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Former officers are sent back to Haiti

They face prison for role in killings

BY ALFONSO CHARDY

achardy@herald.com

In two nightmarish days in April 1994, Haitian soldiers and paramilitary allies rampaged through a poor seaside neighborhood that was a stronghold of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the democratically elected president overthrown in a 1991 military coup.

When it ended, at least 26 unarmed civilians had been killed, men, women and children shot or beaten to death. Their bodies were buried in shallow graves turned over by pigs and dogs.

Carl Dorelien and Herbert Valmond, two Haitian military officers accused of orchestrating the massacre, fled to the United States after Aristide was restored to power. Valmond settled in Tampa and Dorelien in Port St. Lucie, where he won \$3.2 million in the Florida Lottery .

On Monday, justice finally caught up with them.

The two men, who were convicted in Haiti in absentia for their roles in the mass killings, were sent home aboard a U.S government aircraft to begin serving their punishment for the killings that convulsed Raboteau almost 10 years ago.

Dorelien, a former colonel who was part of the group that ousted Aristide, and Valmond, a former lieutenant colonel, are the highest ranking military officers to be kicked out of the United States because of alleged human rights violations since the U.S. government began targeting suspected violators three years ago.

"The United States is not safe haven," said James Goldman, assistant director of investigations for the Miami district office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

"` You cannot commit crimes and atrocities against humankind somewhere in the world and then live happily ever after in the United States."

At least 45 foreign government officials and military officers from several countries have been arrested by immigration agents, most in Florida, since the so-called "persecutor" program was launched in early 2000.

About 25 of these suspects have been deported to their homelands, said Goldman, who oversees the program in Florida.

Immigration agents escorted the hand-cuffed Dorelien, 53, and Valmond, 52, aboard the aircraft that left Opa-locka Airport at 1:30 p.m. and landed 90 minutes later in Port-au-Prince.

There, the two men, who had both been in INS custody, were turned over to Haitian authorities, Goldman said.

Attorneys for Dorelien and Valmond could not be reached for comment yesterday. But both men have said they played no role in the Raboteau massacre, which led the Clinton administration to pursue a stronger campaign to return Aristide to power.

For human rights activists who had long sought the deportation and prosecution of the two men, the deportations were a vindication of their aggressive campaign to train a legal spotlight on people who have left behind nefarious pasts in their homelands.

"It's great," said Richard Krieger, whose Boynton Beach-based human rights group targets foreign torture suspects living in the United States. "It sends the word out that the United States will no longer tolerate human rights violators in its midst."

"It's a positive development," added Ira Kurzban, a Miami immigration lawyer who helped investigate the Raboteau massacre and who represents the Haitian government. "The United States must not harbor human rights violators."

Dorelien was arrested by INS agents at his home in Port St. Lucie in June 2001, while Valmond was picked up in April 2002 at his home in Tampa. Both were charged with overstaying their visas, but the INS produced evidence linking the two men to human rights violations. Dorelien faces a sentence of hard labor for life. Valmond's sentence could not be determined. Both can seek new trials in Haiti.

The two were held in INS custody at county jails until their cases were resolved.

LOST KEY BATTLE

Dorelien lost his last key legal battle on Jan. 13 when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit in Atlanta lifted a restraining order that had prohibited the INS from deporting him.

Dorelien also faces a civil lawsuit filed Friday in Miami federal court by a human rights group seeking compensation for a family of a victim of the 1994 massacre. Marie Jeanne Jean asked for unspecified compensation for the death of her husband, Michel Pierre. The San Francisco-based Center for Justice & Accountability sued Dorelien under the same legal theory the organization used successfully last year to convince a federal jury in West Palm Beach to order two former Salvadoran generals to pay \$54.6 million to three torture victims.

Dorelien won \$3.2 million in the state lottery on June 28, 1997. He held one of two winning tickets bought in Fort Pierce that split a jackpot of \$6.3 million, according to Florida Lottery records. Court records show Dorelien is to be paid in 20 annual installments of \$159,000 and there are no indications that his deportation will affect his ability to collect.

Valmond attempted unsuccessfully to stay in Florida by adjusting his immigration status as husband of a U.S. citizen. According to published reports, Valmond came to the United States to be with his wife, Elizabeth, and their children, who were living in Tampa.

ISSUED WARRANT

In 1998, Haitian authorities issued a warrant for Valmond's arrest for his alleged role in the Raboteau massacre.

Dorelien arrived in the United States in 1995 and sought asylum, but was refused because he had been implicated in the massacre. Before Dorelien and Valmond were deported, the highest profile torture suspect arrested by INS was Eriberto Mederos, a Cuban-American former nurse who had been convicted in Miami federal court of charges connected to the torture of dissidents at a psychiatric hospital in Cuba in the 1970s.

Mederos died shortly after being convicted. Had he been sentenced, he would have been stripped of his U.S. citizenship and placed in deportation proceedings.