

## The junta fugitive, a lottery win and a battle for justice in Haiti

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It was never clear exactly how many men, women and children were killed when Haitian troops and paramilitaries stormed through the seaside town of Raboteau in April 1994. Some of the bodies were buried in shallow graves where they were gnawed by animals, while others were flung into the ocean. At least two dozen people, and perhaps as many as 100, died.

Next week, nearly 13 years after the incident, a court in Miami will hear a case for damages against a former Haitian army officer convicted in relation to the killings. Col Carl Dorélien must be ruing his luck: had he not won millions of dollars on the Florida lottery after he fled from Haiti, it is unlikely lawyers would now be on his trail.

No one alleges that Col Dorélien was personally involved in the killings, carried out when the Caribbean nation was ruled by a military junta which had, with the assistance of the CIA, ousted the elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. But Col Dorélien was a member of the army's high command, and was responsible for discipline and military justice.

Campaigners say that although the junta's rule was marked by a wave of repression and killing of Mr Aristide's supporters, no members of the army or paramilitary forces were ever punished. "An estimated 5,000 supporters of the broad movement for progressive political change were killed during the 1991-94 military regime," said Charles Arthur of the UK-based Haiti Support Group.

When Mr Aristide was restored to power in late 1994, Col Dorélien and many other members of the junta fled to Florida. But any chances of keeping a low profile ended in 1997 when he won \$3.2m (£1.6m) in the state lottery.

Col Dorélien was convicted in absentia by a Haitian court in 2000 for conspiracy and complicity in murder in relation to the Raboteau killings, and three years later he was deported to Haiti by US authorities - only to be released from prison a year later.

In the new case, starting on Tuesday, the California-based Centre for Justice and Accountability (CJA) is seeking to have Col Dorélien's lottery assets, frozen by a previous court decision, awarded to two victims of the junta's repression.

The CJA says that the husband of one of the plaintiffs, Marie Jeanne Jean, was among the victims at Raboteau. The other plaintiff, Lexiuste Cajuste, was a union leader allegedly tortured by the junta in 1993.

"It's important to go as high up the chain of command as possible to act as a deterrent," said the CJA's executive director, Pamela Merchant. "After waiting more than 12 years, our clients will finally have their day in court, and for the first time one of the many high-ranking members of the Haitian armed forces, who found refuge in the US after the restoration of democracy to Haiti, will have to answer to a US jury for the allegations of widespread and severe human rights abuses."

A lawyer for Col Dorélien, who is still living in Haiti, insisted that his client was not involved in the 1994 killings and that he was only being pursued because of his lottery win. "The judgment against Mr Dorélien by the Haitian court has been set aside," he said. "I don't think they should be bringing the case here. He was not remotely responsible for anything that happened in Raboteau. He was a colonel in Haiti's army but he was an administrator."

When fighting his 2003 extradition to Haiti, Col Dorélien claimed in a letter to the then US Attorney General John Ashcroft that he had become a "sacrificial lamb". He also said Haitian troops at Raboteau acted in self-defence after being attacked by a mob.

Mr Aristide was ousted a second time in 2004, again with the support of elements in Washington. He is now living in South Africa.