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Ex-Nazi Schaefer Captured in Argentina

by LADB Staff

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Paul Schaefer, the 84-year-old ex-Nazi and leader of a religious colony where political prisoners were allegedly tortured, has fallen into the hands of Chilean authorities after seven years on the lam. Argentine authorities captured Schaefer in early March and extradited him to Chile within days of his arrest, although they were not able to extradite three of his bodyguards, since they lacked an arrest order from Chile. Schaefer faces accusations that he raped children within his compound, known as Colonia Dignidad, and that he helped torture and disappear opponents of former dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990).

Pinochet regime crony was hiding in Argentina

The leader of the secretive German religious sect with close ties to the intelligence services of the Pinochet military dictatorship was arrested March 10 in Argentina. Schaefer, who eluded Chilean authorities for almost a decade, had been sought on 22 charges of child molestation and for his role in the 1974 disappearance of leftist activist Alvaro Vallejos of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR).

Chile President Ricardo Lagos told reporters that the arrest was the result of the persistence and collaboration of authorities in Chile and Argentina. "We are all happy," Lagos said. "As the old saying goes, justice may arrive late, but it will arrive."

The legal team representing Schaefer, which includes Maria Eugenia Correa and Michel Galasso Cabrolle, admits that they have a substantial challenge defending the elderly German. "One can't perform miracles," said Correa in an interview with Chilean daily El Mercurio, "but one can do one's work as professionally as possible." Schaefer, a German citizen who was detained on an international arrest warrant issued by Chile, is also wanted in Germany on child-molestation charges.

Chilean police had raided Colonia Dignidad now called Villa Baviera an enclave founded by Schaefer in the early 1960s. A heavily fortified estate protected by barbed wire, barricades, and hidden cameras, Villa Baviera is inhabited by an estimated 300 people, most of them German citizens, who for years had pledged their complete loyalty to Schaefer. A self-proclaimed "permanent uncle" to his followers, Schaefer is a cult leader whose sermons were said to often contain a heavy dose of anti-Semitic and anti-communist rhetoric.

Argentine police arrested Schaefer in a private, gated community in the Las Acacias neighborhood of the suburb of Tortuguita, north of Buenos Aires. Three others were also taken into custody, though the lack of an arrest order prevented the Argentine authorities from holding the three. After Chile emitted an international arrest order for the two men and one woman, all Chileans, Argentine police arrested them in the outskirts of Buenos Aires on April 5.
Cult leader accused of running torture and pedophilia camp

Schaefer was a medic in Hitler's army during World War II. After the war, he began an evangelical ministry and set up a youth home, purportedly to care for war orphans. But he was charged with sexually abusing two boys, and in 1961 he fled to Chile, reportedly accompanied by some 70 followers. After the Sept. 11, 1973, military coup, Schaefer reportedly formed a close alliance with Chile's secret police, including housing a torture and detention center for the secret police at his Colonia Dignidad.

The colony, near the city of Parral, some 350 km south of Santiago, grew to about 300 members mostly German immigrants or their descendants, but including some Chilean followers. The 137-sq km enclave boasted a school, a hospital, two airstrips, a restaurant, and a power station, and it reportedly made millions of dollars through a diversified range of businesses, including agriculture, mining, and real estate. It won over local people by offering jobs and free schooling and hospital care.

Details of life in the colony are hard to verify. Some visitors have described a scene from 1930s Germany, with women wearing aprons, with their hair in braids, and men in lederhosen. Defenders say the members of the colony may be eccentric, but they are harmless, and in fact do good.

"I know them, and I like them," Otto Dorr Zegers, a prominent Chilean psychiatrist who has worked in the Colonia Dignidad hospital, told The New York Times. "Their ideology is a little bit old-fashioned, like that of the Mennonites who went to the United States, but nothing justifies the coordinated, synchronized lies and distortions that have been invented about them."

But defectors from the camp paint a more sinister picture. Schaefer's accusers say Colonia Dignidad was his fiefdom, where he was worshipped as a god. They said residents, who were never allowed beyond the gates of the camp, were kept strictly segregated by gender so much so that the birth rate of the camp was extremely low. Residents were taught to shun sexual desires with electric shocks administered to the genitals of young boys, former residents said. And they accuse Schaefer of the almost daily sexual abuse of young boys.

Horror stories have emerged of the young sons of poor local families "disappearing" within the barriers of the compound. The son of Manuel Contreras former head of the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA), Chile's now-disbanded secret police has told the Los Angeles Times his father first visited Colonia Dignidad with Pinochet in 1974. He has spoken of the warm relationship that grew between his father and Schaefer. Former political prisoners of Pinochet have testified to a warren of stone-walled tunnels under the colony, where they were taken to be tortured with electric shocks to the strains of Wagner and Mozart.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Rettig Commission), which investigated human rights abuses during Pinochet's rule, backs such allegations. Despite decades of allegations concerning the sexual abuse of boys within the compound, charges were not filed against Schaefer until 1996.
six years after Chile began its return to democracy. Thanks to Schaefer's close links with Chile's ruling elite, the colony was able to operate with impunity as a "state within a state," said a Chilean congressional report.

Almost from the beginning, Schaefer and his aides were accused of keeping more than 300 German and Chilean residents against their will. Several former members who fled the enclave said married couples were forced to live in separate quarters and away from their children, according to court papers. The colony has been stripped of its status as a charitable organization and is under new leadership.

A spokesman for the colony, Michael Muller, praised the arrest of Schaefer, saying, "The time for justice has come." He added, "Our colony has reoriented its life, reorganized itself as an open, free colony, fully integrated to Chilean society."

### Supreme Court restores some immunity to Pinochet

Although President Lagos hailed the Schaefer arrest as a victory for Chileans seeking to punish the human rights criminals of the Pinochet era, the former dictator has escaped part of the prosecutions currently underway against him. Chile's Corte Suprema de Justicia (CSJ) on March 24 refused to strip Pinochet of his immunity from prosecution, blocking yet another attempt to try him for alleged human rights abuses during his dictatorship. The court's 15-4 vote rejected a lower-court ruling that would have stripped the 89-year-old former ruler of his legal immunity as former president. The CSJ did not immediately publish the text of its ruling, believed to be based mainly on Pinochet's deteriorated health.

On Dec. 2, the Santiago Court of Appeals had voted 14-9 to strip Pinochet of immunity at the request of Judge Alejandro Solis, who is investigating the September 1974 assassination in the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires of Gen. Carlos Prats, Pinochet's predecessor as army commander. Prats had opposed the coup that brought Pinochet to power. Prats and his wife Sophia Cuthbert, who had sought asylum in Argentina, were killed when a bomb blew up their automobile.

The investigation in Argentina traced the killing to Pinochet's security services. The latest CSJ decision did not end Pinochet's legal troubles, since he is currently being tried in a case involving Operation Condor, a joint plan developed by the South American military dictatorships of the 1970s to eliminate dissidents.

In addition, another judge is investigating the disclosure that he kept secret multimillion-dollar accounts at banks in the US. Pinochet still faces more than 200 criminal suits stemming from the massive human rights abuses during his dictatorship. While on some occasions the courts have pronounced him unfit to stand trial on health grounds, he has been tried and held under house arrest twice. Pinochet has been diagnosed with a mild case of dementia, he suffers from diabetes and arthritis and has a pacemaker.

### Pinochet antagonist Gladys Marin dies, thousands mourn

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In early March, individuals from diverse political and social sectors mourned the death of Gladys Marin, the veteran leader of the Partido Comunista de Chile (PCCh) and a major force in the struggle against the Pinochet dictatorship. The 63-year-old former lawmaker had asked for her remains to lie in state in the former National Congress building in Santiago.

Among the thousands who filed past her coffin were President Lagos who declared two days of national mourning March 7 and 8 and representatives of all of the country's political parties. Obituaries emphasized her lifelong political convictions. She was forced to go into hiding and then into exile in the Soviet Union in 1974, shortly after democratically elected President Salvador Allende was overthrown in the military coup led by Pinochet.

After almost five years in Moscow, Marin returned to Chile illegally in 1978 and lived under various aliases to escape detection and repression by the dictatorship's intelligence forces until 1990, when democracy returned to Chile and Marin resumed her public life. She had been struggling with cancer since 2003, traveling to Cuba for treatment at one point in her illness. Marin, a schoolteacher and avowed "Allendista," died surrounded by family, friends, and party comrades in the early morning of March 6.

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