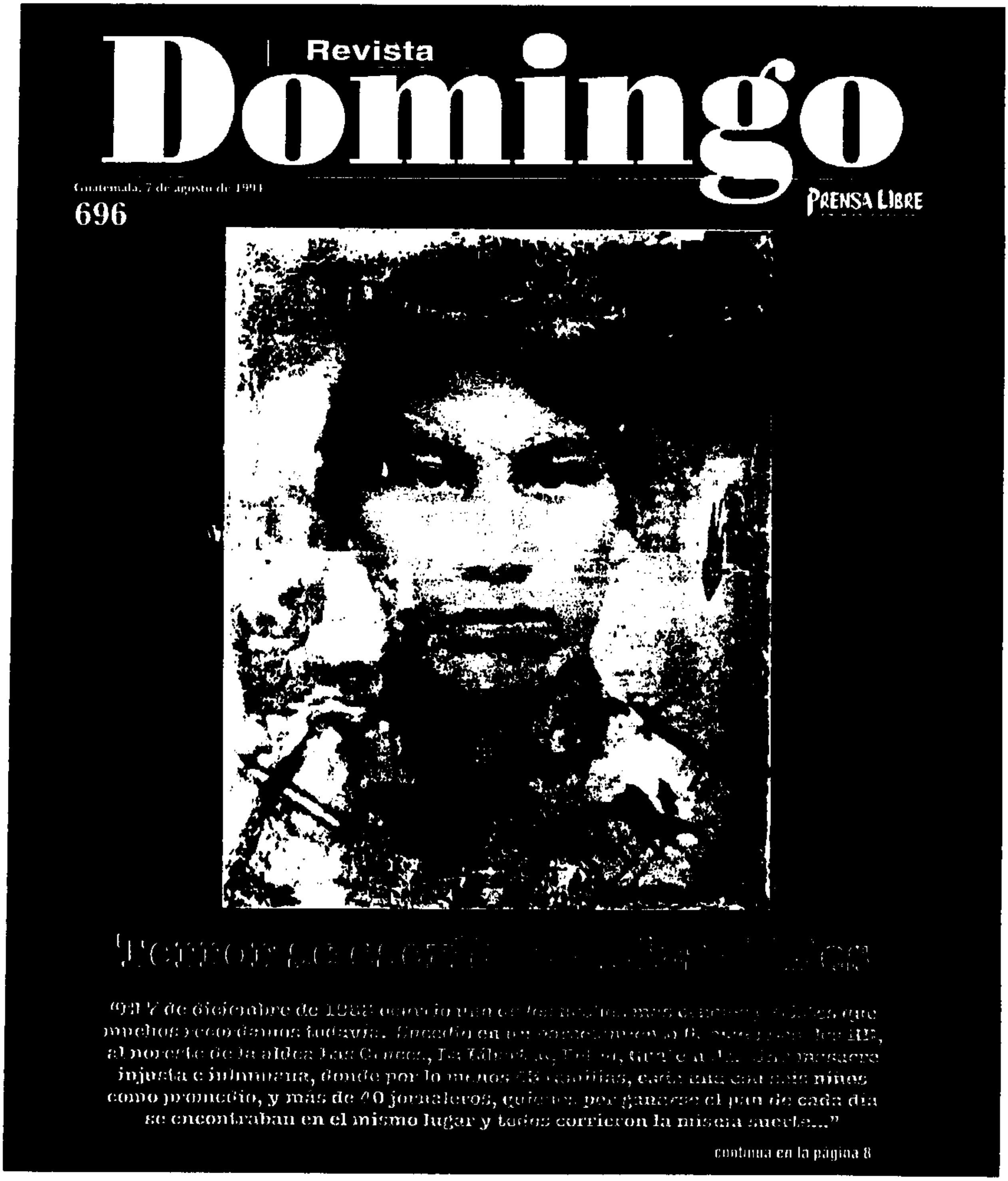

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PRENSA LIBRE

[illegible]

"El 7 de diciembre de 1982 ocurrió uno de [illegible] que muchos recordamos todavía. Sucedió en [illegible], al noreste de la aldea Las Cruces, La Libertad, Petén, [illegible] masacre injusta e inhumana, donde por lo menos [illegible] familias, cada una con [illegible] niños como promedio, y más de 40 jornaleros, quienes por ganarse el pan de cada día se encontraban en el mismo lugar y todos corrieron la misma suerte..."

continua en la página 8

GUATEMALA

The massacre at Dos Rs, El Petén

In July 1994, at the request of a local human rights organization, FAMDEGUA (Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos de Guatemala), and with the support of the Legal Office of The Archbishopric of Guatemala, members of the EAAF conducted a preliminary investigation in El Petén. The investigation centered on the village of Dos Rs, La Libertad, in the Department of El Petén.

Dos RR was one of the many villages and cooperatives founded by poor peasants from other areas of Guatemala who, in response to a government campaign intended to populate the Petén region, moved to the area during the 1960s and 1970s.

On December 8, 1982, during the administration of General Rios Montt, the Guatemalan Army reportedly entered Dos Rs. According to witnesses, Army troops accused the population of collaborating with the local guerrilla movement, and killed approximately 500 men, women and children. Many of the corpses were allegedly thrown into the village well; while others were left lying in the nearby woods. The Army then burned Dos Rs to the ground, and slaughtered the village livestock. The purpose of EAAF's 1994 and 1995 missions to El Petén was to investigate this alleged massacre.

Background

More people have been forcibly disappeared in Guatemala during the past four decades than in any other Latin American country. Since 1960, when Guatemala's internal conflict began, approximately 45,000 disappearances have been reported in a country with a current population of ten million. The majority of these persons "disappeared" from peasant villages between 1978 and 1986, during counterinsurgency campaigns against guerrillas groups conducted by the military governments of Gen. Lucas Garcia (1978-1982), Gen. Rios Montt (1982-1983) and Gen. Mejia Vitores (1983-1986).[1]

These disappearances were intended to eliminate any support the guerrillas might have found among the indigenous and ladino peasants, and to suppress all dissent, organized or otherwise. For example: "in the so-called Victory 82 campaign, thousands of Guatemalans in the countryside were murdered, hundred of villages destroyed, and as many as one million internal refugees created."[2] Thousands of Guatemalan emigrated to Mexico or were forcibly relocated by the army to other parts of the country.[3]

The organizations which are allegedly primarily responsible for the killings and disappearances include the Guatemalan Army, para-military groups, and the "civil self-defense patrols" known as PACs (Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil). The PACs were initiated in 1982 by Gen. Rios Montt's government, which intended to use them to maintain control over the countryside. PACs are organized at the village level throughout Guatemala's rural areas: they consist of villagers obliged to serve, without pay or remuneration, under the command of a local military officer. PAC members are required to patrol their own neighbors, and at times to participate in kidnappings and/or murders. They are typically armed with machetes, sticks, and old rifles provided by the Army. The PACs are an important part of the military's counterinsurgency and intelligence strategy. Men who refused to join them put their lives at risk; they are identified as "subversives," and are sometimes disappeared or murdered.[4] According to the Guatemalan Minister of Defense, in 1993 537,000 villagers served in PACs.[5]

Guatemala has had elected democratic govern-

1. The guerilla groups startedfighting against the central government at the beginning of the sixties but they reached the peak of their power and popularity in the late seventies and early eighties.
2. "Civil Patrols in Guatemala," Americas Watch, 1986., p.1.
3. Amnesty International, August 25, 1981. 4. *Ibid*, p. 18-19.
5. Report from the Independent Expert, Ms. Monica Pinto, about the human rights situation in Guatemala, prepared according to resolution 1993/88 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, E/CN 4/1994/10.

ments since 1986. While the human rights situation has improved during this period, it is still critical. In her 1993 report, U.N. Independent Expert Monica Pinto stated that the government "must require the army to disarm the PAC in zones where the Human Rights Ombudsman and the Judiciary have proved the commission of abuses." In its latest report on Guatemala, Human Rights Watch/America states: "The Human Rights Ombudsman repeatedly has called on the army to disarm the abusive civil patrollers. Alarmingly, for example, General Miranda Trejo, (Commander of Military Zone 22 at Playa Grande, in the Department of El Chique), did not consider death threats, illegal detentions, and other violations of law as serious abuses meriting disarming the PACs dismissed the matter by saying that the civil patrols would be dealt in the context of the peace accords..."(Still in 1996), "the patrollers responsible for a growing list of human rights violations remained at large and maintained their status as armed agents of authority accountable only to the army."[6]

In 1990, the Guatemalan government began United Nations-mediated peace negotiations with the URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca), a coalition of guerrilla groups. On June 23, 1994, in Oslo, these parties agreed that a special commission of inquiry would be formed to investigate the human rights violations which had occured during the 30-year civil war. Since 1994, a United Nations human rights observer mission (MINUGUA) was established in the country, distributing human rights monitors all over Guatemala. [MINUGUA is formed by approximately 400 people coming from 37 countries, from which 220 are civilian human rights workers, 47 are policemen, and 17 are military personnel. There are 120 Guatemalans working for MINUGUA in administrative and logistical support areas.

On May 6, the government of the current Persidente Alvaro Arzu Irigoyen and the URNG signed an accord on socioeconomic and agrarian issues, clearing away a topic that had been under discussion for over a year.

Peace was finally signed on December 30, 1996, ending 36 years of civil war. On December 16, with the approval of both sides, the Guatemalan National Assembly approved an amnesty law that, according to many human rights groups, would exempt both soldiers and guerillas from prosecution for killings, kidnappings and acts of torture committed during the civil war.

Forensic work in Guatemala

Many of the people who have been kidnapped or disappeared in Guatemala were killed and buried in clandestine mass graves in the countryside. On many occasions, local and international human rights organizations have denounced the existence of these clandestine graves, and requested full investigations through a Special Commission of Inquiry for the investigation of disappeared people.

In 1991, EAAF began working in Guatemala. At the request of local human rights organizations GAM and CONAVIGUA, EAAF participated on forensic missions in 1991, 1992 and 1993. On our own and as part of larger forensic delegations, EAAF exhumed remains of disappeared people in Chontala, Quiche (1991) and San Jose Pachoa Lemoa, Quiche (1992). Some of these missions were partially sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Washington D.C.) and Physicians for Human Rights (Boston, USA). In each mission, the forensic professionals worked as expert witnesses for local judges investigating the incidents.

Due to the large number of cases which require investigation, Guatemalan human rights organizations have repeatedly demanded that a local forensic team be formed and trained to carry out exhumations and analysis of human remains. As these organizations stated in a joint declaration in 1992: "Peace will not come to Guatemala as long as the remains of our massacred relatives continue

6. Human Rights Watch/Americas, Guatemala, January 1996.

to be buried in clandestine cemeteries, and we are unable to give them Christian burials. We do not want our dead to be abandoned in the ravines...For this reason we continue to demand the formation of forensic teams in order to continue the exhumations."[7]

In 1992, the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights (IIDH) and the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences (AAAS) sponsored a six-week training seminar in Guatemala for local anthropologists who wished to form a non-governmental forensic anthropology team. A shorter seminar was also given to judges, lawyers, governmental and non-governmental organizations on the ways forensic anthropology can be applied to the investigation of human rights violations. EAAF members were invited among the foreign experts who conducted these seminars. One EAAF member, sponsored by the AAAS, returned in 1993 to exchange experiences with the recently formed local team, the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Team (EGAF). EGAF is a non governmental organization, currently composed of 9 members, that conducts forensic anthropological work in the human rights field throughout Guatemala and in other countries.

El Peten: Historical Backgroud

El Petén is Guatemala's northernmost department. Bordering on Mexico and Belize, it has more historic and geographic links with Mexico than with the rest of Guatemala. Most of its vast area is covered by dense jungle, and because of its inaccessibility and harsh living conditions, it was largely uninhabited for the first half of this century. Efforts to populate it occurred only after 1954, when the Guatemalan military, supported by local elites and the U.S. government, overthrew President Jacobo Arbenz in a coup. The coup was motivated by opposition to Arbenz's agrarian reform policies,[8] and the military-backed governments which assumed power after 1954 took a different approach to Guatemala's agrarian issues. The governments of Castillo Armas and his successors attempted to solve land shortages by opening new land to cultivation: they "distributed unused or useless land owned by the State in frontier areas, leaving intact the best lands from the latifundios."[9] Much of this land was distributed by FYDEP (Fomento y Desarrollo de El Petén), a new agency created by the government in 1958 to oversee the colonization of El Petén. Largely under the control of the Guatemalan Army, FYDEP offered peasants across the country cheap land in El Petén which could be cleared for agriculture and or exploited for natural resources such as oil and wood. For a small amount of money, peasants received provisional tenure of the land, holding it either individually or as members of cooperative groups.

The current population of El Petén is approximately 280,600 people, 85 % of whom colonized the area between the 1960s and the 1980s.[10] These settlers came from all areas of Guatemala, particularly from the overcrowded lands of the fertile Pacific coast, where population pressure had become a serious concern to the government. Easing these pressures was one of the primary motives of the new colonization policy.

Guerrilla activity in El Petén started mainly in the late 1970s; the guerrilla group active in the area was the FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias). The Army responded with counter-insurgency tactics that did not respect the civilian population. During the early 1980s the Army directed a policy of terror, assassination and so-called "scorched earth" operations against many of the local cooperatives and settlements. According to witnesses and human rights organizations, the Kaibiles, an Army elite counterinsurgency unit, perpetrated most of the massacres in

7. Conclusion at the Second Conference for Peace and Human. Guatemalan Human Rights Organization. February 1992, Guatemala City.
8. See "Fruta Amarga" ("Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American coup in Guatemala"), by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, 5th ed. Siglo XXI, Mexico 1988.
9. "La Batalla por Guatemala" ("The Battle for Guatemala), by Susanne Jonas, FLACSO, Ed. Nueva Sociedad, 1991, p.70.
10. See United Nations International Instrument of Human Rights, HRI/CORE/1/Add 47/1994.
11. *Ibid*, Jonas p. 70.

El Petén. Many peasants were forcibly relocated to "model villages" in "development regions" (polos de desarrollo) under the control of the army;[12] others fled to other parts of the country, or to Mexico, where they settled in refugee camps.[13]

Less is known about the massacres which occurred in El Petén during the 1980s than about the many others allegedly committed by the Army throughout other regions of Guatemala. No complete investigation has yet been conducted in this area, although some information about several major incidents has been collected from witnesses' testimonials. According to the accounts, massacres have occurred in the following villages: Tres Aguas (early 1981); Nueva Libertad-Sayaxche (March 1981); El Arbolito (June 17, 1981); Dos Rs (December 6, 1982); La Tecnica (December 1982); Josefinos (April 29, 1982); Los Batres (bombing occurring March 18, 1982); Macanche-Flores (involving the assassination of 15 peasants on April 22, 1982); and others.[14]

The massacre at "Dos Rs"

The Reyes and Ruano families were among the poor peasants who moved from the Pacific Coast to El Petén in search of land. In 1978, they founded Dos Rs (meaning the "Two Rs"), so called because of the founders' last names. The village had a population of approximately 40 journeymen and 60 families with an average of six children each. Most of settlers came from the settlement of La Maquina in Suchitepequez, on the Pacific Coast. They cleared the land and cultivated chile, banana, pineapple, corn, beans and other plants; built a school and two churches; and dug a well.

According to survivors, in early 1982 groups of FAR guerrillas passed through Dos Rs. As they did in many other hamlets, they met with the local villagers, bought food and left. Shortly afterwards, the Army set a detachment to Las Cruces, a larger village located a few kilometers away from Dos RR. Lieutenant Carias, the commander in charge of the Las Cruces military post, attempted to organize the people of Dos Rs into civil patrols, as he had already done with 800 men from Las Cruces. The villagers of Dos Rs refused to participate, simply because, according to their accounts, they would not be remunerated for their work.

On December 5, two military trucks entered Dos Rs and the army blocked the roads leading into the village. According to witnesses on December 8, Army troops accused the population of collaborating with the local guerrilla movement, and killed approximately 500 men, women and children. Many of the corpses were allegedly thrown into the village well; while others were left lying in the nearby woods. The Army then burned Dos Rs to the ground, and slaughtered the village livestock. According to witnesses, the troops responsible for the massacre were members of the Kaibiles units from Poptum and Las Cruces.

"People were saying that something strange was happening at Dos RRs", recalls Antonino Solis, who lived at Las Cruces but had relatives at Dos Rs. "Finally we went to see Lieutenant Carias, who was in charge of Las Cruces military detachment. He repeated what he had already said before: 'everybody is fine at Dos Rs...We are just doing a cleaning'."

The only direct witness of the massacre saw the soldiers lock the women in the church. The soldiers then took the men out of the school where they had been kept into the forest in groups, beating them as they walked. When the men were no longer at sight, he hear the sound of machine guns. A soldier who participated in the massacre told another person interviewed by EAAF that the children were beaten on the neck with clubs and were then thrown into a dry well.

12. There were two Development Poles in El Peten: Laguna Perdida and Yanahi. From "Guatemala–Polos de Desarollo," v. 2, CEIDEC, 1990, Mexico.
13. The refugee camps in Mexico were in Campeche and Quintana Roo.
14. Information obtained from Amnesty International reports (1981 and 1982). Comite Pro-Justicia y Paz de Guatemala (1993 report) and other local human rights organizations.

"There were rumors that Don Juan Arevalo's well was covered with earth. If this is true, we thought: It is because they dumped the bodies there," Antonino Solis continues. "So to verify our doubts we went to see...When we arrived at the site, the well looked as if it had just been covered...We looked inside and saw three hats lying on the dirt. We could not recognize who they belonged to. Then an immense doubt and a great desolation entered our souls."

Twelve years later, in July 1994, three anthropologists from EAAF — Patricia Bernardi, Dario Olmo and Silvana Turner— conducted a 20-day preliminary mission in El Petén. The mission was conducted at the request of FAMDEGUA, a local human rights organization, and was provided with support from the Legal Office of The Archbishopric of Guatemala. The state prosecutor Ramirez Ramos, and the judge in charge of the investigation, Ramirez Hernandez, were present at the site during the first days of the excavation. Peace brigade members were also present to escort members of FAMDEGUA.

First Mission of EAAF in El Petén

On the basis of evidence collected in witnesses' testimonies, EAAF members surveyed three areas within "Dos Rs" and conducted a preliminary excavation at one of them—"Pozo Arevalo" (Arevalo's well), a dry well which was designated as "Site 1".

In this preliminary mission, the goal was to conduct an initial inspection of the well. Due to time constraints and our limited logistical support, we built a very simple structure over the well, which consisted of poles with forked ends, and a crossbeam set between the poles, from which we hung a pulley. People, tools, and findings were raised from and lowered into the well by means of the pulley and ropes.

EAAF members descended six meters down the well and found the first articulated human skeletons. Ten individuals' skeletons were recovered at depths between six and eight meters, and it was evident that many more remained inside. The skeletons were all male, and belonged to persons who at the time of death had ranged in age from children to adults. Gunshot wounds to the head were found in at least two of the cases.

The individuals were fully clothed. Personal belonging were found inside their pockets. Three of the items provided information about the time at which the events occurred: Guatemalan coins dated 1977 and 1978; a 1982 calendar, and two identity cards. The date was legible only in one of them; the document was issued in 1977. This information indicates that the victims could not have been killed and buried earlier than 1982.

One of the skeletons was positively identified as that of Albino Israel Gonzalez Romero, a 22 year-old unmarried farmer. At the request of his family, his remains were reburied in 1995, during a collective ceremony and reburial of the massacre victims.

Patricia Bernardi descending into the well on the 1994 mission.

Sites 2 and 3:

Large numbers of non-articulated human bones and clothing were observed widely scattered around two overgrown areas, designated as Site 2 and Site 3. A bullet fragment and two spent cartridges cases of the type used in Israeli Galil rifles were found at site 2..

Conclusion of the first mission to Dos Rs

So far the findings were consistent with the information provided by the witnesses. It was evident, however, that a longer and larger mission was necessary to perform a complete investigation of the case. In order to reach the remains lying deeper inside the well, a better infrastructure was needed. Moreover, by the end of the first mission, the rainy season was about to start. Accordingly, a second mission was planned for 1995. This mission was the first time forensic anthropology had been used to investigate a massacre in El Petén.

Second Mission to Dos Rs, El Petén:

The second stage of work in the village of the Dos Rs was carried out from May through July, 1995 under the direction of EAAF team members Bernardi, Olmo, and Turner, who had worked on the same project the year before. During this second mission Austrian archaeologist Ute Hofmeister and artist Claudia Bernardi worked as volunteers with the team on the excavation. The project was commissioned by FAMDEGUA, and members of FAMDEGUA were present throughout the work. Members of the United Nations Human Rights Observers for Guatemala (MINUGUA) were often present at the excavation and provided crucial logistical support to the work.

Work was financed by CEBEMO (Catholic Organization for Development Corporation - The Netherlands) and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation (New York). The objective of this phase was to complete the forensic investigation of the Dos Rs. Excavations had been suspended the previous year due to logistical problems and bad weather.

Preliminary Historical Investigation

Along with excavations and laboratory analysis, EAAF conducte interviews with witnesses, relatives, and survivors in order to collect as much information as possible concerning the case. These interviews were carried out with the help of members of the local office of Catholic Church Action. EAAF and Catholic Action also gathered information on other massacres which occurred in the same region (El Petén) in the 1980s. These data might serve as the basis for future exhumations in other Petén sites.

As a result of this research, EAAF compiled a list of the names and physical characteristics of victims. The list was then compared with data from the skeletal remains. At this time 222 victims are listed by first and last name (some children are listed by last name only). However, the total number of victims remains unknown, due to the fact that a great many victims were young children for whom no family has survived. EAAF was unable to record the names of these victims.

Approximately half of the 222 listed victims were children less than twelve years of age (105 victims; 47.3 percent).The age group least represented among the victims consisted of adults over the age of fifty (5.95 percent). The youngest victim was only a few days old and the oldest was 85 years old. Table I (below) shows the total

Age Cohort	*Male*	*Fem.*	*Und*	*Total*
0-12	48	45	12	105
13-25	22	25	00	47
26-37	18	18	00	36
38-50	17	04	00	21
50+	10	03	00	13
Totals:	115	95	12	222

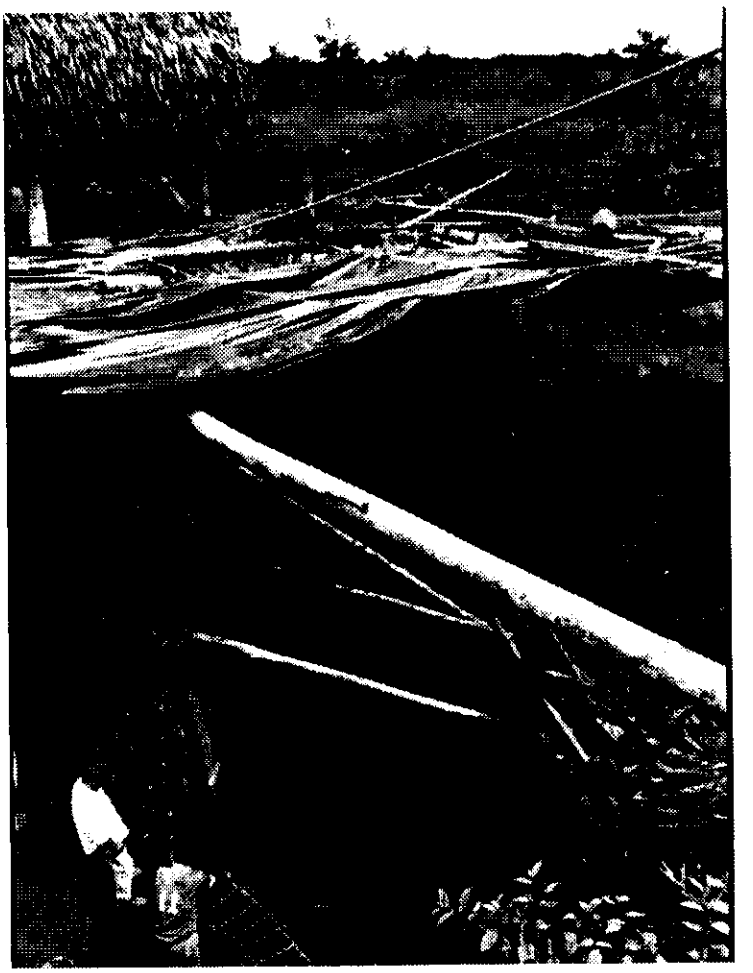
Table I: Victims at Dos Rs, according to the Preliminary Historical Investigation, by sex and age.

number of victims registered by EAAF, by age cohort and sex. The category "undetermined sex" ("und.") refers to children, mostly very young, whose full names, sex, and family of origin were not known by witnesses.

Archaeological Work Site One: The Well

Site One was an unfinished dry well, circular and with a diameter of 2.15 meters at the mouth, which was level with the surface. The depth of the well was not known at the beginning of the exhumation; witnesses' estimates ranged from ten meters to 26 meters. In 1994, after one month of work, EAAF excavators reached a depth of eight meters and recovered ten complete skeletons and remains from four incomplete skeletons.

The bottom of the well: remains of a child. The well narrows from 2.15m the top to 90 cm. at the bottom.

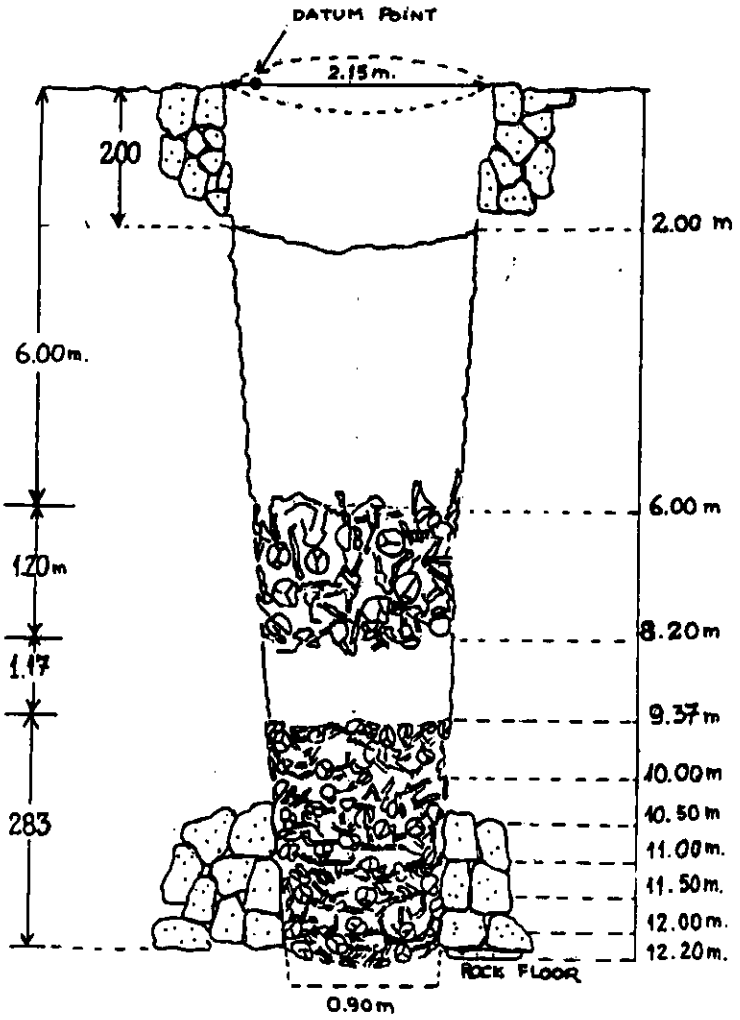


In the second stage of the mission, carried out in the summer of 1995, a plan for further excavation was designed with the advice of an engineer. The plan included the removal of earth from the periphery of the well, in order to build a platform at a depth of six meters from the surface. In this way access was gained to more of the remains. Results of these excavations are documented below. As excavation moved deeper, the platform was lowered proportionally in order to gain further access without damaging the remains (see photo).

In the first stage of excavation, which entailed moving a great deal of earth from around the well, EAAF contracted workers from nearby Las Cruces. On occasion excavators also made use of a bulldozer provided by the Mayoralty of La Libertad. One problem encountered during excavation was periodic collapses of the walls of the well and those surrounding the platform.

When this occurred, walls were shored up with wooden timbers supported by crossbeams (see photo above).

Once the level of the remains had been reached, excavation followed along natural strata, in order to preserve the articulation of skeletal remains. The numerical sequence used in 1994 was resumed in the designation for the skeletons discovered in 1995. However, because of the vertical position of the skeletons and the fact that they were so entangled together, it was decided that after ten meters excavation would proceed along artificial strata 50 centimeters in thickness.



Excavations continued until July 14, 1995. During this time at least 156 skeletons were recovered. Clothing and personal effects were also found, as well as firearm projectiles. These projectiles provide important evidence concerning the cause of the death. The skeletal remains of six dogs were also exhumed along with the human remains. Judging from the distribution of remains and the depths at which they were discovered, the women and children were the first to be thrown into the well. Their remains were found entangled at the bottom. Male remains were then found above the women and children.

At the end of excavation of Site One, the well had been excavated to its original depth of 12.20 meters, with a base 90 centimeters in diameter. Once this work was completed, EAAF closed the well and leveled the excavated area on the surface.

Surface Sites

According to witnesses, residents of the Two RRs were taken out of the village in groups and executed in the woods. In July 1994 it was found that surface skeletal remains had been observed by residents of the area in at least two places. These reports were corroborated by EAAF in preliminary work. EAAF visited the sites, known as La Aguada and Los Salazares, both of which are located in the woods near the Dos Rs. In these places, human skeletal remains, clothing, personal effects, and ballistic evidence were observed in the underbrush.

Site Two: La Aguada

On June 1, 1995, EAAF conducted a survey and collection of skeletal remains and associated evidence which were dispersed over an area of approximately 1,400 square meters. Representatives of the Justice of the Peace of Sayaxche, the Public Ministry, and members of MINUGUA were present for this stage of the project. The work took place in an area known as La Aguada, located in a former reservoir which is now thickly covered in vegetation, approximately six kilometers north of Site One.

The remains were found disarticulated, incomplete, and in an severe state of deterioration. This was due in large part to damage by fire and other external factors, including various predators such as dogs, birds, mountain lions, and vultures, as well as rodents and insects. These animals scattered the bones in different ways and left tooth marks and other damage.

The heavy foliage on the woods made it difficult to establish a consistent system of coordinates for the whole area. Instead the remains and associated evidence found on the surface were marked with colored blazes. When a group of skeletal remains and related evidence was observed particularly close together, it was identified as a "concentration."Eighteen concentrations were discovered and marked in this manner. Once the entire area was covered, all evidence from the concentrations was collected.

Site Three: Los Salazares

On May 19, 1995, in the presence of the same local authorities who witnessed the work at La Aguada, observation and collection of evidence for the area known as Los Salazares (Site Three) was carried out. This site is located approximately 12 kilometers south of Site One. It consists of an area of approximately 400 square meters, covered in foliage.

As in Site Two, human remains and associated evidence were observed on the surface with signs of fire damage. They had been scattered by the actions of predators and of the weather. A survey was made of the entire area and 14 concentrations of skeletal remains and clothing were marked with red blazes. After the inspection was complete, all the physical evidence in the area was collected.

In spite of the fact that the condition of the remains was very poor, some evidence concerning cause of death was recovered. Fragments of skull were found with fractures consistent with lesions caused by projectiles from firearms. The ballistic evidence associated with the remains also included three empty shells from Galil rifles. It was not possible to establish whether the victims were alive when they were taken into the area. However, the presence of empty shells next to skeletal remains which sustain lesions caused by gunshot wounds can be added to the testimonies that victims were brought to the woods to be assassinated. Taken together, these data strongly suggest extrajudicial executions.

Laboratory Analysis

Analysis of the remains found in Site One began in July 1994 with the skeletons which were recovered first, and continued in June and July 1995 once the excavation of the well had been completed.

Minimum Number, Sex, and Age of Victims

Laboratory analysis increased the minimum number of individuals recovered in Site One from 156 to 161. Skeletons corresponded to individuals of both sexes and all ages. Sixty-seven (41.35 percent) were of children under twelve years of age with an average age of 7 years old. Adults over fifty were the least represented age cohort (17 individuals; 10.5 percent).

It was not possible to determine the sex of 74 of the skeletons (45.65 percent). Most of these cases were children (67 individuals), for whom sexual dimorphism is not yet expressed in the skeletal system. In the remaining seven cases, deterioration of the remains was so severe that sex could not be determined.

Comparison of Preliminary Historical Investigation and Forensic Investigation

The following table shows the distribution by sex and age cohort for the skeletons exhumed from Site One and analyzed in the laboratory [lab.], in comparison with the list of victims generated from preliminary research [prel.].

Note: The nine individuals found in Sites Two and Three must be added to this table, bringing

the minimum number of skeletons recovered in archaeological work from 162 to 171 individuals.

In this table we can see the discrepancy between the 222 persons listed from preliminary research and the minimum number of individuals (171) recovered through forensic investigation.

This difference was particularly large in the category of children under twelve: the victims' list records 38 more children than were recovered in archaeological work. This discrepancy can be explained in part by the poor conditions of the skeletal remains of the infants, as well as other difficulties of the investigation (which have been described above). For this reason we can only speak of a "minimum number" of skeletons. It is possible that a greater number of individuals are actually represented among the skeletal remains recovered. In addition, it may be true that some children were not thrown into the well but instead were buried elsewhere or left on the surface in some other part of the village.

Another significant difference between the list of victims and the exhumed remains can be found in the age cohorts of women between the ages of thirteen and 37 years old: that is to say, girls and young adult women. In these age groups the victims' list records 29 more women than the results of forensic investigation. The explanation for this discrepancy may lie in certain circumstances of the massacre. Some reports state that a group of women were separated from the rest to prepare food for the soldiers while they remained in the area.

Laboratory: Patricia Bernardi looks at children's clothing recovered from the well.

The youngest women could have been taken to the woods and raped and murdered there. In all probability, their bodies were abandoned where they were killed.

With respect to the surface sites, the remains found at Site Two (La Aguada) were classified according to type of bone and laterality. A minimum number of four individuals was determined through this analysis. Ninety percent of the skeletal remains recovered were of long bones, and ten percent were of flat bones corresponding to skull and rib fragments. The same methods were used for the remains from Site Three (Los Salazares). A minimum number of five individuals was determined for Site Three.

Age	Male		Female		Undeterm.		Subtotals	
Cohort	Prel.	Lab.	Prel.	Lab.	Prel.	Lab.	Prel.	Lab.
0-12	48	00	45	00	12	67	105	67
13-25	22	28	25	12	00	05	47	45
26-37	18	15	18	02	00	00	36	17
38-50	17	12	04	04	00	00	21	16
50+	10	09	03	06	00	02	13	17
Totals:	115	64	95	24	12	74	222	162

Table II: Comparison between the historical data and the Forensic Laboratory results.

State of Preservation/Peri- and Post-mortem Lesions

As stated above, the remains found on the surface in sites 2 and 3 were in an extremely bad state of preservation, due to a variety of external factors. A similar situation was found at Site 1. Here, the damage to the bones resulting from the bodies being thrown into the well and from the pressure of the earth on top of them may be responsible for the numerous peri- and post-mortem fractures. In addition, deformations in the bones were observed which corresponded to the curvature of the well's walls. These deformations could have been caused by the same factors described above.

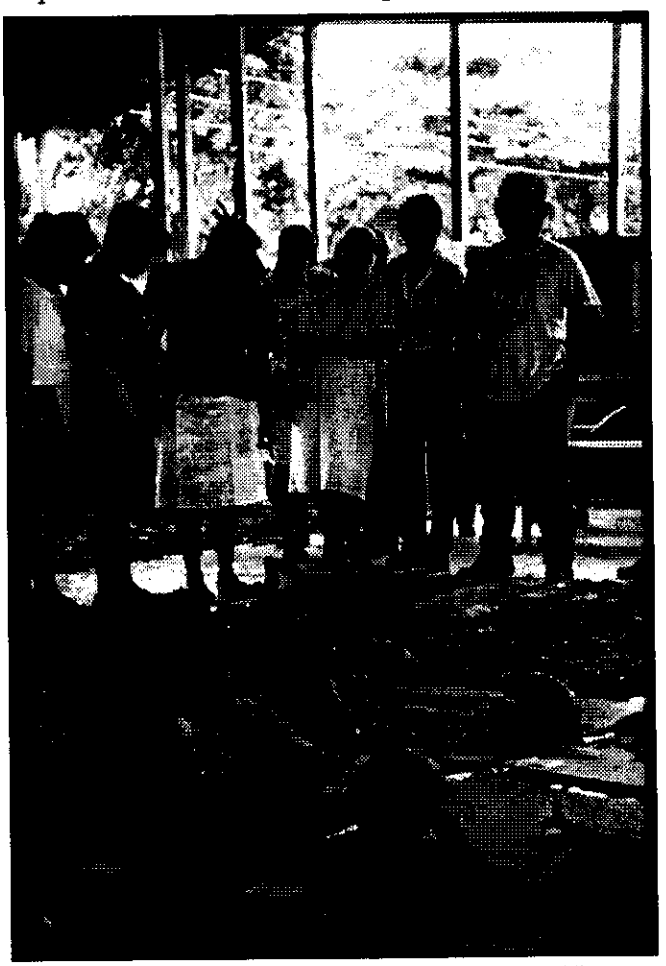
In addition to these damages, the skeletal remains demonstrate severe traumas caused by gunshot wounds as well as lesions incurred when the bodies fell into the well and were then crushed. At least 29 victims received gunshot wounds, as determined by the recovery of projectiles associated with the remains, and/or the observation of lesions consistent with gunshot wounds in the skull and thorax. These lesions provide important evidence as to the cause of death.

Four individuals were found with their hands tied behind their back and ropes around their necks. The cause of death for these victims may have been hanging or strangulation.

Identification

Identification is a process of comparison between the data obtained through the study of skeletal remains and physical information on the victims supplied by relatives and witnesses. In the case of the Dos Rs, most families had all of their members killed, so that the solicitation of pre-mortem data was not possible. In addition, most of the victims massacred were recent migrants to the area coming from parts of the country. For this reason, it was difficult to track down surviving relatives for these victims. A third factor working against the identification of victims is the almost total absence of both clinics or of dentists in the area which the population might have made use of. For this reason, medical and dental records, two primary sources for pre-mortem physical data, were not available.

Nevertheless, it was possible to establish three tentative identifications based on external factors: the discovery of an identity card, a photograph, and a raffle ticket. These pieces of evidence were found in the pockets of clothing associated with the skeletons. They established ties to relatives who provided physical data, which in turn led to the positive identification of the following people: Albino Israel Gonzalez Carias, a farmer from Las Cruces, 22 years old; Cristobal Aquino, son of Federico Aquino, 17 years old;



In accordance with Guatemalan justice requirements, a public exposition of the remains and other evidence retrieved from Site One was held on July 29, 1995 in the all-purpose building of the village of Las Cruces.

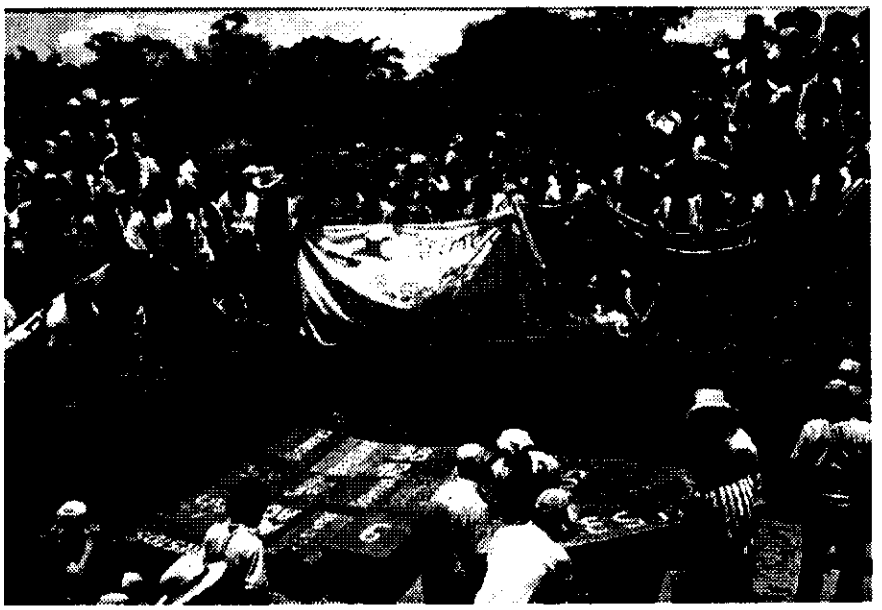
and Adan Pineda, a male child who was killed in the massacre along with his family. The names of these three people appear on the list of victims.

On July 25, 1995, representatives of FAMDEGUA and EAAF delivered the forensic report to the District Justice of the Peace of Sayaxche, Sr. Raul Armando Ramirez Hernandez. In accordance with Guatemalan justice requirements, a public exposition of the remains and other evidence retrieved from Site One was held on July 29, 1995 in the all-purpose building of the village of Las Cruces. There, relatives and neighbors had the opportunity to view the remains and attempt to recognize specific characteristics, clothing, or personal affects of the victims.

As a result of this exposition, the Judge certified the identification of sixteen other people, all of whom were named in the list of victims of the massacre at the Dos Rs. These individuals were: Juan de Dios, 25 years old; Felipe Arriaga, Rene Jimenez Castillo, and Esteban Romero, all approximately 55 years old; Jeronimo Muñoz, and José Domingo Batres, both 50 years old; Juan Mejía Echeverria, 60 years old; Prospero Ramírez, 65 years old; Cristobal Aquino, Ramiro Gomez Hernández, Angelina Hernández Lima, Rosa Hernández, and Elida Esperanza Arriaga, all 6 years old; Albina Canan and Maritza Granados, both 8 years old; and Dina Arévalo, 16 years old.

On the morning of Sunday, July 30, 1995, a religious ceremony was performed among the ruins of the Dos Rs, in the presence of the Bishop of the Petén, Monseñor Rodolfo Bobadilla. Afterwards, a procession carried urns containing the remains of the victims to the cemetery of Las Cruces. The urns were laid side by side in a collective grave. The remains of those persons identified in forensic analysis or recognized were placed in a special section of the same common grave, in case their relatives should ask to have them re-exhumed in order to move them to another cemetery or to individual graves.

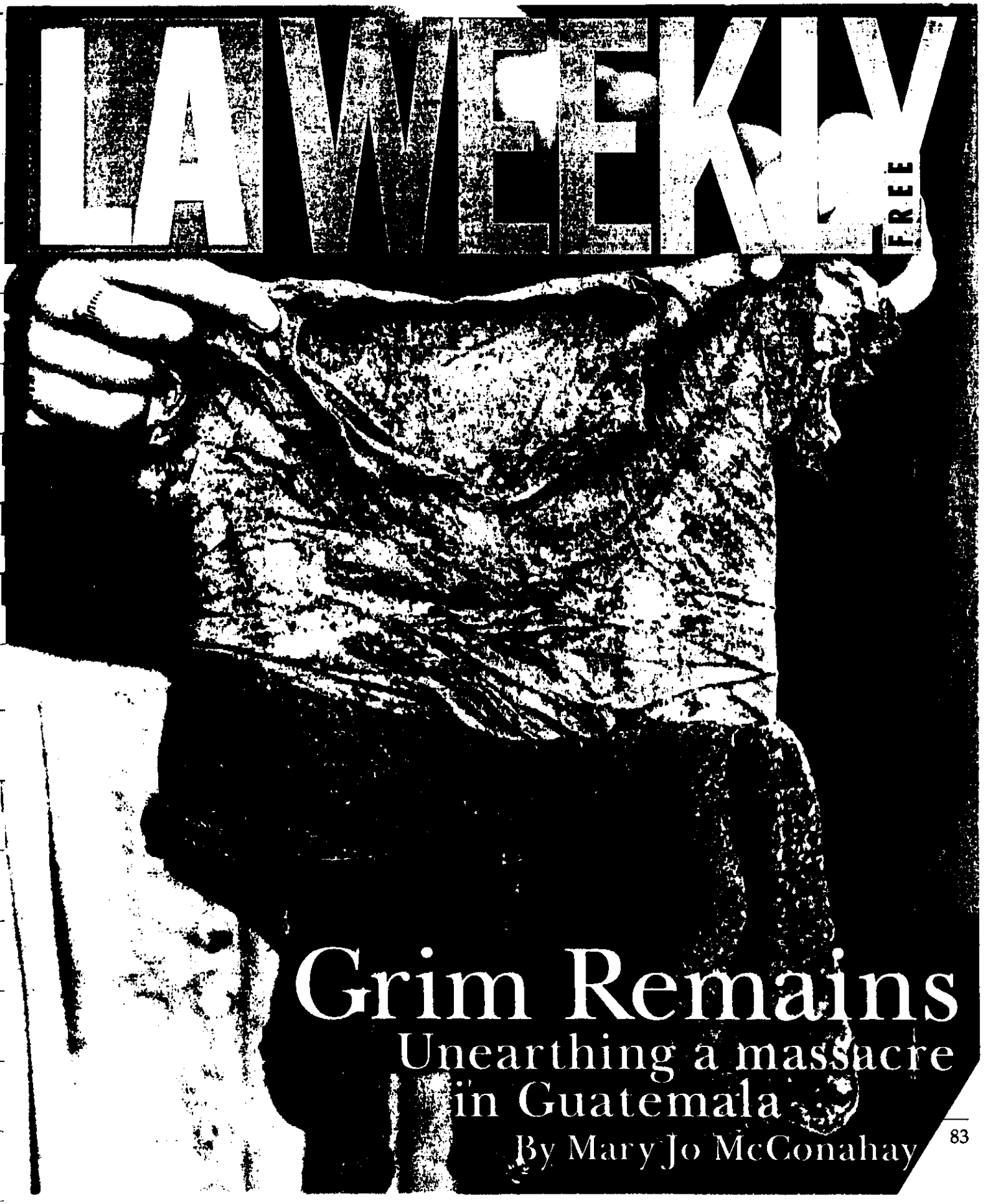
The investigation of the massacre which occurred in the areas of the village of the Two RRs in December 1982 has begun to shed light on the repression which existed in the Petén in the 1980s. More specifically, the investigation has uncovered a history which has been hidden under several meters of earth. Investigation of the past is fundamental to the peace process in Guatemala, which is taking its first few steps down a long road. The massacre at the Dos Rs is just one terrible example of this past.



Current Situation

FAMDEGUA will try to prosecute General Rios Montt for the massacre at Dos Rs. The case will also be presented at the future UN Truth Commission emerging from the peace accords.

LA WEEKLY FREE



Grim Remains

Unearthing a massacre in Guatemala

By Mary Jo McConahay

Grim

Unearthing a massacr in Guatemala

BY MARY JO McCONAHA

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANA ASL

My rented Jeep hurtled along a dirt road in northern Guatemala under a yellow sun already hot at midmorning. "Look for a flame tree on the right," someone had said. Amid the dust and potholes rumbled pickups carrying local priests with pickaxes, newly arrived Argentine forensics experts and a handful of shovel-toting, stone-faced survivors of a 12-year-old massacre.

We were a caravan seeking the macabre: human bones, perhaps thousands of them, which might tell the true story of a hidden chapter of the hemisphere's history. If the bodies could be found, the survivors of the massacre might be able to reclaim lands they lost during a long and brutal war. And Guatemala would take another tentative step toward restoring its fragile democracy.

The blooms of the flame tree shone like stoplights through the dust, and a silent farmer opened a gate onto a narrow break between cornfields. We headed into miles of farm plots gone wild and a stretch of rain forest where peasants had hunted tasty *tepescuintle* rodents and wild boar. As we approached the place where the village called Dos RR's once stood, I heard the eerie cries of howler monkeys and watched as clouds of black butterflies rose from the scrub in startling bursts. There were no signs of human activity, however, as if the locals believed the land had been cursed by so much killing.

I had undertaken this journey because of the stories told by those who knew the village that once stood here. It had been a settlement cut out of the jungle of El Peten, a vast rain forest stretching from Chiapas to Belize, colonized by peasants using slash-and-burn farming methods. "Skulls in the fields explode when you burn around Dos RR's," said one old-timer who lived on the Usumacinta River, four hard-road hours away. Another *petenero* told me to look for the unfinished well in which the villagers had once searched for water.

Through a friend, I had months earlier tracked down one of the few survivors of the massacre, now a janitor in a Guatemala City hotel. The janitor was very poor, and my friend, a college professor, brought him old clothes each time he visited the hotel. I will call him Pedro García, though, as with the other villagers mentioned here, that is not his real name. Over the years, Pedro confided to my professor friend the story of what happened at Dos RR's.

I found Pedro in a remote corner of the lobby, sweeping up bits of dirt around the flower pots. When I introduced myself and mentioned the name of Dos RR's, his face went pale. He grasped his broom and stared hard at me, then looked around to make sure no one else was listening. Yes, he said finally, in a decisive tone, he would talk into my tape recorder, because I was a friend of his friend, and because "It is time." Pedro led me furtively up a labyrinth of the hotel's back stairs, where we sat near the trash drop and spoke for several hours. He often spoke in the present tense, fear suddenly fresh again on his 62-year-old face, as if he were reliving the moments armed men arrived at the isolated family farm where he lived with two daughters and their husbands, two sons and their wives, and eight other children.

The killings in Dos RR's took place during the height of the Guatemalan army's counterinsurgency campaign. In an effort to separate leftist guerrillas from their

(Above, left) The excavation nears its final stages. (Above, right) Forensic anthropologist Silvana Turner at the Dos RR's exhumation


Remains

peasant supporters, the army launched a "scorched earth" policy, wiping more than 400 villages off the map.

Pedro García remembered that the soldiers who arrived at Dos RR's were disguised as guerrillas, a ploy often used by the army to trick the peasants into revealing their loyalties.

"They say, 'We are the guerrillas, and we're come to take you with us, and if not we'll kill you.' But they aren't guerrillas. They are army. The army had been circling our village for days," he said. They even carried a camp kitchen on the operation. Now they wore old clothes over their uniforms, but hadn't bothered to change their distinctive army boots or backpacks, and carried army-issue Israeli Galil rifles. "Put us all together and kill us, but we're not going," answered Pedro's wife, Rosa, desperately playing along. "Do you think I could go with you to the mountains with my small children to suffer hunger and thirst, where mosquitoes and flies and every other animal can bite them? No."

For five hours, three soldiers tormented the family. At one point, they ordered everyone into a line, aimed and cocked their rifles, but did not shoot. Then they took Pedro outside and asked for money. "Where are the guns you have hidden?" the soldiers demanded. "Why do you live so far outside town?" Then, finally, "Everyone face down on the floor!" But Pedro remained upright. There on the back steps of the hotel, relating those moments, Pedro García, a fervent evangelical Christian, stood and lifted his arms.

"I prayed, 'I commend my spirit and those of all your small children here — you will know what to do with us, Lord.'" He said he reckoned he would die, and began to speak loudly in strange "angelic tongues." The soldiers were surprised, and maybe even frightened — they were very young, and there may have been among them evangelicals, too, in whom the outburst struck a God-fearing chord. Suddenly, the drama changed course, and the soldier in charge turned quickly to leave. Over his shoulder he warned the García not to go in a certain direction, "because our companions are there" and they'll kill you.

Indeed, at that moment, García's sons and 60 others were being led at gunpoint on a death march through the heart of the village. Only one would survive. Federico, who was 11 at the time. "Come back in eight days, and I will take you to my son," Pedro García said to me.

As I followed the motley caravan on the way to the exhumation at Dos RR's, I thought back to those first interviews with the García, and realized the valor they displayed in talking about the massacre. The peasants in the pickups of the caravan looked humble, too, but they also had done something courageous in denouncing a mass killing by the army. Ever since 1954, when a CIA-sponsored coup toppled the democratically elected leftist government of President Jacobo Arbenz, Guatemala's iron-fisted army has been the law of the land.

There was a time, however — in 1979 and the early 1980s — when guerrillas seriously challenged the army. It was an insurgency begun years before by dissident army officers who objected, among other things, to Guatemala's role in providing CIA training camps for Cuban exiles. In the countryside, peasants began to organize against their impoverished condition only to see their leaders imprisoned, tortured and murdered by the government. When the guerrillas attacked or held political meetings, the army arrived, wreaking vengeance against civilians, leading even more campesinos to support the opposition. By the early 1980s, the army had adopted the ultimate counterinsurgency strategy: empty or eliminate entire communities to deprive guerrillas of support.

The night before our caravan headed for the site, international doctors and churchmen at the medics' clinic in a nearby town recounted the short, bitter history of this particular disappeared community, confirming what García told me. Beginning in 1978, they said, 43 families came to the wild, homesteading Peten region, cleared jungle and planted 300 acres; they named the place Dos RR's for the Ruano and Reyes families, the first to arrive. It was a tight-woven community, because most came from the same place on the Pacific coast. Like pioneers in the old American West, they worked together to clear the seven-kilometer road to the village by machete (no one could afford a chain saw) and build a one-room schoolhouse. No liquor was sold in the three housefront shops, and on Sundays villagers filled the two small churches they had built, one Catholic, the other evangelical. By the early 1980s, however, when guerrillas operated in the Peten, the army began to suspect that the community was harboring rebel sympathizers. The villagers didn't know it, but they were doomed.

"What's happening is a cleansing operation," an army lieutenant told one of the villagers during the massacre, according to testimony. "Like the Bible says, those who are judged filthy shall die, and those clean shall live. The filthy to the fire." Some 376 persons, by the most conservative estimates from among those who have investigated the events at Dos RR's, died on December 6, 7 and 8, 1982. The number includes villagers and about 40 day laborers hired by the farmers during harvest time. Very young girls were raped before soldiers cut their throats, according to testimony.

As the jeeps and pickups in our caravan parked at the end of the road, I searched the horizon for the place where all this might have happened. There was only brush, it seemed, and a few scrubby trees. We walked for a half-hour under a blazing sun, in a straggly line. No one spoke. I believe each person who knew the history of Dos RR's was thinking of the last march of those who died here.

This is the way Federico García, who was there, described the march the day his father took me to meet him: "They brought in more people we knew, our neighbors, about 30 men and 30 women, in separate columns, herding them like cattle. That's not counting the children, who were walking behind their mothers, weeping. The men with guns surrounded them, grabbing the women by the hair, making them walk; they directed the men more carefully, cursing them, but not hitting them as they did the women. They mounted one man in his 90s on a horse, because he couldn't walk fast enough. They took my cousin Rosita and another young girl from their mothers, and made them stay. 'We're taking you to the school,' they told the rest of us. 'Don't worry.'"

I interviewed Federico García in the two-room shack on a ranch outside Guatemala City where he worked as a caretaker. He described a living village where now I was seeing only tall grass bent by hot wind. The fields of his youth, he said, were filled with corn, squash, bananas, beans and chile; while the roofs of some houses were still thatch gathered from the jungle, more and more families each year could afford safer, more fireproof tin sheeting over their heads. There was the thrill of hearing jaguar roar far off in the night, and the more practical pleasure of bringing home the odd tasty bird downed with a slingshot. Like other adolescent boys, Federico worked alongside his older brothers in the fields, but he was still enough of a youngster to enjoy the pineapple and sugar cane the farmer Juan Arevalo distributed to the delight of children as they came to watch the progress on the well he was digging. "He'll dig all the way to China!" they used to say.

As we neared the site of that well, I remembered that Federico García was stunned that anyone would ask him what happened at Dos RR's. He had not spoken of it to anyone outside the family, mostly out of fear, but also because he thought no one would believe such things could happen. A handsome young man with a thin mustache and the muscular arms of someone who lifts and hauls, Federico introduced me to his wife, Rosa. She dried her hands on an apron before shyly extending one in greeting. Federico and Rosa cleared and scrubbed a small wooden table — the only furniture besides two beds in the room where they lived and slept with their three children. They brought in two wooden stools from the eating shed, a simple way of giving great importance to the setting where Federico would speak.

Federico began his story by retracing his movements in the hours before the soldiers captured him. He and his brother Ernesto had gone to Las Cruces that morning, to buy milk for Ernesto's new baby and medicine for their mother, who was recovering from a stroke. As they returned home, they ran into a man who said he wanted to buy a fresh turkey from their uncle for Christmas. Instead of going by their usual route, circling Dos RR's itself to reach the family homestead, the brothers headed for their uncle's house in the center of town to give him the order right away.

"That day we didn't pass anyone in the road," Federico García remembered. "What could be happening? When my

KATHLEEN FOSTER IMPACT VISUALS

PIET VAN LIER IMPACT VISUALS

Special forces troops of the Guatemalan army

A school in a community of returned refugees, El Peten, Guatemala

brother Ernesto and I reached my uncle's house, armed men were there in civilian clothes, but underneath you could see their soldiers' camouflage. On top, they had put on the clothes of those they had already killed. They were holding my uncle and his four young daughters in the cooking shed, and his wife, too, who was crying. Her eyes were so red — she was afraid, she knew something was going to happen."

When the brothers started to bolt, they were stopped by gunfire and ordered to join the others. Ernesto would be dead in a few hours.

The rest of Garcia's testimony was careful in detail. I took its main points to a church person I trusted in Peten. He rose from his desk to close the office door. "We know about this, people have been coming to us," he said. He asked me not to go looking for the disappeared village. Investigators in the guise of hunters were reconnoitering at the site right now for the purposes of a legal exhumation, he said, but the appearance of a *gringa* asking questions could alert those who might want the crime hidden. He invited me to accompany the scientists their remains mixed up in gullies and groves?

The job seemed one for a relatively new breed of scientist — forensic anthropologists. Like archaeologists, they carefully unearth history by digging up the dead. Like legal investigators, they are looking to solve crimes. The young Argentine and Guatemalan teams (no one is over 40) are among the few scientists of their kind who regularly combine anthropology and archaeology to give voice to victims of political mass murder.

Their conclusions have been rejected by the grieving when science determines remains are not those of political victims. More commonly, they have been threatened by those in authority who want the recent past to stay hidden. They have been denounced as political tools of one side or another.

Never, as yet, has their science been successfully impugned.

"This may call for digging a trench to come in from the side," senior anthropologist Patricia Bernardi said, thinking out loud as she stood next to Juan Arevalo's well at Dos RR's, gloved hands on hips, a blue bandanna around

Patricia Bernardi cleans bones recovered from the well at Dos RR's.

and others when they began their task.

By 1994, events were converging to lift the silence about Dos RR's. The army had abandoned its camouflage-painted cement box buildings in the garrison at Las Cruces, the market and cattle-trading town five miles southeast. Peace talks between the government and the guerrillas were under way. The Peten's Roman Catholic bishop had opened an office to help illiterate peasants navigate the government's paper bureaucracy — to obtain birth certificates for children enrolling in school, for instance. Unexpectedly, survivors of Dos RR's appeared because they, too, needed paperwork: in order to press claims to the old farmland and work it again for their families, they required proof of the deaths of the husbands, fathers, sisters and others in whose names the land was legally registered. The problem, they said, was that no death certificates had been issued by municipal authorities, because the victims had been massacred by the army.

And how were they to prove relatives died at all, since their bodies lie piled together at the bottom of a dry well, or her neck. A short-haired blond woman in her mid-30s, Bernardi dropped her trowel and ran in shock and grief at the sight of her first bullet-pierced skull in 1984; this day she was clearly in quiet command after just minutes on site. Silvana Turner, a new recruit to the team still in her 20s, a stickler for order and detail yet compassionate of manner, was lashing together saplings with vines alongside her more experienced teammate, Dario Olmo. He is a big, urbane and soft-spoken Buenos Aires resident whose time away from the field is spent teaching university classes in forensic anthropology.

Together, Turner and Olmo supervised the construction of a kind of sawhorse, 6 feet tall and spanning the 6-foot mouth of the well, from which a bucket to excavate the well's contents would be suspended.

Everyone pitched in. Two local priests, one coughing with emphysema, the other sweating profusely, wielded machetes to clear brush. Someone flung a rope over the crosspiece of the sawhorse to attach the bucket; later, anthropologists, lawyers, farmers, padres, widows and sympathetic onlookers would take turns hauling it up. For now, each approached the rim of the well to watch a lone farmer who had climbed down inside to a depth of 7 feet, where he backed away at invading tree roots, which had to be cleared before the dig could begin. He was intent, a man searching for lost neighbors.

It took more than an hour of careful digging with a trowel before the first items appeared — shreds of badly disintegrated cloth. A local woman, Carmen de Perez, appeared on the scene to bring food. Claiming a place alongside the well, she took on the role of a Greek chorus of one: "They're down there, the children and the old men, they are there," she insisted each time the buckets rose to the surface carrying nothing but dirt.

In the summer of 1994, a non-government human-rights advocacy group, the Families of the Disappeared in Guatemala (FAMDEGUA), filed a request for a judge's order to begin the exhumation at Dos RR's. Three FAMDEGUA members who collected accounts of events and descriptions of the victims — important where few ever see a doctor or have an X-ray — now stood in the hot sun alongside everyone else, waiting patiently for the appearance of bones.

The slow process grated on the nerves of some of the government officials witnessing the excavation. Two uniformed national policemen busied themselves with recording the names of everyone on site. The district attorney, Mario Alfonso Ramirez Ramos, who had to verify the collection of evidence and declare cause to investigate, said he didn't think any bones would be discovered. He was palpably nervous — district attorneys have been threatened and shot at, and their houses firebombed, for facilitating investigations like this one. When Ramirez announced he was suspending the dig for two days, some cried foul.

"You can't do that," said a church lawyer, quoting chapter and verse from the new penal code she carried in hand.

Olmo was testier: "We came 9,000 miles, and you've come barely 300. Can't you wait a little longer?"

Ramirez turned to me later, gesturing at the abandoned hamlet and the budding dig, and said, "Look, everyone knows it was the military, but this was all 12 years ago. I have 16 cases on my desk that need tending right now."

Someone motioned I should proceed quietly through a stand of bushes to follow a search party: a priest, a photographer, Carmen de Perez, Turner and several peasants were already hiking toward a thicket about a mile away. They wanted to investigate another possible site without drawing the attention of *oreja*, literally "ears" or spies who might have been among the crowd of some 40 persons at the well.

Typically in these investigations, a delicate balance had to be struck between gathering enough information to obtain a judge's order for exhumation, and giving away one's moves lest evidence be stolen or destroyed.

We walked single file in the open landscape through grass called *golondrina* ("swallow," after the bird that symbolizes return) and edible weeds called *chipilin*. Some of us were edgy, and we called out to each other when we became separated. Approaching a dark wood, we broke branches to use as walking sticks and for protection against snakes. We used our boots to turn over the soil and leaves, and found bones. As our eyes adjusted to the faint light, we used our sticks to pick out bits of clothing and footwear partially mulched into the forest floor. Turner scanned with a more practiced eye, stooping to examine small objects. She noted the bones were dispersed in a wide area, because the unburied bodies had been exposed to animals and the elements over years. Animals would have carried away the long bones early, she said, when they still bore flesh. Clothing and other clues to identification, as well as bullet fragments or casings important for clues to the cause of death, would not necessarily be "associated" with the skeletal remains to which they belonged. This wooded site was frustrating; put coldly, it was not worth the time and expenditure of precious resources at the moment for the results it might produce.

Carmen de Perez did not need a scientific investigation to know this was a killing field. Twelve years ago, she said, her brother-in-law Juan de Dios Falla Mejia had departed from their house outside Dos RR's to help a neighbor who believed his seven children were inside the town. They never came back. Two days later, Carmen and her sister entered the village to look for some trace of the men.

Instead, at the school they found the desks covered with blood, pieces of looped rope, and ripped clothing. They walked through Juan Arevalo's fields and sensed something amiss. They knew Arevalo had been doggedly digging his well month after month, looking for the water he never found. They found the shaft, once more than 30 feet deep, newly filled in with dirt. The women fled home to huddle with their children for almost a month, before they worked up the courage to enter these woods. They came because they had seen vultures flock here in the days after the massacre.

"There were many decapitated bodies," Carmen recalled, standing under a tree and looking into the dense foliage. "The heads were piled among the roots of the trees. They were our friends and neighbors. We could see the dogs had been eating them. We felt afraid, because of what happened in this place." It was hard to recognize individuals, Carmen said, because during the month between the killings and the day she dared to enter the wood "a kind of green stuff" had also come to grow over the remains.

Why, I wondered, did Carmen de Perez, a timid-looking 38-year-old peasant mother of six, expose herself in this way to sit by the well and lead others to the open tomb in the woods?

"I was amazed when I saw them digging out the well," she said quietly, "because for so long we thought our lives here were worth nothing to anyone. We said nothing, because we felt that for them, for others whose lives were worth something, we were like some animals who could be killed, even for speaking."

Seeing our caravan arrive from her house, outside where Dos RR's once stood, had been a shock. The last time so many vehicles entered the village was when a caravan of army and civilian trucks came from Las Cruces after the massacre to steal the goods of the dead: corn, pigs, calves, chickens, furniture, anything that could be moved before they burned the place down. When Carmen de Perez realized what was happening this time, however, she was overcome with the emotion of the event, realizing that for once the dead peasants were being considered human beings. That was when she packed food and water for the work-

ers, changed into pants and a head scarf, and headed for the well.

By quitting time in the late afternoon, we were back at the dig. The team had unearthed two makeshift shovels, crafted from cut-up yellow plastic cooking-oil containers and steel bars.

Whoever covered any bodies had likely jerry-rigged the shovels on the spot. Logically, they would have been the last things tossed in. The forensic anthropologists were certain they would find bones tomorrow.

"Any bad dreams?" an old peasant farmer mischievously asked early arrivals at the well the next morning.

By this time, the scientists were feeling tremendous pressure to find remains that said something about the terror at Dos RR's. Arranging court orders and interviewing witnesses had already taken weeks, and the fidgety government officials were threatening to abandon the project altogether.

Forensic anthropologists depart from [illegible] excellent homicide without leaving a mark on a bone. But they generally must collect more than just a few of the 206 bones in the human body to find the ones that scream mayhem: a cranium with the beveled entrance and larger exit wounds of a bullet, the broken forearms common to someone defending herself from blows, the congruent breaks in consecutive ribs of a chest crushed by a rifle butt. Eventually the well would produce such evidence. But not on the second, long day of exhumation.

As time passed, even those who had arrived solely as observers felt compelled to help. Some sat where the excavated dirt was piled, to sift through it with sieves and fingertips alongside Turner and Olmo. Concentrating in a manner that seemed meditative, one of the priests discovered tiny bones in dirt others had already examined. "These are human, but really too small and dissociated to be of use at the moment," Turner said in a professional tone. "I don't care how small they are," the padre replied kindly, and continued to extract fragments tenderly. In previous months, I had taken testimony and reviewed lists of the dead. But it was not until the moment that I blew dirt from a small object like sand from a shell, and watched an upper vertebra, the one that connects the spine to the neck, appear in my hand, that I felt I heard the voice of the massacre in my own ears.

At 17 feet, the well began truly to divulge its information. A rubber boot appeared. A pair of women's underwear. A call from below: *¡Ropa!* Olmo strained to raise the bucket, and Bernardi delicately removed a child's red T-shirt with decorative patterns at the shoulders. "A boy's," commented Carmen de Perez. "For a child of what age?" Bernardi asked. "Six," replied Carmen.

Another call. *¡Hueso!* A long bone. "Are you sure it's not just a root? What color is the surrounding dirt?" Bernardi called down.

The child's shirt was placed where it could be measured and photographed, then it was collected in a hand-numbered brown paper bag corresponding to a form that gives details (depth, time, associated material) of its finding. Clothes are especially important, because people in Guatemalan villages often wear the same thing for so long that they can be recognized by a shirt or housedress. Bernardi [illegible] the full skeleton, and the scene suddenly looked like digs at ancient Maya sites I've witnessed elsewhere in Peten: the problems of this team could be the same as those faced by any archaeologist.

How to light the ever-deepening hole? Where to dig canals to prevent rainwater from seeping in? How to rig a sling so they can work shifts in the tight, practically airless circle far below, exposing the scene without standing on it?

They had to mark the surface in quadrants, to identify the exact location of each find at each depth. I heard them wonder briefly with the farmers about how sturdy the walls of the well were, about whether its sides might collapse and bury whoever was at the bottom. There was no guarantee.

"I have to get down there," Bernardi said. "How long can a person work down 25 feet?"

An hour, the farmers answered. "Maybe you who are used to it," Bernardi said, frowning.

In all her experience as a charter member of the Argentine team, Bernardi had never worked a mass grave in a well. There was no time or money to do it absolutely right, with parallel shafts and proper roofing and other infrastructure, and the professional in her chafed.

"Subterranean archaeology," she muttered.

That night I tried to envision Dos RR's as Federico Garcia might have remembered it. But all I could think of was his description of its last hours.

He sat close to his brother in the schoolhouse, he said, until soldiers sent him with seven or eight other youngsters to wait with the women and children at the church. "Let's escape," he whispered to another 11-year-old, who was carrying an infant brother, but the boy said he couldn't go, because he had to stay with the baby. And then the moment was gone.

Inside the church, some women prayed while others sang, thinking that would change the hearts of the soldiers. Instead, the soldiers mocked them, grabbing the guitars for the service and playing along, and putting on the neckties of the pastors. Some women nursed their babies; many just gazed at their children. Everyone knew what was going to happen.

When Federico saw his brother among the men being marched past the church, he ran for the door yelling that he wanted to go with him, but it was locked. The men in line looked "sad, composed," he said. "Why didn't they resist, even unarmed, since they outnumbered the soldiers?" I asked. "These were not the kind of people who opposed authorities, and they were afraid of anyone with guns. Maybe if they had had more time, they might have thought of a plan to defend themselves," he answered. His brother looked dignified as he passed the church, Federico said proudly. About 10 minutes later, bursts sounded from three machine guns, then individual shots.

Now that the men were gone, soldiers tried to take the women and children in another direction, but many refused and held back. "They cried out that they should kill them there in the patio of the church and not in the woods, that they wanted to die in a clean and open place," Federico said. The soldier watching him and clearing a path at the same time muttered back at the [illegible] and warned the youngster, "Don't even think about moving."

"But instead of freezing, as soon as he turned his back I jumped into the woods and rolled behind a fallen tree," Federico said. The soldier fired an automatic weapon into the trees. "He thought I was dead in there, but I was right near the edge of the path, looking at everything that happened."

The soldiers ordered the women into a line. There was the rapid fire of machine guns, screams, the crying of children, then the finishing off, *tiros de gracia*, single shots. Then silence. When the soldiers walked away, Federico saw the women and children heaped over, like bundles, on the ground. He lay unmoving until darkness fell, then crawled into the fields away from the road, and found himself colliding with bundles scattered here and there. These were the dead of the night before, of the other half of the hamlet, those who were killed first, silently, by cutting their throats.

As he inched through the night toward his house and dawn, Federico had to stop several times as soldiers passed close by. He watched a soldier, wearing his brother's hat, ride his brother's mule. At about 1 a.m., crawling past Don Jeronimo's house, "I could hear the soldiers who were inside resting," he said, "making jokes, laughing. 'We finished them off,' they said. 'Now we've cleaned it up. And we're going to keep going until there's not one left of those, those . . .' and here they used ugly words. I heard them talking about violating young girls, and joking about that and other things they did."

On the fourth day, the first skeleton was located at 22 feet 4 inches, still dressed in maroon pants and a blue shirt. Intact in a pocket were a pair of glasses with black plastic rims, and a toothbrush. The second skeleton, at 23 feet, still bore a knotted handkerchief wrapped like a blindfold around its skull. In one pocket Bernardi found a military registration card (a rare event at exhumations) on which identification information could still be read: Albino Carias Gonzalez, age 22, single, farmer; the names of Gonzalez's parents; and his home address. The card carried a photo. Young Gonzalez's bones were found entangled with those of another male, on top of whom he had been dropped. And that person's bones were found mixed with those of the next corpse, and on and on it seemed for days, as the cool, deepening shaft gave up its secrets.

For weeks, the team labored using implements as fine as dental tools and watercolor brushes. Word spread that the unfolding process at Dos RR's was serious, and legally sanctioned, and more informants appeared.

At night, when representatives of FAMDEGUA and anthropologists retired to a bunkhouse at a church installation in Las Cruces, unseen individuals took to throwing rocks on its roof and firing guns nearby. When peasants reported army patrols in the vicinity — an unusual occurrence — and strangers appeared at the well, the anthropologists suggested caution, and Carmen de Perez stayed home. Military presence increased in Las Cruces; cars traveling to the dig were searched at gunpoint. Parishioners warned one of the priests that word was out around town he was in danger. He did not feel deeply threatened, he told me, "because there haven't been any of

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the notes or other warnings yet that you usually get in these situations."

By the time the rains came — early and hard — everyone around the well had begun to look more alike: tired, but also bathed in a layer of the same red-brown mud, a democratic patina of clay uniting police, scientists, survivors. The rain seeped into the earth, each drop threatening to loosen the walls of the shaft and bury whoever might be working inside. When the trucks from the main road to the vicinity of the well site became almost impassable, Olmo and Turner called a temporary halt to the dig and took the bones they had excavated thus far to a room in Las Cruces.

The scientists washed the bones and laid them out on flat surfaces. They looked for answers to key questions: the cause of death (say, a bullet in the head) and manner of death (homicide, suicide, accident, natural causes). They measured leg bones to extrapolate stature, observed the beveling of the scapula and the length of the humerus to determine whether someone was left- or right-handed. They dated bones by checking the degree to which epiphyses — the rounded ends

that ossify separately — were fused.

Tired, sniffling from the mildew that had become ubiquitous since the arrival of the heavy tropical rains, Bernardi, Turner and Olmo packaged the remains of seven adult males and three young boys in the best available material — cartons used for importing corn flakes — and stacked them in a closet at the public clinic in Las Cruces, sealing it with a chain and a bicycle lock. Painstakingly, they elaborated a report, which Turner delivered to the judge.

From an archaeological point of view, the burial was "a primary, synchronous common grave," they said: common because at least several persons were buried there; synchronous because skeletons were uncovered superimposed and even intertwined, indicating burial at the same time; primary because bones were found articulated and in their correct anatomical positions, as if persons had died in place or just before burial, and their bodies decomposed in the well — not as if their bones had been transferred from somewhere else. And they could say the grave was consistent in time with the massacre reported by witnesses, because coins and even a 1982 calendar were found in the victims' pockets.

They also determined persons died violently. A fragment of metal — "compatible with the projectile of a firearm" — was embedded in a lower jawbone. A telltale green mark, typically left behind by the copper coating of a high-velocity bullet, stained a cranium. Ribs broken at death. Bullet fragment attached to a shirt. Spent cartridges. The cleanly cut neck.

Because remains of 10 persons were found in a space of just one and a half meters, Bernardi termed them "a token" of what the well contained. "There are undoubtedly 10 meters more of bones," she said.

In May, assisted by funding from a Dutch non-governmental agency and a German religious organization, the Argentine scientists returned to the well and two additional nearby sites.

Federico García once told me that instead of feeling relief at having escaped, he wanted to die after what he had seen, thinking he was the only one left in the village. With his communal upbringing, he could not imagine living without his relatives and neighbors. At the same time, if his family were alive on the outskirts, he felt he needed to survive out of a sense of responsibility, to reach the house and "tell my parents what happened."

It is a feeling Bernardi, Turner and Olmo would understand.

"We see our work as historical reconstruction," Bernardi said in Peten. "In Argentina, it helped demolish the official story that the 18,000 'disappeared' had simply ceased to exist, and that the military government had nothing to do with mass torture and murder. The bones are the story of what happened. They cannot lie."

During the break in the Dos RR's exhumation, I traveled to Guatemala City to talk to Federico Reyes, an archaeologist turned forensic anthropologist. In the early 1990s, the Argentineans and other scientists, sponsored by the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, first taught Reyes and other Guatemalans their forensic skills. Now the Guatemalan team is uncovering massacres that demolish this country's "official story": that clandestine graveyards hold guerrillas, or are the work of leftist rebels in the 1980s.

"It is important to open a space where this period can be considered. We're giving scientific proof of the manner in which ordinary people were affected," said Reyes.

I interviewed him over the skeleton of a 9-year-old girl from a site called Plan de Sanchez, in Baja Vera Paz province, where remains of more than 180 Maya Achi Indians were recovered. Reyes pointed to fire fractures — bones burst like popcorn. The teeth provided clues to age and ethnicity: canines and molars on the skull had not erupted, and the shovel-shaped incisors were characteristic of Amerindians. He determined sex by the tilt of pelvic bones. My take was less scientific, but I, too, could see this was a little girl, who had groomed herself that morning for a day she had no idea would be her last: long hair remained attached to the skull in a braid, decorated with a strip of once-bright colored cloth. Reyes reminded me that the majority of victims of mass murder uncovered by the Guatemalan team since it began work in 1992 were children.

There are few places where public reassessment of recent history is more earnest than Guatemala. In May, based on the findings at Dos RR's, FAMDEGUA began legal proceedings against General Efrain Rios Montt, who was chief of state at the time of the massacre and who remains a powerful political figure.

Much of the everyday hard work around exhumations is left to about half a dozen non-government organizations such as FAMDEGUA, whose members are often relatives of disappeared themselves. They collect testimony, document the chain of events, often winning the confidence of witnesses by speaking to them in one of Guatemala's 22 indigenous languages. They publish a newsletter called *Nunca Más* ("Never Again"). When I visited FAMDEGUA's office in downtown Guatemala City, workmen had just delivered dozens of miniature coffins — they needed, after all, only to be the length of a femur, the body's longest bone — to hold remains of the victims at Dos RR's.

Key support for the exhumations often comes from the Catholic Church. At Dos RR's, church legal aide Juan Francisco Soto worked in dirt at the well, a baseball cap on his head and earphones tuned to soccer on his portable radio. When I interviewed him in Guatemala City, at the archbishop's Human Rights Office facing the National Palace, he was in white shirt and tie, seated at a computer, reviewing testimony he collected about Dos RR's.

"That is good land, which these families worked well, so there are moral and economic reasons why it should be returned to them," he said. "But we also want to get the truth to help people shed their trauma from those years."

What happens then? If witnesses testify the army perpetrated a massacre at Dos RR's, and you have scientific proof of a massacre, don't you join the push for justice against those responsible? Soto was cautious. The army remains powerful and the political situation is delicate.

"We do not want to affect the ongoing peace dialogue between the government and the guerrillas," he said diplomatically. "We see Dos RR's as an experiment, like opening a door. Now we have to see what kind of reaction people, and the army, have."

There are those whose position is less sensitive than Soto's, who extol the process of digging up the past as actually helping the country's transition to democracy, not threatening it. Exhumations give once-terrified people a chance to organize themselves, they say, and can even restore faith in the judicial system; this shifts power away from the army.

Before I left his office, Soto set aside arguments about whether or not exhumations stir up political trouble. Instead, he seemed moved by what he saw and heard in Peten.

"Yet to recognize sin and say punishment is impossible is to make a mockery of things," he finished thoughtfully. "You cannot play that way with people's feelings."

In July, bones retrieved from sites at Dos RR's were laid out in the halls of the municipal building at Las Cruces. Family members identified the remains of some 20 persons. Paperwork is proceeding on some of the land claims that first spurred the exhumations.

On a rainy Sunday morning, the bones were collected into the tiny coffins for a requiem mass said by one of the two priests who helped at the dig; the boxes were buried together in a single grave, in a corner of the town cemetery.

That weekend in Guatemala City's international airport, I ran into Patricia Bernardi, the Argentine forensic anthropologist I had not seen since the first phase of the exhumation. She looked wan and indeed poor health had obliged her to return home to Buenos Aires ahead of the other scientists. But she was anxious to talk.

"Can you have a coffee?" she asked.

They had excavated the well down to rock, 36.6 feet, she said. She would never exhume in a well again. Once she shook a fer-de-lance from her shoulder; the walls might have caved in at any moment; vandals stole the life belts, measuring devices and eventually all the ropes. Bernardi took snapshots out of her purse and pushed them across the table. The excavation of the well had ended by looking like a miniature Grand Canyon.

After the first group of men, the next bodies they found were those of women, 24 of them, killed by gunshot wounds — almost all from Israeli Galil rifles — and blunt-instrument trauma. The next two meters produced the remains of 67 children, average age 11. Small craniums still filled with milk teeth. Examination of the remains revealed few bullets had been wasted on the young ones — they were battered to death or their skulls fractured.

I drove to the outskirts of the capital to find Federico García again. I wanted to say goodbye and show him a newspaper photo of the dig. He marveled at the picture, shocked that the army would allow the exhumation to happen. He remains shy of letting me use his real name, as does his father and Carmen de Perez; but Federico says he feels emboldened to give testimony to FAMDEGUA and the Catholic Church.

"My aunt had a gold tooth," he said. "Do you think that might help people tell which one is hers? I might go there to help them find my brother's bones among the others. It is hard to say that, because the last screams are still with me."

García and his parents gazed at the grainy newspaper photo, which showed only a pile of dirt, as if they could see more in it than most people.

"Look! Your brother is there!" Federico's father cried. "Your aunt Feli and the girls! Rosita! Carmen! The little ones, too! Cristobal's brother is there!"

It was a moment to recall what the forensic anthropologists told me: that they feel the personal healing their work can bring is just as important as correcting the historical record. All the digging, measuring, examining, report writing and reconstruction of events resonates deeply at such moments.

Federico García adjusted his lap to accommodate a 3-year-old son, named Ernesto after his dead brother, and examined the newspaper clipping. He spoke to his father, who stood amazed, and to his mother, who sat on a bed folding and refolding a thin blanket in an effort not to weep. I cannot say what he was seeing in his mind, but his lifted eyes fixed in the direction of tall buildings that marked the beginning of the capital and the rest of the country beyond.

"They will believe us now," he said. LA

Mary Jo McConahay is Central America editor for the Pacific News Service.

The General and the Ghosts — A Guatemalan Saga

By Trish O'Kane
Chronicle Foreign Service

Las RR, Guatemala

Where a village once stood, there is now a vast field of overgrown weeds that the jungle is steadily reclaiming. There are no ruins, no burned posts, nothing to indicate that this was once the home of 43 families. Las RR has disappeared completely, even from government records.

In 1982, an estimated 250 to 400 people — the entire population of Las RR — died horribly at the hands of soldiers.

Today however, at a time when Guatemala appears to be inching toward a permanent settlement of its decades-old internal conflict, the person who is largely responsible for the obliteration of Las RR is staging a comeback.

Polls show that the strongest candidate in next month's congressional elections is former president and retired General Efrain Rios Montt, who wrote one of the bloodiest chapters in Guatemalan history with his "scorched earth" counterinsurgency campaign of 1982-83.

According to human rights organizations, during Rios Montt's campaign more than 400 villages were wiped off the map and thousands of people massacred. Following the destruction, which all but wiped out the social base of Guatemala's guerrilla alliance, the general, who came to power via a coup, was ousted himself in 1983 and retired from politics.

"How is it possible that someone accused by the United Nations of genocide and ethnocide in the early '80s is now a candidate for congress?" asked human rights activist Factor Mendez last week at a public forum.

Ex-President Plans Return

The answer is that Rios Montt has maintained a steady following among Guatemalans who believe in the need for a strongman. Over the past few years, he has organized a political party to prepare his return from the wilderness.

Guatemala's constitution prohibits Rios Montt and any other person involved in a coup from being a presidential candidate, but not running for congress. Observers believe that once in office, Rios Montt will enlist the help of more than a dozen former military officers also expected to be elected to amend the constitution, allowing him to run for president.

BY UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

GEN. EFRAIN RIOS MONTT
Ex-president seeking comeback

Blue posters with Rios Montt's smiling face are plastered all over the capital, and his campaign caravans parade up and down main avenues with hundreds of followers.

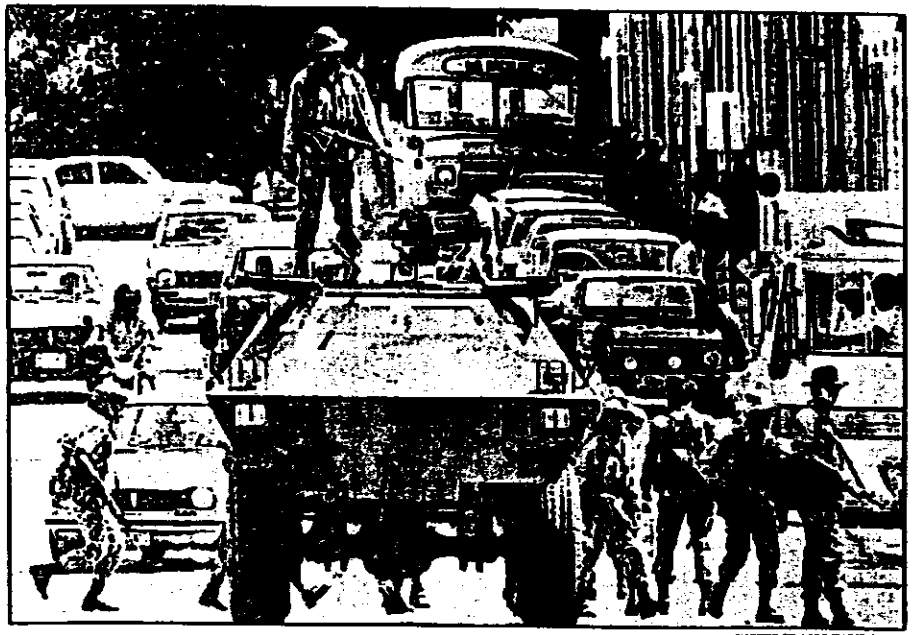
"I don't lie, I don't cheat, and I don't steal," is his slogan, appealing to Guatemalans fed up with political corruption and rampant street violence.

But the ghosts of lonely places like Las RR are coming back to haunt Rios Montt.

Earlier this month, the organization Family Members of the Disappeared in Guatemala announced that it will press charges against him for the massacre at Las RR.

This will be the first court proceeding of its kind against Rios Montt. Until recently, family members of the thousands of "scorched earth" victims have been too afraid to press charges.

Rios Montt denies responsibility for the massacres. Campaign adviser Harris Whitbeck said the international press has been "unfair" to the general, blaming him for violations that occurred before his regime.



PHOTOS BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

Guatemalan soldiers left an armored troop carrier near the presidential palace in Guatemala City in 1983, one day after a military coup toppled the government of General Rios Montt

"You can't change a mentality in the army overnight. But the changes really began June 1, 1982, with Rios' 'Beans and Rifles' program. The army's mentality changed totally from an army of occupation to an army of integration, under very strict orders," Whitbeck said. "Anyone could see that during that time, there was a pronounced peace in Guatemala."

New Frontier

In December 1982, Rios's "pronounced peace" came to Las RR, in the northern province of Peten, Guatemala's least populated area. In the '70s and '80s, it became the new frontier as thousands of landless peasants flocked to the region at the government's offer of land.

Las RR was a small settlement of some 43 families from different parts of Guatemala. It was named after its two founders, Francisco Ruano and Marcos Reyes, the two "R's," who came in 1978, taming the virgin jungle and building a new community.

In just a few years, Las RR grew and prospered, with a school, a church and a store. The land was good, harvests plentiful, and those living nearby remember their neighbors as friendly and helpful.

The only drawback was the growing presence of both leftist guerrillas and the Guatemalan army. The army built an outpost at Las Cruces, a nearby town, and began organizing civil defense patrols.

Local residents were forced to patrol in other areas, far from their homes. Las RR was a two-hour walk from the main road, and its residents did not want to spend their time patrolling.

"It was too far, and everyone had a lot of work to do on their land. So in November the leaders of Las RR went to the military outpost and told the commander, Lieutenant Carlos Carias, they had decided to patrol only their own area. He told them, 'Have it your way,' " recalled a farmer who lived on the road leading to Las RR.

One night in early December, he and his wife heard army troops pass by on their way to Las RR.

A few days later, they saw more troops head for the village, this time with tractors and trucks. The caravan passed by their house later on, loaded down with their neighbors' belongings, furniture, zinc roofing and farm animals, which were all taken to the Las Cruces military outpost.

"After the army left, we went to Las RR to see what had happened to our neighbors," the farmer's wife said. "Inside the school, the children's desks were covered with blood, and the poor women were lying dead all over the place.

"It is very painful for me to remember this," she said. "Outside there were many cadavers of the men, decapitated. There were a pile of heads at the roots of a tree, heads of our neighbors. Dogs were eating them. We were too afraid to even bury them, and we left."

After 12 years of silence, the news of the massacre at Las RR finally broke this month in Guatemala. On July 4, Family Members of the Disappeared and a team of Argentinean anthropologists began excavating a well where many of the cadavers were stuffed.

Digging Up History

On the first day of the dig, only mud and scraps of clothing were found. Mario Alfonso Ramirez, the government representative sent to observe the exhumation, said there was nothing there, and returned to the capital.

On the second day of the dig, 20 feet below the surface, the anthropologists hit human bone. As of July 13, they had uncovered five skeletons and estimate that there are many more in the well.

Since there are no known survivors of the massacre, no one is exactly sure how many people died in Las RR, but more than half are believed to be children. The anthropologists said identification of victims will be difficult since there are very few living family members and no medical records.

Two other cemeteries were discovered this month within walking distance of the well. On a low hill covered with jungle growth, numerous human bones and shoes stick up from a heavy cover of leaves.

The Argentineans will dig until the end of the month and then study the bones to determine cause of death. Their findings will be used in the case that Family Members of the Disappeared is preparing against Rios Montt.

The farmer's wife at the excavation site said: "Now at least we feel satisfied that someone has come here to see what happened to us. Before, we felt like animals, as if our lives were worth nothing."