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Honduran couple details how they were tortured

A married couple testified in Miami federal court how people they believed were Honduran soldiers abducted and tortured them for several days in 1982.

BY ALFONSO CHARDY

achardy@MiamiHerald.com



The horrors of a secret torture chamber in Honduras were recounted in a federal courtroom in Miami on Thursday where a married couple told of soldiers repeatedly applying electric shocks to their bodies as soldiers screamed questions about leftist guerrillas.

Gloria and Oscar Reyes, who now live in Vienna, Va., said soldiers abducted them from their home in Tegucigalpa one night in 1982 and took them to a

house outside the Honduran capital where they were kept for days.

Both frequently broke down crying during the four-hour bench trial to determine compensatory and punitive damages in the case against retired Honduran Lt. Col. Juan Evangelista López Grijalba, a former Miami-Dade resident. He may be ordered to pay six plaintiffs in a torture-related lawsuit against him.

KICKED IN STOMACH

After a torture session ended, Gloria Reyes said, an officer appeared and she complained about the torture. "He hit me in the stomach hard with his boot, and I lost consciousness."

At one point U.S. District Judge Joan Lenard halted proceedings so Mrs. Reyes could regain her composure.

The case is the latest in a string of civil actions filed by the San Francisco-based human-rights organization Center for Justice & Accountability against foreign-born torture suspects living in the United States. In November, a federal jury in Memphis, Tenn.,

found Nicolás Carranza, former vice minister of defense and head of the Treasury Police in El Salvador, liable for murder and torture and ordered him to pay \$6 million to the plaintiffs. Carranza is appealing the verdict.

There is no evidence López Grijalba was among the Reyeses' tormentors, though one of the attorneys in the case told the court a witness placed the officer outside the Reyes' home the night the abduction occurred. Benjamine Reid, an attorney for the plaintiffs, said the men who abducted the Reyeses belonged to military intelligence units operating under López Grijalba's command.

López Grijalba was deported in 2004 after an immigration judge found him responsible for human-rights abuses in Honduras.

He was not represented in the courtroom on Thursday. But in the past López Grijalba has denied torture allegations.

'SPOKEN THE TRUTH'

Judge Lenard commended the Reyeses for coming forward.

"You have spoken the truth," Lenard told the couple when they finished testifying. "A painful truth . . . but it's important for the world to hear what you have said, especially in this forum, and in the history of this great country of ours, the United States of America."

Lenard indicated she will rule at a later date.

The case began on the evening of July 8, 1982, when masked gunmen raided the Reyeses' home on Los Pinos Avenue, a leafy residential road in the Colonia Florencia neighborhood of Tegucigalpa. Oscar Reyes was then a tenured journalism professor and his wife helped run a mini-market at their home.

Blindfolded, gagged and tied, the Reyeses were taken to a house outside Tegucigalpa where men proceeded to beat both in separate rooms and then applied electric shocks, they said.

"They asked 'Where are the guerrillas?' or 'Who are the guerrillas?' " Oscar Reyes testified. "Every time I said 'No, I don't have any information' they applied the electric shocks."

SENT TO NEW ORLEANS

Mrs. Reyes said she was asked repeatedly if her neighbors were guerrillas. Then, she said, she was taken to a room where her clothes were removed, her body was sprayed with water and then electric shocks were applied to her genitals.

Mrs. Reyes said her torturers applied so many electric shocks to the genital area that eventually it wouldn't stop bleeding. Her husband said his torturers applied the shocks all over his body -- but mostly in the genital area.

Eventually, the Reyeses said they were released on the condition they agreed to leave the country. When they agreed, they were taken to the airport and put on a plane to New Orleans.

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