

DAY THREE

*Guatemalan anthropologist, author and Jesuit priest **Ricardo Falla** presented the first testimony before Judge Pedraz on Wednesday, May 28, describing the genocidal campaigns of the Guatemalan army in the Ixcán during the early 1980s and the communities of popular resistance (CPRs) formed in response by those who escaped. Falla's account was based on years of interviewing massacre survivors living in the CPRs and in the Mexican refugee camps along the border with Guatemala. His research and analysis has been published in many articles and books, including *Massacres in the Jungle: Ixcán, Guatemala, 1975-1982*. He began his testimony by telling how he learned of the 1982 San Francisco massacre. On July 17, 1982, soldiers entered the hamlet of San Francisco Nentón in Huehuetenango. They called all of the villagers to a meeting, then locked the men and women into two buildings. By the end of the day they had killed more than 300 people. One survivor told the story to Falla in a refugee camp in Mexico.*

The first massacre that I documented was the massacre at the Finca San Francisco. I met the principal witness in La Gloria refugee camp in Mexico, on the border with Guatemala, at the beginning of September 1982 – two months after the massacre. He told us what happened and I taped his testimony. We also taped Monsignor Samuel Ruiz, the bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas, who described seeing the Guatemalans arrive in Mexico after fleeing the massacre. They were in a complete panic, carrying their children with them, their bundles, their chickens, and anything else they could take out of Guatemala.

The witness told me how the military arrived in the village on Saturday, July 17, 1982. They came in helicopters, so the witness knew they were not guerrillas. The men were working in the fields and the women were inside their houses. There were hundreds of soldiers. They gathered the men and brought them to the courthouse, where they locked them inside. The women and children were locked inside a church. The men could hear the rattle of machine gun fire and the screams of the women. The women were being raped. (I asked him, "How did you know?" He said because he and other survivors went to see later and found the women's bodies with their skirts pushed up.) The soldiers took the children and smashed their heads against the ground.

Then the soldiers rested. The massacre was a lot of work. The soldiers closed the door on the building and chatted, played guitar. Later they would kill everyone inside. The eyewitness escaped out of a window while the soldiers were resting.

The hamlet was razed. It was never reconstructed. I realized that this testimony was precious – and a responsibility. I wanted to understand, *how* did this happen? How did this come about?

In 1983, I went into the jungles of the Ixcán to speak with the people fleeing the massacres. I stayed with a group of people and moved around with them while they hid. We talked – I filled 5 notebooks with the interviews. Bit by bit, each interview gave me more until I was able to create a map of how the massacres took place. It was difficult work; we were in the mountain, and there were soldiers, guerrillas, there was a war going on. Later I went to refugee camp that was nearby, maybe three or four hours walking from where we were hiding. To be in the camp was like being in a Hilton hotel. There was milk, cheese. You didn't have to worry about being

chased by the army. I had the opportunity to take many declarations. And the people talked and talked. They told me what they had suffered. They told me their life stories.

I never stopped being a priest. And the people were glad to be able to tell me their stories.

In the map I made, I documented what had happened between the Rio Ixcán y Rio Xalbal – those were the best documented massacres, because there were more people there. But I also heard about massacres in Santa María Tzeja and other places. I interviewed survivors of the massacre of Cuarto Pueblos, which happened in two different places. Then the soldiers went to Los Angeles. They didn't massacre. Why not? I think it was the day that Rios Montt took over in a coup. So they didn't massacre because there was no high command to give the orders. Then the Xalbal massacre took place. In June came the amnesty, and there were no massacres. There was only one massacre then, and it was by the guerrillas, one of the few by them.

All of these massacres were part of a plan and followed the same pattern: the soldiers would surround a town, divide the men and women, rape the women, kill the women and children and then the men, and burn the town. One witness told me how the officers had to encourage the soldiers to keep working, that they were fighting communism. They thought these villages were supporting the guerrilla and so had to be destroyed "down to the last seed." According to some news reports at the time, the army had in their headquarters a map with little red flags marking the villages. They had a plan to destroy the people because of their belief that they were behind the guerrilla. Of course most of the villagers didn't have anything to do with guerrillas.

I am not an eyewitness to the massacres. But I am a witness of the persecution that the soldiers carried out against the people: the people who were resisting. At first we didn't know or use this word, "resisting." We were holding on. We would be in little groups of 7 or 8 households, maybe 50 people. And a group of soldiers would surprise us in the mountain. What would we do? We would flee: running, running through streams so we wouldn't leave footprints. We would have already agreed a place to meet later. And so we would scatter, running, and then meet later in the place.

And God, it would rain – such tremendous rain. There were at one point about 450 people hiding up there in tiny groups. Because there was food at that time – it was hard to find, but it was there. Sometimes you had to go for a day or two without eating, but then you could eat, because there were hidden crops and other sources of food that we would forage.

Later I went to Mexico. I shut myself up in a room and wrote for two years. I wrote – and I cried. You know when there is something fresh and you are motivated? I wrote down everything I could – 1,400 pages. It was two volumes, too much.

In 1984, Mexico took everyone gathered in the refugee camps by the border, and dispersed them in Campeche and Quintana Roo. Many people refused to go to the new camps and resettle away from the border, so some of them decided to return and resist. They joined the organized people in the mountain. We always talk about people as victims, but not about all the amazing things they did to resist and survive. The people were much more organized by then.

They could stay for up to three months in one place without moving. The army was bombing them with huge bombs that would leave gigantic craters. But they didn't actually kill that many people. The people just hid from the bombs. So, they were victims, but in resistance – a resistance that began with the massacres.

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*The second person to testify was **María T.** Now 67 years old, María was born in El Caserio Tunajá, a community between Chiché and Joyabaj, municipality of Zacualpa. She spoke to Judge Pedraz in the Quiché language through an interpreter.*

In December 1983, soldiers and civil defense patrollers (PACs) came to our village. I was inside our house. The army went from house to house looking for people. They took four women and found my husband working in the field and took him too, to the military base in Joyabaj. Two of the women taken were my neighbors; when they returned from the base they told me they had seen my husband bound and badly beaten. His hands were swollen from being tied together so tightly.

When the soldiers took my husband, he protested that he had served in the patrols and my children and I ran out to defend him but they hit us and took him away anyway. He was kept at the base for eight days. Then they took him to Zacualpa and I went to find him. I saw him tied up on the back of a military truck on top of a pile of wood, and I begged the lieutenant there to let him go but he said no. I went back home to my children, feeling very sad. Later another person who had been held with my husband was released and came to me to tell me they had killed him.

After that, the patrollers and soldiers kept coming to our house, every few days, so I had to hide during the daytime from them. They would come into the village shooting at people and telling them to turn over all the bad people to them or they would kill everyone. They registered all the houses of the village. First they were from the Joyabaj patrol, then from Zacualpa. They told me my son had to join the patrols, that there were orders from the lieutenant, but my children were gone, working on the south coast. The first chief of the PACs wasn't so bad. He said everyone had to be part of the patrols in order to protect their community. But the second one threatened to kill the whole family.

In this time no one could leave the place where they lived without permission from the patrollers. A friend of mine tried to leave to go into town – she went to the patrollers and asked permission – but they denied her permission and told her to return to her house.

One night a big group of soldiers arrived at 11 pm at my house and pounded on my door, shouting at me, was I a good person or a bad person? I said through the door, "What do you want?" and they told me, "If you don't open door we will break it down." So I opened it and they entered the house. They registered everything, how much furniture I had, who was living there, and they stole all my food. They asked me, have there been strange people passing here? "No there haven't." They didn't find anything suspicious in the house so they left.

When they returned they showed me photos, saying “these are bad people,” but I said I did not know them. They threatened to take me to the army base since I was not talking. They were threatening me and one of my daughters, who was 8 years old, asked the soldiers, why are you bothering my mother? Go to the mountains and look for guerrillas, because here in the houses are only good people. The soldiers had to use a translator to understand my child because they didn’t speak Quiché.

The soldiers then surrounded the house of my neighbor and told her to turn her husband over to them. She said he wasn’t there. “Why do you have children inside, if there is no husband?” She said he was away working. “If you don’t turn him over, we will take your 5-year-old child away.” The military commissioner asked my neighbor, “Do you have good or bad thoughts?” And she said, “I don’t think anything bad.” But they took her away. I could hear her screaming as they took her away.

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