



Physical Anthropology Section – 2005

H16 Disappearance, Torture, and Murder of Nine Individuals in a Community of Guatemala

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The goal of this presentation is to discuss a case in which fifteen individuals disappeared from the Ixil region of Guatemala between 1980 and 1982, and suggest the role that the Guatemalan Army played in the case.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating that nine of these individuals were victims of systematic torture and murder during the Guatemalan Civil War.

The committee for Historical clarification of Guatemala (CEH) registers 32 massacres which took place between 1980 and 1982 in the Ixil ethnic region of Guatemala. Also occurring during this time was the total or partial destruction of 90 villages in the area, and the displacement of a major part of the rural population from its territory. The case presented here involving the nine recovered individuals is from one of these 32 massacres. The purpose of this investigation is to give this case exposure and provide scientific evidence to the justice system in order to start a trial.

The investigations carried out by the CEH revealed the existence of a clandestine cemetery in the hamlet "Batzcorral." This case appears twice in the report, with different dates. The first version relates that during February 1982 the bodies of five persons displaying signs of torture were found in the above-mentioned hamlet. The second version mentions that during the year 1985 a battle between the army and the guerillas occurred. This was the reason why army members, as revenge, tortured, and executed fifteen persons, whose bodies where dismembered.

The testimonies gathered by the Fundacion de Antropologia Forense de Guatemala, through interviews with members of the families of the disappeared, indicate that after a battle between the guerillas and the army of Guatemala, the soldiers started to search the outskirts of Nebaj for individuals who were allegedly involved in the conflict. On July 10, 1982, five men where captured. Five weeks later 10 more were reported missing. According to the testimonies, some of them were at their places of business. Neighbors say that they saw army members taking the missing persons to the military base. The wife of one of the missing related that she went to the base and asked for her husband. She was told that he was not there and that he might have gone to another place.

On September 15 of the same year, the owner of a nearby field informed family members that he found bodies being bitten by dogs, and that they presented signs of torture. Therefore, family members and neighbors decided to dig a grave to bury the bodies.

In the results obtained by the FAFG, two clandestine graves were found. In total, nine incomplete skeletons and eighteen limb bones (twelve arms and six legs) were recovered.

During the analysis of the bones, it was found that the nine skeletons were male (eight adults and one subadult). Each case presented trauma caused by sharp and blunt forces to the arms and legs, as well as blunt force trauma to the ribs. Cuts to the clothing were also observed. Seven bodies were mutilated, which was, according to the CEH, typical during the civil war in Guatemala. The trauma to these individuals is evidence of systematic torture. Therefore, according to the International right, the crimes of torture and murder were committed in these cases.

Torture, Mutilation, Massacre