be answer enough for the long-suffering family members of the disappeared. It was made clear that the settlement of accounts with a shadowy past would have to be done, like so many other things, without intervention from the state.

Massera, the former admiral, was quoted in a news article in which he denied the facts once more. His statements met with

unanimous repudiation, even from the chief of staff of the navy. Admiral Molina Pico said in contrast that under Massera's leadership the navy had kidnapped, tortured, and murdered prisoners.

In the meantime, Scilingo was accused of the crime of fraud and arrested. From jail, he sent letters to the judiciary with information about a priest and a pregnant woman who were held at ESMA and with suggestions on how to continue the investigation of the disappeared.

Afterword

AGENTS OF state-sponsored terrorism sometimes break the code of silence that links them to their accomplices and comrades and tell their stories. When they do, as Lieutenant Commander Adolfo Scilingo does in this book, the societies in which they live and to which they speak are shaken by contradictory reactions. It is naturally very difficult to separate the enormity of the crimes they describe from our reflection on their own guilt in them. Certainly, the fact that they speak out—especially when they can safely do so without facing prosecution—does not relieve them of their moral responsibility. But the weight of their testimony as participants and the glimpses that they offer into the horror that is part of the experience of most of their fellow citizens stun the society into a new awareness and transform the discourse about national priorities almost instantly.

Unfortunately, these confessions do not happen often enough. Repressive bodies have a remarkable capacity to prolong the

secrecy of their operations years and decades after their end and long after those forces have seen their power and influence in society dwindle. Within the select community of their members, an implicit covenant of silence prolongs the complicity between planners, supervisors, and commanders and subordinates, perpetrators, and executioners. The decision to speak out under those circumstances does set Scilingo and precious few others apart from those who committed the crimes and now continue to injure their victims and society by keeping those crimes secret.

Secrecy and deniability (not altogether "plausible" in this case, given the scale of the crimes) were key to the tactics of "disappearances," the technique overwhelmingly favored by the Argentine military dictatorship of 1976-83. Special "task forces" set up within the chain of command abducted their targets at home, at work, or in the streets and took them to clandestine detention centers where they subjected them to extreme forms of physical and psychological torture. Their tormentors were deliberately shielded from any possible inquiry by a judicial or other authority. When the task forces obtained all the intelligence they needed, the majority of the victims were murdered and their remains disposed of in a variety of ways. The method preferred by the navy was to throw them, while still alive, from transport aircraft into the waters of the Río de la Plata or of the Atlantic Ocean, as Scilingo describes.

For its effectiveness in the "war against subversion," the tactic of disappearances depended heavily on secrecy. Uncertainty about the fate of those abducted sowed terror in society, forced friends and relatives to renounce and ignore old ties, intimidated parents and siblings into not denouncing their plight for fear of making matters worse for their loved ones, and allowed pillars of society, who might otherwise have raised their voices in protest, to pretend they did not know what was going on. Uncertainty is the hardest blow leveled at parents, spouses, and children, and it victimizes them for the alleged sins of their child,

spouse, or parent. Even when it becomes clear that their loved one is gone forever, the lack of a body, a grave, or even some information about the circumstances of the death renders them unable to turn their grief into mourning and get on with their lives.

Disappearances, then, are a "continuing offense" and not only or strictly in legal terms. For as long as the uncertainty remains, they are an open wound in the fabric of society that is not healed by amnesty laws or clemency decrees and much less by lofty calls to "reconciliation" lamely uttered from time to time by political or religious leaders. Without public acknowledgment, reconciliation is an empty gesture, or worse, another name for impunity. Victims are asked to reconcile themselves with the torturers and the murderers while the latter are not even asked to atone for their sins by telling the families what they know. And when the families insist on knowing the whole truth, they are perversely accused by self-styled opinion makers of vindictiveness and of being stuck in the past. Fortunately, the majority of the Argentine public agrees with the families of the disappeared that true reconciliation can come only after the whole truth is known.

To be sure, Argentina has done more to restore truth and justice in the aftermath of the "dirty war" than most other countries in similar circumstances. As democracy returned, in 1983, President Raul Alfonsín and the new Congress annulled a shameless amnesty that the military had decreed for themselves in the waning hours of their reign. A blue ribbon panel, chaired by the writer Ernesto Sábato, was created to inquire into the phenomenon of disappearances. The president ordered the prosecution of the members of the successive juntas that had governed the country since 1976 for their responsibility in massive violations of human rights. Congress enacted amendments to the Code of Military Justice that set the stage for prosecutions of all cases of arbitrary arrest, kidnapping, murder, and torture committed by state agents.

In the next two years, the country learned a great deal about the monstrous machinery of repression installed by the military. The Sábato Commission's report, entitled *Nunca Más* (Never Again) and released in late 1984, pointed out the use of more than 250 clandestine detention and torture centers, described some of the abject forms of torture used to extract confessions or information, and documented the deliberate policy of misappropriating children of "disappeared" parents and of murdering captive mothers only after they gave birth, so that babies born in captivity could be given out in illegal adoption. Later, the trial of the junta members further documented these atrocities and provided irrefutable evidence of the existence of a master plan devised by the high command to treat the problem of subversion in this fashion. With the persuasive power of a civilian court acting in open trial and with the majesty of justice, the Argentine public learned that high-ranking military leaders had made themselves "lords of life and death" over thousands of citizens and had proceeded meticulously to supervise through the chain of command the day-to-day operations of their killing machine.

Against the wishes of President Alfonsín, the conviction of former junta members (including two former presidents, Generals Jorge Videla and Roberto Viola) created only the expectation and the demand for more justice. Generals who had been chiefs of security zones or their subdivisions or heads of police forces during the dirty war were in the dock next. They would be prosecuted and tried, also in open trials and before civilian courts, together with their subordinates, many of whom were still on active duty in the armed and security forces. At this point, President Alfonsín allowed democracy to be blackmailed. Succumbing to pressure from the military, he attempted to restrict the normal course of justice through the law of *Punto Final* (Full Stop), which set very short terms within which all charges had to be brought. The tactic backfired: sixty days later, in a rush to beat the deadline, around 450 known suspects had been arraigned.

The military then turned the pressure up: at Easter-time 1987, a faction of the army infantry popularly known as *carapintadas* (because of their use of black camouflage on their faces) rebelled and demanded an end to the prosecutions. Alfonsín then forced through Congress the Due Obedience law, by which all officers (except those who were chiefs of security areas and zones or chiefs of police forces) were presumed irrebuttably to have acted in ignorance of the illegality of the orders they had received. Despite its legal, moral, and factual absurdity, the Due Obedience law's effect was impunity for hundreds of perpetrators. The handful of high-ranking officers who might still have been prosecuted were pardoned by Alfonsín's successor, Carlos Saúl Menem, in 1989. In December 1990, Menem completed the cycle of impunity by pardoning those who had been convicted in the only two cases that reached the sentencing stage.

The obligation of a state to account for the human rights violations of a recent past has several dimensions. Impunity must be overcome by a deliberate attempt to investigate, prosecute, and punish the abusers. The facts thus uncovered must be disclosed to the victims and their relatives, and to society as well. Even if punishment is unavailable, the authorities have a duty to ensure that the ranks of the armed and security forces of a democratic state do not include anyone who has committed atrocities. The state also owes to the affected families a measure of reparation that is consistent with the enormity of the wrong they suffered and also respects their dignity.

In that light, the balance sheet of the extraordinary Argentine experience is as follows: As for justice, there is now no judicial redress available to the victims and their relatives to seek prosecution of the perpetrators. On the other hand, General Videla and Admiral Eduardo Massera were each sentenced to life and actually served seven or eight years in a military jail. Three fellow junta members and General Ramon Camps, the notorious chief of police of the Province of Buenos Aires, also served time

in prison. The time served is painfully small in comparison with the enormity of their crimes, but it is nonetheless an important milestone in reasserting the rule of law and erasing the unwritten privilege so often granted to criminal defendants only because they wear uniforms. Hundreds of known torturers are free from prosecution and even free from civil actions for damages. But many of them are well-known to the public, and if the state must consider them innocent by operation of the laws and decrees of impunity, society frequently makes clear that their crimes are not forgotten. Whenever they venture into the streets or public places, Videla, Massera, Camps, and several others have experienced spontaneous though nonviolent acts of repudiation: waiters refuse to serve them, other patrons leave the place or sit far away from them, some actually defy their bodyguards and confront them with the opinion that most Argentines have of them. (This is also true, by the way, of former guerrilla leaders who led so many young Argentines into an aimless, deadly "war," and later shamelessly grabbed Menem's pardon, thereby putting themselves in the same category as Videla et al.)

The democratic administrations have done nothing to force the known torturers into retirement. Lamely citing a misguided version of the presumption of innocence, civilian leaders have resisted calls for disciplinary removal of known criminals or for administrative ends to their careers on the basis of the judicial records. For more than a decade, notorious criminals like navy Commander Alfredo Astiz rose quietly through the ranks. Indeed, this "let sleeping dogs lie" approach may have contributed to early instability of democracy by sending the message that *all* members of the armed forces were suspect, regardless of the existence of evidence of abuse against them. Fortunately, Argentine law specifies that promotion to the rank of colonel or its equivalent (in the navy, the rank of captain) requires the Senate's consent. Accordingly, each time an annual petition to the Senate from the Defense Ministry has included the names of

well-known "task force" members, public outcry has forced the Senate to reject them, or the executive branch to withdraw their names in embarrassment. The controversy surrounding the eventually failed promotion of navy officers Pernías and Rolón, carefully described by Verbitsky in this book, seems to have been the final straw that promoted Scilingo's decision to go public. Here, also, the public's refusal to forgive and forget substitutes for the moral cowardice of democratic leaders who hope that these things will simply go away if we continue business as usual—though, in these matters, in the dark if at all possible.

On reparations, the Menem administration deserves credit. Most claims against the state were barred by the Civil Code's very short statute of limitations (two years) and by the courts' unwillingness to consider it interrupted during the dictatorial years. Claims against individual perpetrators were made impossible by the lack of a preliminary finding of criminal liability. When Argentina was brought before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the government settled with some seventy plaintiffs who had been held for years in administrative detention without trial. Then the Congress, at Menem's initiative, passed a law that provides generous reparations to about eight thousand persons held in those years under state-of-siege powers. More recently, Congress extended the reparations scheme to the families of the disappeared, acknowledging the wrong committed by the state against them and not asking the families to endure the indignity of equating their cases to those "presumed dead" because they abandoned their families and are still absent after seven years.

With respect to truth, the Sábato report and the records of the junta trial have uncovered vast documentation about the master plan and its execution. The two pseudoamnesty laws and Menem's pardons have prevented the courts from discovering further details about the role of each cog in the wheel of repression. The preliminary inquiries conducted in hundreds of pretrial investigations, however, provide a wealth of information that is

available to the public and has been widely covered in the Argentine press, even though the evidence cannot be put to the test of cross-examination. But neither Alfonsín nor Menem has done anything to pursue the many leads that these sources provide.

The Sábato Commission compiled individual files for around nine thousand cases. At the end of its work, the files were placed in the custody of the Under-Secretariat of Human Rights at the Ministry of Interior. Since then, little has been done to update and enrich those records with those kept by the courts, for example. When nongovernmental organizations have sought to consult them in order to help families achieve some closure to their grief, they have not received adequate cooperation. Indeed, an exceptional group of young professionals called the Argentine Team for Forensic Anthropology made stunning identifications and cause-of-death determinations in a few cases, but found little official cooperation when they attempted to identify hundreds of remains found in unmarked graves. Sadly, the Argentine forensic anthropologists are more in demand around the world than in their own country. At some point early in Menem's term, plans were drafted at the human rights office of the Ministry of Interior to follow through on the records of the Sabato Commission, to establish the ultimate fate of each disappeared person using forensic technology where appropriate, and to provide each family with the information that could be reliably established. Such plans were not approved by the Menem administration, and they have now been abandoned.

The result is that, twenty years later, more than nine thousand Argentine families still do not know exactly what happened to the person who was once yanked away from his or her home by agents of the state, never to be seen again. At the time, the military authorities told them they could not know and would never know. Now, democratically elected leaders and their sycophants in politics, religion, and the media tell them that they should not want to know.

The public debate that followed the Argentine publication of *The Flight* (*El Vuelo*) in March 1995 (which is described in this English version) showed that the majority of Argentines instantly recognized that the state still owes the families more than money, recognition, and a general report: they have a right to know all that can be fairly established about the fate of their loved ones, including the circumstances of their deaths, the identity of their victimizers, and the location of their remains. Reconciliation can come only after the state lives up to this duty.

This book has done much to put this unfinished business on the national agenda. In 1995, the courts ordered the armed forces to produce records and lists of the disappeared. As of this writing, the administration has refused and the matter is sitting at the Supreme Court, a majority of whose members are hopelessly subservient to Menem. The relatives of the disappeared are lobbying Congress for the creation of a commission of inquiry to complete the Sábato Commission's task. It will not be easy. Menem chooses to attack the messenger rather than to heed the unmistakable message. The commander of the navy—who has a close relative counted among the disappeared—continues to think that his task is to defend the honor of his force by denying the obvious and publicly defending the "moral qualities" of officers who escaped prosecution only because of the Due Obedience law. Neither he nor the chief of the air force have come close to the stunning honesty and dignity of General Balza's apology to the nation for the crimes committed by the army during the dirty war.

It seems true that Balza's leadership of the army goes beyond his historic speech of April 25, 1995. One hopes his initiatives will turn the army into the loyal subordinate of democratic authority that it has not been since 1930. One aspect of his now famous speech, however, remains unfulfilled. Balza called on all officers who have knowledge of the events of the dirty war to come to him voluntarily, under promise of confidentiality,

so that he could in turn disclose to the families whatever information might be reported about specific victims and incidents. Significantly, not a single officer has come forward. In this part of his speech, General Balza was wrong: he should not have asked for cooperation; he should have ordered his subordinates to produce it as a matter of military discipline and as state agents who are duty-bound to assist the administration in fulfilling its obligations to the citizenry. It makes no sense to allege that such an order would violate the officers' right against self-incrimination, since no criminal prosecution is possible at this stage anyway.

If Scilingo's revelation created such a stir in public discourse, dominating the political agenda for months, why has it failed to prompt other officers into imitating him? The immediate answer is that the public pillorying he received from his superiors, including comments on his moral character and his sanity, must have discouraged anyone who might have been thinking of coming forward. In an attempt to silence potential imitators, Menem even toyed with the legally absurd idea of repealing the Due Obedience law, as if immunity from prosecution had been a factor in Scilingo's candor. But there has to be a more profound reason for the obstinate silence of the "dirty warriors."

Despite the consolidation of democracy in Latin America, military establishments still consider themselves a caste above society and not subject to the rule of law. They believe themselves "protectors of the nation" not so much against external aggression as against the enemy within. "The nation" for them is an abstract term, a spiritual concept that is permanent, while the constitution, democracy, or any other form of government is strictly contingent. In this conceit, their fellow citizens, including those prone from time to time to support them, are held in contempt. This ideology has so permeated the mindset of the officer corps that they and their families lead their lives in isolation from the people they are supposed to serve.

It was not always like this. In most of Latin America, armies were created under the liberal and progressive ideals of the nineteenth century, as the "people in arms." In this century, however, they became the tool of the conservative forces that could no longer get elected by fairly playing by the rules of the democratic game. In the case of Argentina, from this early subordinate position in 1930, through successive coups d'etat and pressuring of weak civilian governments, the military adopted a more autonomous, self-directed ideology, coming to be known at times as "the military party," exercising authority over and no longer serving economic, social, or political forces. Not coincidentally, the "enemy within" was defined in terms of the party that had the clearest chance of winning in democratic elections: in the 1930s it was the *radicales* and, to a lesser extent, the fledgling Socialist Party. In 1955 and thereafter, the main object was to prevent the *peronistas* from bringing back their leader from exile. In the late 60s and 70s, when a generation of Argentines who had never been allowed to vote seemed to embrace the winds of radical change then sweeping most of the world, the enemy was the dangerous amalgam of Peronist populism and revolutionary socialism.

This spiral of increasingly violent confrontation corresponds neatly with the military's turn toward intolerance and authoritarianism, and with the progressive abandonment of legal or ethical limitations in the methods of repression. At first, successful coup leaders formed "provisional" governments and called for new, tutored elections in a reasonably short time. In 1966, General Onganía announced that his regime would last twenty years. In 1976, Videla insisted that his government had goals, not deadlines. Torture has been used since 1930; but repression was highly selective at first. Arbitrary execution of political enemies was committed—for the first time in the century—against Peronist plotters in 1956. And yet, before 1976, repression, while brutal, was highly selective, and some forms of judicial

supervision were nominally observed. In contrast, the Videla regime multiplied tenfold the highest number of political prisoners ever held before and embarked on the deadly, methodical, cruel tactic of disappearances. Needless to say, selectivity was replaced by a grotesque witch hunt of young men and women labeled "subversive" for their left-leaning ideas or for their social work among the poor. Explicitly, the definition of subversive went way beyond the armed guerrilla to include lawyers, priests, teachers, artists, labor activists, neighborhood organizers, students, and their friends and acquaintances.

In this climate, the military leaders did not need to persuade their cadres to engage in their barbarous acts. There were precious few who refused to obey manifestly illegal orders, and they were forced into early retirement. Membership in the "task forces" was a career opportunity and a chance to wield influence over and above rank. But while the crimes may have been committed by a small minority of the forces and ordered and supervised by a discrete chain of command going all the way to the top. The rest certainly consented peacefully and explicitly supported the strategy.

After the crushing defeat in the Falklands-Malvinas war, the military was unable to prevent the advent of democracy or even to place too many conditions on the new government. But the successive commanders acting under Alfonsín and Menem were determined to limit the damage. The subordinates who might face prosecution were persuaded to remain silent and trust their leaders' ability to immunize them through pressures on the government. The strategy succeeded: not one piece of the massive evidence gathered by the National Commission on the Disappeared or by courts and prosecutors was obtained through the cooperation of the military, officially or unofficially rendered. Even after the pardons this "covenant of silence" has remained in effect, perhaps because the high command speculates that public opinion is fickle and will one day come to see all this evidence as false.

In the meantime, a curious tension develops within the ranks: the high command insists on silence, while the named perpetrators of the crimes remain identified in the public's consciousness as torturers and murderers. The latter feel, not without reason, that their superiors are letting them hang out to dry as moral scapegoats. If Commander Molina Pico pretends that "the navy" did nothing wrong, then the image he intends to plant in the public mind is that the crimes of the infamous ESMA camp were committed by a small band of rogue elements operating on their own. If it weren't for the report and for the trials of the mid-1980s, this perverse tactic might work. As it is, there is too much knowledge in the public domain to be ignored or to be explained away with inane abstractions.

Under these circumstances, this covenant of silence looks a lot less like loyalty and esprit de corps and more like the Mafia code of *omertà*. This code is not enforced by threat of death, but—just as in criminal organizations—it originates in each party's link to the crimes committed jointly. Scilingo's motivation was not to help the families exercise their right to know, but to expose the fallacy of the navy's pretense that there had never been illegal orders. To his credit, despite his travails after this book was published, he has renewed his pledge to cooperate with any and all attempts to clarify the facts further. There have been others who publicly acknowledged their participation in the crimes of the dirty war, notably Julio Simón (a.k.a. "Julian the Turk") and army Major Héctor Verges. The difference is that these two were widely known to have played important roles in the crimes — at the time of the Due Obedience law Verges was in custody awaiting trial for murder — while Scilingo had never before been named. Also, Simón and Verges expressed no remorse but took to the radio and television microphones in an attempt to sensationalize and trivialize at the same time, exaggerating their own importance and bragging about their continued influence in the intelligence services. Pretty soon they

were offering their "files" for money to foreign journalists (without compensation).

Confronted with the grotesque "testimonies" of Verges and Simón, the families and the public are justified in demanding truth with dignity. Instinctively, Scilingo's story is more credible and influential, not only because he could have continued in anonymity, but also because he chose to tell his story to Horacio Verbitsky, Argentina's most successful and respected investigative journalist. Given Verbitsky's record exposing corruption, undue influence over the judiciary, and the dirty war itself, in approaching him Scilingo could not have hoped for a friendly forum. In the public's mind, the fact that he accepted Verbitsky's tough and knowledgeable cross-examination is evidence of Scilingo's good faith. Since the public knows that many of Verbitsky's colleagues are counted among the disappeared (Verbitsky himself lived many years in exile), the interview was all the more stunning as the confession of a task force member made to someone who could very easily have been one of his faceless, nameless victims.

Argentina's experiment with truth and justice is now more than twelve years old. Since then, several other countries have traveled their own roads, and some—such as Haiti and South Africa—are beginning their own. Yet in 1995, Argentina entered into a new phase of the policy debate as a result of this book. The latest twists in the policy of accountability suggested by the issues on the Argentine agenda should prove valuable to the efforts in other countries, just as the historic achievements of the early Alfonsín years informed the transitions in Chile, El Salvador, Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras, and now South Africa, and are present in the international community's effort to bring peace—with justice—in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. From now on, the attitudes of military leaders towards crimes committed by their subordinates will be measured by how they compare to General Martin Balza's apology to the nation; a process of

truth-telling will be judged by how much secrecy is shed in telling each victim and each family exactly what happened.

One lesson to be learned is how to encourage those who hold the secrets to come forward. In hindsight, the prospect of prosecutions up and down the chain of command in Argentina may have contributed to the officers' hanging tough together with their superiors. But it is not just a matter of offering immunity to the lower ranks, because that would violate the principle established in Nuremberg that obedience to illegitimate orders is not an excuse. Encouraging the culprits to speak out should not be regarded as equivalent to condoning their crimes. On the contrary, it signals that if reconciliation is the goal, the perpetrators must take the first step by breaking the veil of secrecy that is the first condition of impunity.

In countries not directly affected by the legacy of "dirty wars" there should also be a more enlightened understanding of the value of truth telling as an element of accountability. The United States refuses to release information in its files about paramilitary groups in Haiti, even though some of those files are actually Haitian government property taken by U.S. forces during the recent occupation. That lack of cooperation may well doom the efforts of the fledgling democratic government to restore some measure of truth and justice to the decades of brutality against the poor. Canada denies asylum to Florencio Caballero, a low-ranking member of the notorious Battalion 316 in Honduras, whose escape and testimony before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights was instrumental in revealing the structure that made possible the two hundred disappearances of the early 1980s. Honduras is finally prosecuting some of the Battalion 316 leaders originally identified by Caballero; in contrast, Canada seeks to deport him under an extremely narrow reading of the principle that those who participate in the persecution of others are not entitled to asylum.

Truth telling, however, is only part of the process of accountability. The success of "truth commissions" in several countries has generated a perverse and paradoxical result: those who consider themselves political realists are no longer urging a forgive-and-forget attitude. Instead, they urge the creation of "truth commissions" as a way of leaving a messy past behind as quickly as possible. This has even been proposed for Bosnia, to entice the leaders of the genocide to accept a peace plan in exchange for immunity from prosecution. The recent history shows, however, that truth commissions work only if they are conceived as a key element of accountability, not as a pretext for impunity. A report premised on impunity will, almost by definition, be far from a truthful report. In Bosnia, all that could reasonably be accomplished by a truth commission has been done to exhaustion by various U.N. bodies, in reports that world leaders deliberately refuse to read. Only prosecutions before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia can now bring the detailed truths that the victims deserve, through rigorous investigative methodology and validated through trial before an independent judicial body. And if this results in punishment for genocide, peace will be served as well as truth and justice.

Truth, therefore, should not be conceived as an alternative to justice. Argentina's recent example shows that even honest global reports are not enough. A free society demands and deserves to know everything. A free society also understands that it has a duty to offer the victims of human rights abuse a fair exercise of their right to see justice done, and that this right to justice does not consist only of an apology and compensation.

These lessons will soon be tested in different parts of the world. They have not been strong enough to prevent Peru from enacting last year a shameful blanket amnesty for all the crimes committed by military and police forces since 1982, but the Fujimori government did pay an important price in international discredit. In Chile, despite the presence of General Augusto Pinochet still at the head of the army, the newly democratic

regime also appointed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that has produced an exemplary report on the crimes of the Pinochet era. Files and records are made available to families to follow through on every lead to establish the fate and whereabouts of each victim. Pinochet's principal henchman in repression, General Manuel Contreras, and his deputy at the intelligence services have finally been convicted in the murder of former Foreign Minister Letelier in Washington in 1976, the one case not covered by the Junta's self-amnesty law of 1978. And as this prologue is written, the utter contempt of the Chilean military for the public's right to know is being shaken by the capture in Argentina of an intelligence operative long sought for his role in the murder, in Buenos Aires in 1974, of exiled General Carlos Prats. In this case also, Washington is being asked to contribute to justice by making evidence available to courts in Chile and Argentina that so far has remained under the exclusive control of U.S. prosecutors.

All eyes in the human rights community, however, are set now on the new South Africa, where Nelson Mandela has to deal with a legacy of abuse that surpasses anything ever witnessed in Latin America, while maintaining the dream of a multiethnic, reconciled country. His impressive moral authority no doubt is the country's biggest asset in this difficult journey, but clear thinking and respect for moral imperatives have also come from South African civil society. Under a statute enacted in 1995, immunity from prosecution will be conditioned on the suspect coming forward with all he knows, so that the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu can establish a complete official record of the crimes of the apartheid era. In fact, prosecutions against formerly powerful apartheid leaders have begun; the first case includes a former minister of defense who is currently in custody.

If political realists thought that reconciliation in societies torn by human rights violations might be served by a forgive-and-forget

policy, the stunning developments of the transitions to democracy in Argentina and elsewhere have demonstrated that it is far better to confront the question of impunity in earnest. It is also readily apparent that, once a process of accountability is under way, it is a mistake to try to close it off by pseudoamnesty laws and pardons. Sooner or later, the families' right to know the truth is embraced and seconded by the whole society, and the idea itself becomes so powerful that the state must find the means to accommodate this legitimate expectation. In Argentina, that "sooner or later" was the publication of this book. In ways probably not expected even by its author, in a few weeks the book renewed the debate about what is owed to the families of the disappeared. And though the debt is not quite paid in full, the postpublication events have done much to vindicate the rights of the victims of human rights violations and to point the way to what needs to be done in other societies struggling to rid themselves of the legacy of cruelty and abuse.

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Afterword to the 2005 Edition

IN RESPONSE to the first publication of this book, the administration of President Carlos Menem and the Argentine navy quickly undertook reprisals against Adolfo Scilingo in order to keep other former officers from following in his footsteps. In addition to discharging him from the navy, the government found a corrupt judge and police captain who were willing to jail him for two years on unproven charges of fraud. The judge was later removed from office for extorting money from small businesses, and the police captain was prosecuted for obstructing the investigation of an attack against a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires.

The prosecution of Scilingo had its desired effect on other naval officers, who remained silent. But it could not stave off the enormous impact of his words, which reinstated the crimes of the terrorist state on Argentina's public agenda. Though prosecution of those responsible for the crimes was then impossible, the victims' families demanded that the courts at least attempt to establish the truth about what happened to their missing loved ones. The *juicios por la verdad*—truth trials—began with an inquiry opened by Emilio Mignone, one of the leaders of Argentina's human rights movement, and gradually extended across the entire country.

Although the sincerity of the series of self-critical speeches made by members of the military leadership after the book's publication is open to debate, the speeches did heighten the impact of Scilingo's words. For the first time, it was possible to speak freely and openly about what had happened during the Dirty War. This led, among other things, to a public acknowledgment of the children of the disappeared, many of whom had kept their identity secret until then, as if the crimes committed against their parents constituted a shameful disease. At the same time, Argentine society as a whole ceased to tolerate any attempt to justify the dictatorship's massacres. In this newly critical atmosphere, the twentieth anniversary of the military coup was commemorated—on March 24, 1996—with a massive demonstration in front of Argentina's capitol building.

As a way of participating in that commemoration, a group of Argentines living in Spain presented records of events that occurred during the dictatorship to Spanish public prosecutor Carlos Castresana, who, on the basis of common law and the universal jurisdiction authorized by longstanding Spanish laws, requested that the Argentine military officers who had played a role in the dictatorship be charged with terrorism and genocide. Judge Baltasar Garzón accepted the prosecutor's charge and launched a formal case by indicting about a hundred of those officers. The Chilean residents of Madrid brought a similar case against Augusto Pinochet, the former dictator of Chile—a case whose effects were felt across the globe.

Meanwhile, freed from prison after the case against him for fraud fell apart, Scilingo was being threatened and harassed by

an unknown group that appeared to be part of some government or military intelligence unit. One afternoon, only a few feet away from the Argentine Congress building, he was abducted, and in a brutal form of retribution, the initials of three journalists who had interviewed him were carved into his face with a knife, my own among them.

Scilingo's personal situation became unbearable. Several organizations of survivors of the genocide and family members of its victims who valued the information contained in his confession met with him in an attempt to identify the people he had killed. Others, understandably, reacted with anger. It is one thing to demand the truth and another thing entirely to hear it from the lips of a murderer. Some of the dictatorship's victims felt that their role as the living memory of the horror was being challenged, while others were enraged because most of their fellow Argentines only began to believe what they'd been saying all along when it was finally confirmed by one of the perpetrators of the atrocity. Scilingo's Messianic stance and his compulsion to try to make amends didn't make matters any simpler. Despite his lawyers' warnings to the contrary, Scilingo believed that Judge Garzón would grant him the status of a protected witness. Instead, in October of 1997, Garzón ordered Scilingo's arrest along with that of a dozen other Argentine naval officers.

The following year, Garzón issued a warrant for the arrest of Augusto Pinochet in London. The complex process of extradition that ensued opened up a whole new phase in the history of Latin America's Dirty War. Looking back, it's hard to believe that all this just happened to take place on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations' adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The overcautious Argentine judges, who for many years had failed to take full advantage of the loopholes in the impunity laws, now went into action, and in only a few hours thrust Massera and Videla up alongside Pinochet in the world's head-

lines. Both former dictators of Argentina were arrested for kidnapping the children of the disappeared, a crime whose prosecution the impunity laws had never forestalled.

As the National Court in Madrid was unanimously confirming Garzón's jurisdiction over the Argentine state terrorists, in Buenos Aires the Argentine Supreme Court ordered the truth trials shut down. The Argentine government thought it need do no more than pay reparations to the victims and conduct a limited investigation. Only when the Center for Legal and Social Study (CELS) denounced this attempted shutdown to the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights did Menem's outgoing administration commit to allowing the federal courts to pursue their investigations. In 1998, Representatives Alfredo Bravo and Juan Pablo Cafiero proposed legislation that would have nullified the "Full Stop" and "Due Obedience" laws, but the Argentine Congress did no more than repeal them.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the remarkable judicial counterpart to the Argentine situation took an unexpected new twist: Scilingo retracted his confession. Rejected by his former colleagues and with no new allies among the dictatorship's victims, at liberty in Madrid but very closely watched, surviving only on the charity of a priest, he was recruited by the Chilean services who were attempting to undermine the legitimacy of the Spanish proceedings. Scilingo was penniless, but the task of defending him was nevertheless taken on by Fernando Pamos de la Hoz, a well-paid lawyer who enjoyed very friendly relations with the Chilean Embassy, which was doing all it could to have Pinochet freed.

On November 2, 1999, Judge Garzón charged Scilingo and about a hundred of his comrades-in-arms with torture, genocide, and terrorism. Two days later, Scilingo retracted all his previous statements. He now claimed that because of a personal grudge against Massera, he had agreed to take part in a conspiracy orga-

nized by Garzón and the victims' groups. When I was called as a witness in the case, I gave the judge six hours of tapes of Scilingo's voice—recorded at least a year before Garzón launched his case—as well as the documents included in this book, which make it clear that Scilingo spent fifteen years of his life looking for someone, anyone, to listen to his story.

Once the highest court in Britain had rendered two separate decisions, in November of 1998 and January of 1999, allowing for Pinochet's extradition to Madrid, the Chilean Supreme Court reinterpreted the Amnesty Law of 1978 and ruled that abduction is a perpetual crime that continues to be committed as long as the victim's body has not been found. With the way thus open for Pinochet to be brought to trial in Chile—as the administration of Chilean President Eduardo Frei Ruiz Tagle was demanding—the British government obtained a medical certificate, released on January 10, 2000, to the effect that the former dictator was mentally unfit for trial. Then came the miracle of Pudahuel, televised live across the globe, when the supposedly disabled Pinochet stood up from his wheelchair and walked the moment he set foot on his native soil, brandishing his cane as if it were a sword.

Toward the end of 2000, as the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Argentine military coup drew near, the national and international situation appeared more encouraging than ever before. Upon his return to Chile, Pinochet was deprived of his senatorial immunities, while a hundred of his former henchmen were already under arrest or on trial. Meanwhile, Argentine Generals Carlos Suarez Mason and Santiago Riveros were convicted by the Italian courts, and Suarez Mason's extradition was demanded by the Nuremberg public prosecutor. Alfredo Ignacio Astiz was discharged from the Argentine navy, at the insistence of the navy itself, for having confessed in a news article that he was the best man for the job when it came to killing journalists or politicians. Several truth trials were well underway in various Argentine courts, and the former dictators Videla and Massera,

along with a dozen other high-ranking officials of the dictatorship, were serving prison sentences for having kidnapped infants. A case was underway in Buenos Aires against Videla, Pinochet, and the former dictator of Paraguay, Alfredo Stroessner, over Operation Condor. And the Court of Appeals of Buenos Aires ruled that crimes against humanity were not subject to amnesty under any circumstances, a decision the Supreme Court would uphold three years later.

That same year, given that there was no longer any legal, ethical, or political basis for the Argentine impunity laws, the Center for Legal and Social Study again asked the courts to nullify them, and in March of 2001 Federal Judge Gabriel R. Cavallo did so. The Court of Appeals subsequently upheld the decision, in which Cavallo was joined by judges and courts from across the country and by the Argentine solicitor general. Two weeks after that decision, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights—the highest tribunal recognized by the reformed Argentine Constitution of 1994—ruled on a similar case. Significantly, in its decision on the "Massacre of Barrios Altos," committed by a Peruvian military group known as Grupo Colina during the presidency of Alberto Fujimori, the Inter-American Court established that serious human rights violations cannot be granted amnesty, nor can there be any statute of limitations on their prosecution.

In August of 2002, the United States government declassified some of the documents that had been requested two years previously by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, and the CELS. The four boxes of documents that were delivered to Buenos Aires contained telegrams sent during the Dirty War by employees of the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires to the State Department in Washington, with evidence concerning the crimes and responsibilities of the Argentine government. Between the time the documents were requested and their arrival, the government of the United States changed, with the appointment of George W. Bush as president, as did the interna-

tional context. After the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Washington put the so-called "War on Terror" at the center of its domestic and foreign policies. Even so, no vindication of the Argentine military's dirty war against the Argentine people ensued. The Argentine people took the implicit message of those four boxes to be that forced disappearances, torture, and clandestine executions are crimes against humanity that the international community will not tolerate under any circumstances.

From 1996 to 2003, two successive Argentine presidents, Carlos Menem and Fernando de la Rua, and the senator temporarily in charge of the executive branch, Eduardo Duhalde, invoked the principle of territorial integrity in order to avoid processing extradition requests from Judge Garzón. Duhalde also attempted to persuade the Supreme Court to validate the impunity laws in an effort to close the book on justice once again, before handing the reins of government over to Argentina's new president, Nestor Kirchner, in 2003.

But Kirchner did not share that ambition, as he quickly made known. In the first week of his administration, he discharged the military top brass that had taken part in the negotiation with Duhalde and the Court. He also repealed a decree issued by former President de la Rua that had stripped the courts of their jurisdiction over extradition requests; he gave new impetus to the impeachment proceedings against members of the Menemist automatic majority on the Supreme Court; and he proposed the legislative annulment of the impunity laws, which the Congress then proceeded to annul in August of 2003. Courts across Argentina began reopening cases and arrest warrants were issued for more than a hundred formerly high-ranking military and police officers. On March 3, 2004, the chief of staff of the navy, Admiral Jorge Godoy, repudiated the atrocities committed at the ESMA in an act of institutional self-criticism that went well beyond the one previously carried out by General Balza of the army.

The public hearings in the Spanish trial against Scilingo are scheduled to take place in the summer of 2005, and, given that the major piece of evidence against him is his own confession, it is likely, but not certain, that he will be found guilty. But regardless of the verdict, justice itself will be the winner, for Scilingo will enjoy all the guarantees of due process and a fair trail that his victims never had. Whether he is convicted or freed, one hopes that he will derive at least some satisfaction from the thought of all that his tormented conscience has set in motion.

—Horacio Verbitsky, 2005

Sources and Notes

Chapter One: Let's Tell the Truth

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Chapter Three: A Christian Death

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Chronology

1930:
A military coup overthrows President Hipólito Yrigoyen of the centrist party known as the Radical Civic Union. Yrigoyen was the first president to have been cleanly elected by a secret and obligatory vote; he represented the accession to the government of the new middle classes of immigrant origins.

In the following half century, Argentina will undergo no fewer than one military coup per decade and will be governed by more presidents who owe their office to the sword than to the ballot. During this period, which lasted until the democratic election of President Raúl Alfonsín, also a Radical Civic Union member, in 1983, only two elected presidents successfully concluded the constitutional term of six years, and both were retired army generals. One of them, Agustín P. Justo, came to power through fraudulent elections in 1932. The other, Juan D. Perón, was overthrown in the middle of his second term as president in 1955.

1943:
A military group that sympathizes with the Axis Powers takes control of the government. Among them is Perón, then a colonel, who becomes, successively, secretary of labor and social welfare, minister of war and vice

president. While serving as secretary of labor he formulates a policy of respect for the rights of workers, inspired by the social doctrines of the Catholic Church.

1945:
Perón is arrested by his comrades and a spontaneous popular demonstration demanding his freedom converges on the center of Buenos Aires from the suburbs.

1946:
Perón is elected president in a clean vote.

1955:
On June 16, navy planes drop nine and a half tons of bombs on the Plaza de Mayo, in front of the Government House, in a failed attempt to overthrow Perón, reelected three years before with 62 percent of the vote. This is the overture to the violence that will envelop Argentina until 1983.

In September, a military junta overthrows Perón, disbands the Congress, dissolves the Supreme Court, takes control of the unions, and governs in a state of siege. A decree by the Executive Power establishes prison sentences for anyone who publicly speaks the name of ex-President Perón or his wife Evita. The military steals Evita's embalmed corpse.

1956:
In June, General Juan José Valle and two dozen Peronists, both military and civilian, are shot on the orders of military president Pedro Aramburu, in reprisal for an uprising aimed at holding free elections.

In October, the exiled Perón sends his "General Directives for all Peronists" and his "Instructions for Leaders," in which he recommends armed resistance against the government, the organization of guerrilla forces to combat it, the use of bombs, and the assassination of adversaries.

Members of the Argentine military take classes at the School of War in Paris while French colonels teach Argentine officers at the military institutes of Buenos Aires. The counterinsurgency tactics employed by the French in Indochina and Algeria are studied.

1958:
Radical Civic Union politician Arturo Frondizi becomes president, elected by the votes of the outlawed Peronist movement, to whom he has promised participation in the country's political system. During the forty-six months of his administration, he will face thirty-two standoffs with the military, some of them involving the deployment of tanks in the streets of Buenos

Aires. The intensity of the Peronist resistance grows; oil pipelines are blown up and there is a generalized sabotage of manufacturing. Striking railroad workers are militarized and soldiers run the trains. Tanks break down the doors of the Lisandro de la Torre meat-packing plant, which has been occupied by its workers.

1959:
On January 1, Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara enter Havana in triumph. They propose, among other things, to transform the Andes into a larger version of the Sierra Maestra, the mountains where the Cuban insurgency began.

1961:
The Argentine politician John William Cooke, one of Juan D. Perón's personal representatives, participates in the Cuban resistance against the invaders at the Playa Girón in the Bay of Pigs. Cooke invites Perón to relocate to Cuba, but the former president prefers to go to Spain, where he will live until 1973.

U.S. President John F. Kennedy announces the Alliance for Progress. Argentine officers learn counterinsurgency techniques at the School of the Americas, and Argentine guerrillas are trained in Cuba. Superimposed on Argentina's internal political dynamic are the strategic conflicts of the cold war.

1962:
Frondizi allowed Peronist candidates to participate in elections for provincial governorships. One of them wins in the decisive province of Buenos Aires, and as a result Frondizi is overthrown. Strife within the military allows the president of the Senate, José María Guido, rather than the chief of the army, to ascend to the presidency in Frondizi's place. In September, various military factions have an armed confrontation over the control of a weak President Guido.

1963:
In April, the opposing military factions confront each other once more, this time with airplanes and armor-plated vehicles. Army tanks destroy Naval Aviation's runways, giving rise to a lasting hostility. Out of these combats a new strongman emerges, General Juan Carlos Onganía, who presents himself as the leader of the "army of the constitution and the law" and says he supported the call for elections, but then returned to being strictly professional, without intervening in "internal politics." But five weeks after he so clearly stated his submission to the civil authorities, Peronism is outlawed

once again. In June, with barely 23 percent of the vote, the Radical Civic Union candidate Arturo Illia is elected president.

1964:
Onganía remains commander in chief of the army. From West Point, he formulates the doctrine of ideological borders and calls for intervention by the army in internal politics as an extraconstitutional watchdog. In Salta, the police break up a Marxist guerrilla detachment.

President Charles de Gaulle of France visits Argentina. Perón orders that he be received as if he were Perón himself, and demonstrations in the streets throughout the country checkmate the government. Months later, Perón attempts to return to Argentina, but, at the request of Illia's government, the Brazilian military detains his plane in Río de Janeiro.

1965:
The Peronists achieve good results in all the elections they are permitted to participate in, which makes them the foreseeable victors of the following year's elections in the province of Buenos Aires.

1966:
On June 28, prior to the provincial elections in Buenos Aires, a military junta overthrows Illia, imposes a Revolutionary Statute that is superior to the Constitution, and installs Onganía in the presidency. The Congress and the Supreme Court are dissolved and all political and labor union activity is banned.

The clerical organization Opus Dei participates in the national cabinet to a significant degree, and Cardinal Antonio Caggiano, who is also a military bishop, signs Onganía's decree of assumption to the presidency and participates in all the official ceremonies. Onganía and a group of prominent generals go on spiritual retreats where they undergo the influence of the Catholic fundamentalist groups Verbe and La Cité Catholique, both of which originated in France.

1968:
A detachment of half a dozen guerrillas, members of the Peronist Armed Forces, is routed in the province of Tucumán.

1969:
On May 29, columns of workers and students occupy Córdoba, the country's second largest city, in protest against Onganía's socioeconomic policies. The police are overwhelmed, and the army intervenes and fires into the crowd in order to regain control of the city. That same day, an unknown

guerrilla commando kills Augusto Vandor, leader of the metallurgical workers, who is denounced as a paradigm of the alliance between the Peronist union bureaucracy and the military establishment.

Amid the commotion caused by both episodes, Nelson Rockefeller arrives in Argentina as part of his mission through Latin America. In the report he sends to President Nixon, he describes a growing Communist threat, praises the role of the armed forces, and recommends strengthening the continent's police forces as the first line of combat.

Onganía announces a procession to the sanctuary of Luján in order to consecrate Argentina to the heart of the Virgin Mary. But the Catholic Church is divided: under the auspices of the Second Vatican Council and the meeting of the Latin American Catholic Church in Medellín, many Bishops and priests defend the so-called choice for the poor, justify a violent response to oppression, and support a dialogue between Catholics and Marxists. All the conditions for a militarization of politics are present.

1970:
A commando from the new organization known as the Montoneros, which takes its name from the irregular parties of gauchos who resisted pro-British liberalism during the nineteenth century, kidnaps former dictator Aramburu on May 29. The Montoneros' members emerged from the group known as Catholic Action and participated in social work camps led by priests in the country's poorest regions. The Montoneros combine personal attacks against members of the military and union leaders with community work among the poor and political organizing of the Peronist Youth. After a mock trial for the 1956 shootings, Aramburu is killed in a cellar, and his corpse is submerged in quicklime. From his exile in Madrid, Perón approves of the deed and congratulates the Montoneros, whose first communication commends Aramburu's soul to God.

Onganía is overthrown by the army, which puts in his place the military attaché in Washington, General Roberto Levingston, a counterinsurgency specialist. Massive demonstrations to protest the socioeconomic situation and demand a new political beginning take place across the country, which becomes ungovernable by the military. While the Peronist trade unions are negotiating agreements with the government, a resistance against the military dictatorship is organized by grass roots union leaders, the Montoneros, and the Peronist Youth. The same fracture that had split the Church is now dividing Peronism. Perón says he must act as "The Holy Father" and give his blessing to all the conflicting sectors.

Small Marxist guerrilla organizations known as the "People's Revolutionary army" (ERP) and the "Revolutionary Armed Forces" (FAR) also begin to take action. Both groups are inspired by the Cuban, Chinese, and Vietnamese

experiences, but while the ERP remains faithful to Marxist orthodoxy, the FAR begins a process of approximating itself to the mass movement of Peronism.

1971:
The chief of the army, General Alejandro Lanusse, deposes Levingston, assumes the presidency, and calls elections in which, for the first time, the Peronists are permitted to participate. His idea is to strip the guerrillas of their most powerful rallying point and isolate them politically and socially, given the difficulty of suppressing them by force.

1972:
With the help of the Catholic Church, the military had been keeping Evita's embalmed body hidden in a cemetery in Italy; as a gesture of goodwill, Lanusse now returns it to Perón in Madrid. Lanusse passes a law establishing that only those who were residing in the country before August are eligible to be candidates in the upcoming elections and challenges Perón during a meeting of the top ranks of the military: "I don't think he has the guts to come back." Perón returns to Argentina in November, acclaimed by mass demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people. Since the deadline has passed and he is ineligible to be a candidate, he designates his personal representative, Héctor J. Cámpora, to run for the presidency and returns to Madrid. The campaign's central buzz word is "Cámpora to the government, Perón to power," and the slogan "FAR and the Montoneros are our companions" is chanted at every Peronist rally, which infuriates the military.

On August 22, after faking an escape attempt, the navy executes a dozen guerrillas imprisoned at its base in Trelew. Their bodies are laid out in the central headquarters of the Justicialista Party, but its doors are broken down by the police, who take away the coffins in order to keep the bodies from being autopsied.

1973:
Cámpora is elected president on March 11. For his swearing-in ceremony on May 25, he invites Chilean President Salvador Allende and the Cuban Osvaldo Dorticós. His first decision is to free all the imprisoned guerrillas; this is unanimously approved by Congress, which also dissolves as unconstitutional a special tribunal created to try them. As they arrive from the country's various jails, the prisoners are given a hero's welcome in the provincial government houses. The FAR merges with the Montoneros into a single organization.

On June 20, Perón finally returns to the country. His private secretary and one of Cámpora's ministers, José López Rega, a former chief of police

and an astrologer, calls on unionists and members of the military to organize an armed contingent to be positioned on the stage above the crowd gathered near Ezeiza Airport during Perón's first public appearance in Argentina. The crowd begins to assemble the night before and is estimated at more than a million people. When the columns of the Peronist Youth approach, they are fired upon from above. The crowd scatters and at least thirteen people are killed and three hundred wounded by bullets.

Perón comes out against the Montoneros and forces Cámpora to resign. Raúl Lastiri, López Rega's son-in-law, assumes the presidency for an interim period and calls new elections. On September 23, Perón is elected president for the third time, on a ticket completed by his wife Isabelita. Two days later, the Montoneros kill the general secretary of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), José Rucci, a trade unionist, as one of those responsible for what happened in Ezeiza, but they do not claim responsibility for the attack in order not to enrage Perón. The ERP continues kidnapping U.S. businessmen and demanding ransom for them and attacking army facilities.

1974:
On May 1, Perón calls the Montoneros "immature imbeciles," whereupon they turn their backs on him and leave the Plaza de Mayo half empty. Perón dies on June 1 and Isabelita assumes the presidency, while López Rega governs from behind the throne. The Triple A (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance) begins to take action, kidnapping and assassinating intellectuals and politicians suspected of links to the guerrillas. In September, the Montoneros announce they are going back underground. The ERP opens a rural guerrilla front in the northern province of Tucumán.

1975:
Without the political umbrella of Peronism, the Montoneros' actions lose their mass character and their acceptance. Isabelita charges the army with controlling the growing social agitation, and Ricardo Balbín, the leader of the opposition party, the Radical Civic Union, says that the striking workers constitute an "industrial guerrilla group." The government orders the army to "annihilate the actions of subversion," first in Tucumán, then throughout the country. The first leader of the troops in Tucumán is General Adel Vilas, a disciple of the French, who defends torture as the weapon of choice in this type of battle and advocates the extension of the conflict to the universities. He is succeeded by General Domingo Bussi, who studied counterinsurgency in Vietnam.

Swept out of Tucumán, the ERP attempts, in the final days of the year, a desperate attack on a Buenos Aires military installation. The attack's

failure ultimately leads to the organization's demise. The Montoneros attack a military facility in the province of Formosa, something only the ERP had done until that point, and they are also repelled with heavy losses.

The president of the bishopric, Monseñor Adolfo Tortolo, announces to an audience of business people that a purification process will soon be carried out. The Order for Army Operations includes dispensations for special methods of interrogation, a euphemism for torture. The navy follows suit; the commander of naval operations, Admiral Luis Mendía, communicates this to navy officers in the Puerto Belgrano naval base. He maintains that these methods, as well as the elimination of living prisoners by throwing them into the sea, have been approved by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. But because of the international isolation of the Chilean dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, the Argentine military must keep its procedures carefully under wraps.

1976:

On March 23, the commanders in chief of the army, the navy and the air force pay a visit to Monseñor Tortolo at the bishopric's headquarters. Hours later, on March 24, they overthrow and imprison Isabel Perón. The governor of the province of La Rioja, Carlos Menem, and other Peronist leaders, are confined to a navy prison ship anchored in the port of Buenos Aires. Once again, the Congress and the Supreme Court are dissolved. Clandestine concentration camps are set up in units of the armed and security forces, and those who are abducted are taken to them, always secretly and without any judicial order. There they are tortured, then covertly murdered. In a meeting of the bishopric, Tortolo defends torture with theological arguments.

The military junta designates the chief of the army, General Jorge Videla, to be president, but the junta is being torn apart by internal conflicts. Old jealousies are erupting between the army and the navy, led by Admiral Emilio Massera, who maintains that the junta is the organ of maximum power and Videla no more than its delegated administrator.

In the plans approved by the military junta, it falls to the army to command the operations of the dirty war, and the jurisdictions are clearly determined. But Massera does not respect those agreements and invades the jurisdiction of the army as a way of accumulating intramilitary power. His instrument for doing so is the Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA), where a clandestine concentration camp is operating. The task force that administers it answers directly to the chief of the navy, who personally participates in certain operations.

In June, an army patrol brings down the leader of the ERP, Roberto Santucho, and the dismantling of that organization is complete.

Also in June, at a breakfast during a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Chile, Argentine Foreign Minister Admiral César Guzzetti tells Secretary of State Henry Kissinger what the Argentine military is doing. Kissinger replies that they have to finish off the terrorists before the installation of the new U.S. Congress in January 1977. Kissinger is counting on the reelection of Gerald Ford, who is defeated in November by Jimmy Carter.

1977:

The Argentine military considers Carter's human rights policies a betrayal and establishes links with members of the ultraconservative opposition, such as Senator Jesse Helms. Videla meets with Carter's envoy, Patricia Derian, and tells her he cannot control the lower ranks.

On March 25, the writer and journalist Rodolfo J. Walsh is abducted after having distributed an "Open Letter to the Military Junta," in which he denounced the torture and murder of prisoners.

On Christmas Eve, the members of the founding nucleus of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, which had been infiltrated by Lieutenant Alfredo Astiz, are abducted from the Church of the Holy Cross. They are tortured in the ESMA by Lieutenant Antonio Pernías and never reappear.

1978:

Admiral Massera retires. His successor, Armando Lambruschini, consults with the papal nuncio, Pio Laghi, on the situation of the prisoners. He doesn't want to kill them, but if he leaves them alive he is afraid they will reveal what they saw.

1979:

The Interamerican Commission on Human Rights of the OAS visits Argentina.

1980:

The OAS report appears; it states that the thousands of disappeared persons have been killed by official forces and that the alarming and systematic use of torture has been proven. The government responds that the state is exercising its power of self-defense and using the "appropriate means." Adolfo Pérez Esquivel of the Service of Peace and Justice, who denounces the massive violations of human rights, receives the Nobel Peace Prize.

After Somoza is overthrown by the Sandinistas, the Argentine military trains the first contingents of the Contras, by agreement with the CIA. They also instruct members of the militaries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador on torture methods.

1981:
A year of economic crisis and a rapid turnover of military presidents. In March, General Roberto Viola succeeds Videla; in December, General Leopoldo Galtieri removes Viola from office. The political parties demand that elections be held for the first time in a decade and the unions demand economic improvements.

1982:
On April 2, the military junta occupies the Malvinas, Georgias, and South Sandwich Islands, which have been controlled by Great Britain since the first decades of the nineteenth century. Margaret Thatcher's government sends a powerful fleet to recover them. The navy, which had encouraged the occupation, withdraws its fleet to the coast at the news that the United Kingdom is using nuclear submarines. Astiz is captured by the British after surrendering the South Georgias Islands without resistance. Ultimately, Argentina loses the war. Galtieri is deposed by his peers. Fatally wounded, the dictatorship calls elections.

1983:
In July, the courts order the arrest of Massera for the murder of a mistress's husband, the businessman Fernando Branca, who was invited for a sail on the yacht Massera used as chief of the navy and never appeared.

In September, the military junta passes an autoamnesty for all members of the military charged with human rights violations. In October the leader of the Radical Civic Union, Raúl Alfonsín, wins the presidency with 52 percent of the vote; it is the first time the Peronist movement has been defeated in clean elections. He is sworn into office on December 10. The new Congress nullifies the autoamnesty. Alfonsín creates a presidential commission of leading members of the society to investigate human rights violations and asks the courts to press charges against Videla, Massera, and other leaders of the dirty war.

1984:
At the demand of the national government, which wants the military to purge itself, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces orders the arrest of the three commanders in chief who held power in 1976. The National Commission on the Disappeared, presided over by the writer Ernesto Sábato, delivers its report to the president. The report states that human rights were violated in an institutional and state-ordained manner and that after being tortured the disappeared were thrown into the river or into the sea. Nine thousand cases are verified, with the names and surnames of the deceased, but the actual figure is believed to be higher. In a collective response, the Supreme Council

affirms that the orders given by the former commanders were perfectly correct. The Federal Chamber removes the case from the military courts and carries on with the trial, which is extended to include the two military juntas that succeeded the first one. In all, nine former military leaders are charged, three of whom were also de facto presidents.

1985:
Between April and September, the Federal Chamber hears testimony from survivors of the clandestine concentration camps and national and international leaders (such as Patricia Derian) for twelve hours a day. On December 9, Videla and Massera are sentenced to life imprisonment for treasonous homicides, illegal deprivations of liberty, torture, and robbery; former general Roberto Viola, former admiral Armando Lambruschini, and former brigadier general Ramón Agosti all receive prison sentences as well, and all those convicted are also dishonorably discharged from the armed forces.

The sentencing order describes the "criminal plan" adopted by the former military leaders which consisted in "apprehending suspects, keeping them secretly in captivity under inhuman conditions, subjecting them to torture in the aim of obtaining information so as ultimately to put them at the disposition of the courts or the National Executive Power or else to eliminate them physically." It also establishes the responsibility of those who carried out these men's orders directly and states that obedience to orders does not excuse those who carried out aberrant crimes.

1986:
The Supreme Court confirms the convictions, though it reduces Viola's and Agosti's sentences. The Federal Chamber hands down prison sentences to the former chiefs of police of Buenos Aires, Colonel Ramón Camps and General Pablo Ovidio Riccheri, and to their former assistant chief, Commissioner Miguel Osvaldo Etchecolatz, as well as to Dr. Jorge Bergés and Corporal Norberto Cozzani. The entire pyramid of repression is thus covered, from the highest-ranking military leaders to the low ranking policemen and civilian collaborators.

The same court takes over the trial for the events at the Navy School of Mechanics. Alarmed by the military repercussions of the convictions, Alfonsín persuades Congress to sanction a law known as Full Stop: the judges will have 60 days to bring charges against all those implicated in human rights violations. Once that time has elapsed, all such cases will be considered invalid.

1987:
In February, when the sixty-day statute of limitations ends, Federal Chambers throughout the country have not brought charges against thirty or

forty members of the military, as the government had hoped, but against almost four hundred. In the ESMA proceedings, the Federal Chamber of the Capital orders the arrest of nineteen men, among them admirals, officers, and noncommissioned officers. As the summonses continue to reach officers facing charges in other parts of the country, the military tension grows.

On April 15, Lieutenant Colonel Ernesto Barreiro ignores a summons from the Federal Chamber of Córdoba to give testimony in response to charges of torture and treasonous homicide. Lieutenant Colonel Aldo Rico occupies the School of Infantry in the largest military garrison in Argentina. His commandos, known as the *carapintadas* because their faces are painted, demand that the trials of their comrades be brought to a halt. "The shifting terrain of the law and judicial chicanery is not the soldier's natural habitat. The soldier is trained to show his teeth and bite; combat is his proper environment and his power resides in holding a monopoly on violence," he explains in a document. The president orders the uprising to be repressed, but the military columns take several days to travel a few hundred kilometers. In front of the Legislative Assembly, Alfonsín declares that no civilian or member of the military can use force to negotiate his judicial situation and reaffirms the equality of all before the law. He announces to a crowd that has gathered in the Plaza de Mayo to condemn the uprising that he will go personally to the garrisons to demand the surrender of the *carapintadas*. Upon his return, he calls them "the heroes of the Malvinas war" and asks the demonstrators to disperse, stating that "the house is in order." He bids them good-bye with a disconcerting, "Happy Easter."

In July, he persuades Congress to approve the law of Due Obedience, which exempts from guilt those who tortured or murdered in fulfillment of orders. Only the former military leaders and a select group of generals and former leaders of army corps and security zones remain in prison. Among those set free are Astiz and Pernías.

1988:

The *carapintadas* take part in two new uprisings, the first led by Rico and the second by Colonel Mohamed Alí Seineldín, a former adviser to Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega. Seineldín says he is receiving directives from the Virgin Mary.

1989:

In January, a remnant of the vanished People's Revolutionary Army occupies the military facility of La Tablada after denouncing a pact between the *carapintadas* and the Peronists which is intended to force Alfonsín to resign.

International credit organizations cut off Argentina's financing, which unleashes a run against the peso. In May, the Peronist candidate Carlos Menem is elected president. Hyperinflation devalues salaries and supermarkets are ransacked for food in several parts of the country. Alfonsín resigns from the presidency and Menem assumes it five months before his term officially begins. In October, he signs a pardon for four hundred officers and noncommissioned officers charged in the *carapintada* rebellions (among them Rico and Seineldín) and for the three former commanders in chief sentenced by the military courts for their role in the Malvinas war, as well as four dozen generals, admirals, colonels, and captains who remained in prison for human rights violations.

1990:

In December, Seineldín leads a new uprising, 48 hours before the arrival in Argentina of President George Bush; the rebellion is put down, weapon in hand, by the assistant chief of staff of the army, General Martín Balza. Menem wants to have the prisoners shot, but is dissuaded by his advisers. Days later, he pardons the former members of the military junta sentenced by the courts, as well as the Montonero leaders Mario Firmenich (sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment), Fernando Vaca Narvaja, and Roberto Perdía (who was living in exile).

1995:

Lieutenant Commander Adolfo Scilingo becomes the first member of the Argentine military to speak openly and at length about his participation in the dirty war.

Key Figures

Acosta, Jorge A. ("El Tigre"):
Chief of intelligence of the task force at the Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA) from 1976 to 1978, while Massera was commander in chief. The navy forced him to retire when a photograph of him with a showgirl who was wearing his officer's cap appeared in a magazine. Arrested on charges of illegal deprivation of liberty, torture, and homicide in February 1987, he was set free that same year under the Due Obedience law.

Agosti, Ramón:
A former brigadier general and commander in chief of the air force, he was part of the military junta that took control of the government on March 24, 1976. The civilian courts sentenced him to four and a half years' imprisonment. The Supreme Court reduced the sentence to three years and nine months, which he finished serving in June 1988. He is the only member of the military who served the entire sentence given him by the courts.

Alfonsín, Raúl:
President of Argentina, democratically elected in 1983 by the Radical Civic Union. He formed a commission to investigate the disappearances that took place during the military dictatorship and ordered that nine former

commanders in chief of the armed forces, among them three former de facto presidents, be brought to trial. In 1987, after the first *carapintada* uprising, he sent Congress the law of Due Obedience, which exempted the direct executors of the crimes committed during the dirty war from responsibility. Because of hyperinflation and the looting of supermarkets, he resigned from the presidency in May 1989, five months before completing his term of office.

Anchézar, Juan Carlos:
Retired vice admiral. He worked very closely with Massera and was the person who certified that Scilingo was not experiencing psychiatric difficulties. Menem appointed him undersecretary of State Intelligence.

Arduino, Adolfo:
As defense chief of the ESMA, he ordered Scilingo to go on his first flight. No charges were ever brought against him. In 1988 he became a vice admiral, and the following year he retired.

Arosa, Ramón:
Admiral, chief of staff of the navy under Alfonsín from 1983 to 1989. He was Scilingo's commanding officer at the Military House of the Presidency.

Astiz, Alfredo:
Commander. Was a member of the task force at ESMA. In 1987 he was arrested and charged with illegal deprivation of liberty and the torturing to death of political prisoners, among them two French nuns. He was set free by the law of Due Obedience, but the Chamber of Appeals in Paris sentenced him to life imprisonment in absentia, and therefore he cannot leave Argentina.

Balza, Martín Antonio:
General, chief of staff of the army from 1991 to the present. He was outside of Argentina during the first years of the military dictatorship and later he fought in the Malvinas (Falklands) war. In 1990, he repressed the last of the *carapintada* uprisings, weapon in hand. In 1995, and during the debate that followed the publication of this book, he acknowledged the atrocities that were committed by the army during the dirty war and offered a modern doctrine of obedience: a soldier must disobey immoral or illegal orders.

Barreiro, Ernesto Guillermo ("Nabo"):
Former lieutenant colonel. He was the chief torturer at the army concentration camp in Córdoba. On April 15, 1987, he ignored a summons from the

civilian courts that sought to question him on charges of torture and treasonous homicide and took refuge in a military facility. Thus began the Easter Week uprising, which culminated in the law of Due Obedience, exempting all officers below the rank of general from prosecution.

Bignone, Benito:
General. The last military dictator. He was appointed by his peers in June 1982, after the disastrous Malvinas war, and handed over the presidency to Raúl Alfonsín in December 1983. Upon leaving office he was arrested by the civilian authorities for the disappearance of two enlisted soldiers from a military unit under his command. The military courts left him at liberty during the trial, which ended with the law of Due Obedience.

Bonafini, Hebe:
One of the leaders of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who have demonstrated in front of the Pink House (Argentina's White House) for their disappeared children every Thursday since April 1977. Two of her children are among the disappeared.

Chamorro, Rubén Jacinto:
Admiral, director of ESMA. Under the aliases "Máximo" and "Delfín" (Dolphin) he commanded the ESMA task force that operated after the 1976 coup. He was arrested and charged with illegal deprivation of liberty, torture, and the murder of prisoners. He died in jail in 1986.

Daleo, Graciela:
A leader of the Peronist guerilla group, the Montoneros, who was abducted in 1977. She was tortured at ESMA and set free in 1979. She was a witness in the trial of the former military leaders and was the only person who did not accept Menem's pardon in 1989, but the Supreme Court declared that the pardon could not be rejected.

Devoto, Jorge:
Retired navy lieutenant junior grade. After going to his commander in chief to ask about his father-in-law, who had been abducted, Devoto never reappeared. Scilingo heard rumors at ESMA that Devoto was thrown into the sea while conscious.

Domon, Alice and Duquet, Leonie:
The two French nuns abducted in December 1977 by the task force based at ESMA, where they were tortured and murdered.

Ferrer, Jorge Osvaldo:
Admiral, chief of staff of the navy between 1989 and 1993. As commander of the navy's only aircraft carrier, he was the commanding officer who helped Scilingo retire from the navy.

Firmenich, Mario Eduardo:
Chief of the Peronist guerrillas known as the Montoneros. Extradited from Brazil in 1984. In 1986 he was sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment for kidnapping the businessmen Juan and Jorge Born. Menem pardoned him in 1990.

Galtieri, Leopoldo:
Former general, one of the leaders of the repression in the provinces of Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, Corrientes, Chaco, Formosa, and Misiones. He took control of the government by force in December 1981. In April 1982, he ordered the occupation of the Malvinas, or Falkland Islands, and in June of that year he was thrown out of the presidency after the defeat by Great Britain. In 1986, the military courts sentenced him to fourteen years in prison for his role in the Malvinas war, and in 1988 the civil courts reduced the sentence to twelve years. He was also tried for human rights violations committed during the dirty war. Menem pardoned him in 1989.

Hagelin, Dagmar:
A seventeen-year-old girl of Swedish-Argentine extraction captured by the ESMA task force on January 27, 1977, during an operation in which Astiz wounded her in the back. She never reappeared. The Federal Chamber considered the case against Astiz to have been proven, but absolved him in December 1986 because the statute of limitations had expired.

Harguindeguy, Albano Eduardo:
Army general. Chief of police in 1975 and minister of the interior for the military government from 1976 to 1981. Tried for the extortionist kidnapping of two businessmen. Menem pardoned him in 1989.

Hesayne, Miguel Esteban:
Bishop of Viedma, in Patagonia. One of the few members of the Church hierarchy who condemned torture and stood up to the military government. Called for the Conference of Bishops to repent for not having done the same.

Ibáñez, Victor:
Noncommissioned army officer who was in charge of guarding the prisoners at the largest concentration camp in Buenos Aires. After Scilingo's

confession, he revealed that the army also threw prisoners into the sea. He identified half a dozen of the victims. The following day, Balza made a public admission of the facts.

Juppé, Alain:
In 1994, as France's minister of foreign relations, he met with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires and declared that his country would not forget the two nuns "tortured and murdered for their way of thinking." In 1995, as prime minister of France, he supported his ambassador's expressions of displeasure with the chief of the navy's praise for Commander Astiz's "moral condition." French ambassador Renaud Vignal called Astiz "a murderer." Because of that episode, the government forced Astiz to request retirement.

Laghi, Pio:
The papal nuncio to Argentina from 1974 to 1981. Played tennis with Massera and consulted with his successor, Armando Lambruschini. According to the wife of a disappeared man, to whom Laghi was of some assistance, Lambruschini asked the Vatican's representative what to do with a group of forty prisoners whom he didn't want to kill but who he was afraid would reveal what they had lived through. Previously, the navy had smuggled another group of prisoners out of the country with visas the military vicar's office had obtained thanks to Laghi's contact with the Venezuelan ambassador. The nuncio saved several lives, but never condemned what he knew was taking place.

Lambruschini, Armando:
Commander in chief of the navy and a member of the military junta between 1978 and 1981. In 1985, the civilian courts sentenced him to eight years' imprisonment for illegal deprivation of liberty and torture. In 1978, the Montoneros exploded a bomb inside his house and his fifteen-year-old daughter Paula was killed. Menem pardoned him in 1990.

López, Fausto:
Retired admiral, former director of personnel and third in command of the navy. When Scilingo wrote his initial letters demanding that the truth be told about the disappeared, López first offered him money to shut up, then threatened to strip him of his naval benefits. Menem made him second in command of internal security.

López Rega, José:
A police corporal and esoteric astrologer known as "El Brujo" ("The Sorcerer"), he became the butler at Perón's house in Madrid. Upon returning to Argentina in 1973, he was appointed a minister and promoted to commissioner general of the police. Once in power, he organized the death squads known as the Triple A. Pressure from the military forced him to leave the government and the country in 1975. After a decade during which his whereabouts were a mystery, he was arrested in Miami, Florida, in 1986 and extradited to Argentina. He died in prison in 1989.

Maggio, Horacio Domingo:
A Montonero union leader. In 1978, he managed to escape from ESMA and revealed what was taking place there, but he was recaptured and killed by the task force.

Martínez de Perón, María Estela "Isabelita":
A cabaret dancer whom Juan D. Perón, thirty years her senior, met and married during his exile in Franco's Spain. In 1973, she was elected vice president and assumed the presidency on July 1, 1974, after Perón's death. During her brief and chaotic tenure in office, López Rega organized the death squads known as the Triple A. She was overthrown by the military on March 24, 1976.

Massera, Emilio Eduardo:
Commander in chief of the navy after 1975 and from 1976 to 1978 a member of the military junta that overthrew the government of Isabel Perón. Arrested in 1983 by the civilian courts for the murder of a mistress's husband. In 1985, the Federal Chamber of Buenos Aires sentenced him to life imprisonment. Menem pardoned him in 1990.

Massot, Vicente:
Vice minister of defense under President Menem. Recommended that Menem request the Senate to confirm the promotions of Rolón and Pernías. Resigned in January 1994 over the resulting scandal.

Mayorga, Horacio:
Admiral, was chief of naval aviation and Astiz's defender in the military courts. The first navy officer to acknowledge that torture was used on the prisoners at ESMA.

Mendía, Luis María:
Vice admiral, in 1976 was commander of naval operations and as such drew up the plans for the navy's participation in the dirty war. Announced to all the officers at the country's largest naval base that prisoners would be secretly executed and that the method of the flight had been approved by

the church hierarchy. He was tried in 1984 but set free because the statute of limitations had expired.

Menem, Carlos:
President of Argentina, democratically elected in 1989 by the Justicialista Party. After a constitutional reform, he was reelected in 1995. In 1990, he pardoned the former members of the military junta who had ordered his arrest in 1976.

Mignone, Emilio:
President of the Center for Legal and Social Studies, a human rights organization. His daughter Mónica was kidnapped in 1976 along with the nun Mónica Quinteiro and never reappeared. He filed a lawsuit that eventually persuaded the courts to declare a right to mourning and the burial of bodies, but the armed forces continued to deny that they had any information about his daughter.

Molina Pico, Enrique Emilio:
Admiral, appointed chief of staff of the navy by President Carlos Menem in 1993. Fought in the Malvinas war. His wife's sister was Mónica Quinteiro, the nun who was abducted, tortured, and killed by the ESMA task force in 1976.

Moreno Ocampo, Luis:
Former prosecutor who brought charges against Videla, Massera, Pernías, and Astiz. In 1991, Scilingo confessed his participation in the flights to Moreno Ocampo, who told him that the judicial process was closed and did not make the confession public.

Pernías, Antonio:
Naval commander whose promotion was rejected by the Senate in 1994. After the 1976 military coup, he was a member of the ESMA task force. In 1987, he was arrested and accused of torturing political prisoners to death, among them the two French nuns. He was set free by the law of Due Obedience.

Perón, Juan D.:
The central figure in twentieth-century Argentine politics. Army general and constitutional president between 1946 and 1955, when he was overthrown by a military coup. He returned after eighteen years in exile and was reelected in 1973. He died in office in July 1974.

Quinteiro, Mónica:
Catholic nun abducted in 1976 and seen by other prisoners at ESMA. She never reappeared. Her sister is the wife of Menem's chief of staff of the navy, Admiral Molina Pico.

Quinteiro, Oscar:
Retired captain. Father of Mónica Quinteiro and father-in-law of Admiral Molina Pico. He interceded with Massera, who had once been his student, on his daughter's behalf. Massera told him his daughter was not being held by the navy.

Rico, Aldo:
Leader of the April 1987 *carapintada* rebellion demanding that President Alfonsín put an end to the trials of members of the military for their actions during the dirty war. Today he is the national representative of a small right-wing party aligned with the government.

Rolón, Juan Carlos:
Navy commander whose promotion was rejected by the Senate in 1994. After the 1976 military coup, he was a member of the ESMA task force.

Sábato, Ernesto:
Argentine novelist and painter. In 1984, presided over the National Commission on the Disappeared.

Solarz de Osatinsky, Sara:
Her husband, Montonero leader Marcos Osatinsky, and two teenage children were killed by the military. She was held prisoner at ESMA from May 14, 1977 to December 19, 1978. In 1979, together with her companions in captivity Ana María Martí and María Alicia Milia de Pirles, she presented lengthy testimony before the French National Assembly, in which she mentioned the flights that were used to kill the prisoners.

Timerman, Jacobo:
Owner and editor of the daily paper *La Opinión*. In April 1977, he was kidnapped by the military and his newspaper was seized. In 1979, the Supreme Court ordered that he be set free and the military junta deported him. During his testimony in the 1985 trial, he said that Massera and other navy officers justified the clandestine killings because "it would be very difficult to send people to the firing squad against the Pope's wishes."

Urien, Julio César:
Ensign who received instruction on torturing at ESMA in 1971. In November 1972, he tried to foment a revolt at ESMA in support of Perón's

return. He became a member of the Montoneros and was arrested in 1975. He remained a prisoner until the end of the dictatorship.

Vaca, Lieutenant:
A lawyer and cousin of Tigre Acosta who joined the ESMA task force under the pretext of being a member of the military. He participated in Scilingo's first flight, and Scilingo accuses him of having, for purely personal reasons, planned the kidnapping and murder of a woman lawyer who was not at all politically active.

Videla, Jorge Rafael:
Commander in chief of the army after 1975 and a member of the military junta that overthrew Isabel Perón's government. He was de facto president of the country until 1981. In 1985, the Federal Chamber of Buenos Aires sentenced him to life imprisonment and stripped him of the rank of general. Menem pardoned him in 1990.

Villar, Alberto:
Police commissioner, former chief of police, reviled as an organizer of the death squads known as the Triple A. Killed by the Montoneros in 1975. Twenty years later, Menem vindicated him as "one of the greatest leaders."

Viola, Roberto:
Successively chief of staff and commander in chief of the army after the 1976 coup. The military junta designated him to succeed Videla as president. During a visit to the United States as president-elect in 1990, he said that if the Nazis had won the war, the Nuremberg trials would have taken place in Richmond, Virginia. He became president in March 1991, but was overthrown in December by the man to whom he had yielded command of the army, Leopoldo Galtieri, who claimed he was acting for health reasons. Sentenced to seventeen years' imprisonment in 1985. The Supreme Court reduced the sentence to sixteen and a half years. Menem pardoned him in 1990, and he died in 1994.

Walsh, Rodolfo:
One of the greatest Argentine writers of the twentieth century, author of short stories, detective novels, investigative reports on the political violence, and plays. He was linked to the Montonero guerrillas but had disagreements with the group's national leadership, whose militarism he objected to. After the 1976 military coup, he organized the clandestine diffusion of information on the horrors of the dictatorship's concentration camps. On March 25, 1977, after he had disseminated by mail an "Open

Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta," which Gabriel García Márquez described as "a masterpiece of universal journalism," a squad from ESMA under Astiz's command tried to kidnap him. Walsh resisted and was riddled with bullets. A prisoner saw his body at ESMA, where it may have been incinerated.