- ARGENTINA -

THE MANFIL CASE

Introduction:
In August 1992, after fifteen years of silence and anguish, Karina (20), Graciela (25) and Cristian (16) Manfil learned what had happened to their parents.

One morning in January 1991, Karina Manfil, came with her husband to the door of Sector 134, at the cemetery of Avellaneda, where EAAF has been excavating mass graves containing several hundred skeletal remains of people who disappeared in last Argentine military government (1976-1983). She said she had just turned 18 and was old enough to start searching for her disappeared relatives. Somebody had told her that her parents and her 9 year old brother were buried in some of the mass graves at the Avellaneda Cemetery.

Sector 134:
Since January 1988, EAAF has been working in Sector 134 of the Municipal Cemetery of Avellaneda, located 30 minutes south of Buenos Aires city.

This is the largest case EAAF has worked on Argentina. EAAF members work daily on the case, while also responding the international requests.

Sector 134 is a rectangular area (12 by 24 meters), located at the back of the cemetery. On one side, sector 134 is separated from the rest of the cemetery by a brick wall and a gate; on the other side, the area has a big gate that communicates with the street.

During the first two years of the dictatorship, while hundreds of people disappeared each month, the neighbors across the street observed military trucks and police and military personnel entering sector 134 through this lateral gate. They came at different times of day and night, carrying bodies of young people that would be buried in mass graves in sector 134. Although this activity was suspected by many people, it wasn’t until 1984, when democracy returned to Argentina that places like this could be investigated.

When EAAF arrived at the site, there was a small abandoned morgue adjacent to the graves. We repaired the structure and it serves now as the laboratory where the remains exhumed from the graves are examined and deposited. The grave site was covered by vegetation which we removed carefully so as not to change the shape of the underlying soil.

The work in sector 134 is divided into three steps 1) the preliminary investigation; 2) the archaeological work and 3) the laboratory work.

1) The preliminary investigation includes two types of data: the historical and pre-mortem.

Historical Investigation: The investigation of administrative documents related to the site- cemetery records and death certificates- showed that, despite all the secrecy surrounding the repression, at least 220 people were entered in the cemetery registers as being buried in sector 134. From this total, 160 were non-identified young individuals, who had been killed by gunfire and brought to the cemetery by the local police or the military personnel based nearby. The cemetery records indicated that sector 134 was not a single mass grave but at least 19 mass graves, and several individual ones, containing from 1 to 30 bodies each.

According to those records, Sector 134 was only used from the beginning of 1976 until the end of 1978. These were the three first years of the military government, when the majority
of the 10,000 people who disappeared in Argentina were kidnapped by security forces.

In order to identify the remains, EAAF has tried to establish patterns of *modus operandi* of the different security forces acting in the repression in that area of the province of Buenos Aires. In order to accomplish this step, EAAF is continually investigating 18 clandestine detention centers (CDC) which were functioning near the cemetery during the dictatorship: establishing relations between those CDCs and the various nearby cemeteries, including Avellaneda documents; movements of prisoners through CDCs; interviewing and examining several hundred testimonies from survivors who provided lists of people seen alive in those CDCs, as well as military, police and judiciary files that give information about the discovery of bodies, shoot outs-faked or not- between the security forces and guerrilla groups, etc. We also collect information about union and political groups active during those years, who were primary targets.

Collection of pre-mortem data: the collection of physical information about the victims when they were alive: race, stature, age, sex, laterality, old fractures, diseases, dental information, X-rays, pathologies, etc. The information is gathered through several interviews with relatives, medical doctors and odontologists of the victims.

The historical investigation helps to establish which ones are the possible families that need to be interviewed.

The preliminary investigation about sector 134 continues up to today.

2) The archaeological excavation of the site finished in March 1992. Three hundred and twenty four skeletons were recovered; around 50% more than expected.

3) The laboratory work started in 1990 and continues up to today. It consists in the washing, labeling, reconstruction of the fractured bones, determination of race, sex, age, stature, laterality, pathologies and traumas, dental charts, cause of death, and finally, identity.

EAAF compares the information obtained from the skeletal remains with the information coming from the preliminary investigation. Until today, eight people have been identified including the Manfil Family.

The Manfil Case:

In the early hours of October 27, 1976, a group of security forces, formed by policemen from the Buenos Aires Province and Army personnel, attacked an apartment in a housing project, located on the third floor of Lafuente Street, in the neighboring of Villa Corina, Avellaneda. Inside the apartment were the Manfil family who owned the house: Carlos L. Manfil (30); his wife, Angelica Zarate de Manfil (28) and three of their four children: Karina (4), Carlitos (9)

---

1 The names of the identified people are: Mercedes Hourquebic de Francesc; Luis Adolfo Jaramillo, Lidia Massironi de Perdoni; Maria Adela Garin de De Angelis; Rosario Ramirez, Carlos Laudelino Manfil, his wife, Angelica Zarate de Manfil nd his son, Carlitos Alberto Manfil.

Equipo Argentino de Antropologia Forense (E.A.A.F.)
and Cristian (6 months). Graciela (12),
the older daughter, was sleeping at her
grandmother's house that night. Another
family was temporally staying with the
Manfils: Rosario Ramirez (30) and her
husband Jose Vega and their two
children: Adolfo (9) and Marcela Vega
(11). Carlos Manfil, an employee at the
Botanical Garden of Buenos Aires, as
well as Jose Vega, were members of the
Peronist Party.

All the children were sleeping in
the same room. When the attack started,
Carlitos leaned out of the window and
received a gunshot wound in the
forehead. He fell dead over Karina. She
moved his body and hid under the beds,
together with the other children. She
heard her mother screaming, next door:
"don't shoot; there are children inside". The
next thing they saw were military
boots opening the door of their room
with a kick and a burst of bullets over them.
Karina was wounded in the leg; Adolfo,
was wounded in his arm and leg and
Marcela, in her chest. Cristian, who was
with his mother, was not wounded. The
three wounded children were taken by
firemen to a Hospital, were they stayed
about a month. Adolfo and Marcela went
to live with one their aunts; Karina,
Graciela and Cristian stayed with their
grandparents. The children from the two
families never saw each other again.

Karina knew that his brother was
killed but she was not sure what
happened to her parents. Like many of
the relatives of disappeared people, she
thought there was some possibility that
they might still be alive.

Angelica Zarate was killed inside
of the apartment; Jose Vega, Carlos
Manfil and Rosario Ramirez tried to
escape by climbing down the drainpipes.
Only Vega succeed; Manfil and Ramirez
fractured their legs on their way down
and were killed immediately after. (Vega
was kidnapped a year later by security
forces and disappeared). The bodies were
not returned to the families and their
whereabouts were uncertain though they
were thought to be at Sector 134.

The Role of EAAF:

After several interviews with
different members of the Manfil and
Zarate family, pre-mortem forms were
completed and EAAF members went to
several courts to see if there was any
information about the events. EAAF
found death certificates of the three
adults and the children in the
registration office of the area. They were
in fact buried in Sector 134.

Among the 324 skeletons from
Sector 134, in square B8, EAAF
recovered the remains of an approx. 10
year old child, with an entrance gunshot
wound in his frontal bone. No other
children with this feature was recovered
from sector 134. His remains were found
together with several other adult
skeletons: among them, three adult
skeletons were selected as possibly
corresponding to Carlos Manfil, Angelica
Zarate and Rosario Ramirez. But the pre-
mortem information of the four of them
was insufficient.

At the end of 1991, we found a
file, issued by a military court, where
-although parts of the facts were changed
or deleted- there were pictures and
autopsy reports of the bodies. We
compared the wounds described in the
autopsy reports with the wounds that we
found in the skeletal remains of the four
selected skeletons and there was an
important degree of consistency .
However, we still had some doubts.

The Recovery of Genetic
Material from Skeletal
Remains:

Due to the doubts mentioned
above, EAAF decided to send bone
samples of the selected skeletons to the
laboratory of Dr. Erika Hagelberg, at
Oxford University in England. Dr.
Hagelberg was able to recover genetic
material from the bones and established
that there was a filial relation between
two of them.

We also sent samples of teeth of
the selected skeletons to the laboratory
of Dr. Marie Claire King, at the
supposed to be Carlos Manfil and compared it with the blood sample of his mother (Karina's paternal grandmother).

In August 1992, the results were ready. In all of the three cases, the identifications were positive, confirming that the selection of skeletons done previously was correct.

Fortunately, the Federal Court of Appeal, presided by Dr. Costa, accepted the anthropological and genetic reports, making possible the speedy return of the remains to the family, and creating an important judicial precedent by accepting the evidence of the genetic test.

The remains of the three members of the Manfil family were buried in December, 1992.

This is the first time ever that identifications of skeletal remains have been done through the recovery of genetic material from dental pulp. We express our gratitude to Dr. King and Dr. Hagelberg who volunteered their efforts to this project.

The positive results of the genetic techniques advances our work enormously. Many cases could now be solved by applying this new technology. It is a powerful scientific tool with direct and immediate consequences for thousands of families who are fighting for their right to recover the remains of their disappeared loved ones.

The Case of Colonía Montes de Oca:

The Colonía Montes de Oca is located 100 km. from Buenos Aires city. It is an rural state institution for the mentally retarded. In April 1992, the judicial authorities discovered a series of crimes in which the director of the Colony was supposed to be involved: theft of public money, traffic of human organs and the suspicious death and disappearance of various patients and of one staff medical doctor. The Federal judge of Mercedes, Province of Buenos Aires, Dr. Heredia, asked EAAF to exhume the remains which may have belonged to Marcelo Ortiz, one of the patients of the Mental Institution.

Marcelo Ortiz was severely retarded and could not even walk; he had to crawl. When he was 9 years old, he was admitted to Colonía Montes de Oca. In September, 1988, after 7 years of being interned- Marcelo was already 16 years old- he was moved to the adult room of the colony. That night there was a big fight in the room between two other
mental retarded patients that wanted to sexually abuse Marcelo. He disappeared that night.

Twenty days later, a decomposed body was found within the area of the colony. The officials assumed it was Marcelo’s but due to the degree of decomposition, were not able to recognize him. The dentist from the colony compared Marcelo’s dental chart with the dentition of the body. He found several similitudes but two teeth were missing in the body that were in Marcelo’s chart. Though the dentist recognized that Marcelo’s chart was not updated, he was not sure if it was Marcelo’s body. Then, the officials declared it was not his body and buried that corpse as an N.N. (John Doe).

In 1992, EAAF was called by the judge conducting the investigation to exhume and analyze the remains buried as N.N. The conclusions of the analysis of the skeletal remains were consistent with Marcelo’s race, age, stature and more important with bone traits which are consistent with a Hurler syndrome, a disease Marcelo was diagnosed when he was a child. No person with these features disappeared in the area during the last 20 years.

We believe there are great possibilities that the skeletal remains that we exhumed belong to Marcelo Ortiz. However, in order to confirm his identification, the only tool that is left is to try to recover Mitochondrial DNA. Therefore, we sent a blood sample of Marcelo’s maternal grandmother along with one of Mr. Ortiz’s teeth, to the laboratory of Dr. King, at the University of California/Berkeley. We are presently waiting for the results.