

Witness testifies he was tortured in El Salvador, Lawsuit accuses ex-colonel of letting soldiers do it

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MEMPHIS (AP) -- A federal court witness testified yesterday that he was tortured in 1983 by a group of men led by a subordinate of a former Salvadoran colonel accused of human rights abuses.

Nicolas Carranza, 72, a top officer during El Salvador's civil war in the 1980s, is being sued in U.S. District Court by five Salvadorans who accuse him of allowing torture and murder by his soldiers.

Daniel Alvarado, one of the accusers, said he was kidnapped while watching a soccer game in El Salvador in 1983 and tortured over several days into confessing to the murder of a U.S. military adviser.

Alvarado, 46, said he was hung blindfolded from a ceiling, repeatedly beaten and shocked with electrical wires attached to his body.

"I felt like my arms were being torn off," he testified through an interpreter. "Even to this day, my shoulders hurt all the time."

He said he later learned that the supervisor of the torture was an Army major who served under Carranza.

Alvarado said he was taken to a news conference after signing the confession and presented by Carranza as one of the assassins of Marine Col. Albert Schaufelberger.

Alvarado was later freed after U.S. investigators reviewed his confession. He has lived in Sweden since 1986.

Alvarado said his attackers refused to accept his story and that his torture lasted "I could not say how many hours or days" before he signed the confession.

"When I could stand it no more, I said, 'Yes, I will sign the paper,' and I signed the paper," he said.

Carranza, who moved to Memphis in 1985, says he had no authority to stop abuses by the police or military. Defense lawyer Robert Fargarson describes Carranza as a career officer who tried to correct deficiencies

in El Salvador's military and was an informant for the U.S. government.

In the 1980s, Carranza was vice minister of defense for El Salvador and commander of the Treasury Police, one of the country's top law-enforcement departments.

The civil war between El Salvador's U.S.-backed military and its civilian opponents ran 12 years and cost more than 75,000 lives.

The lawsuit was filed by the Center of Justice and Accountability in San Francisco and the Nashville law firm of Bass Berry & Sims. It rests on federal laws giving U.S. courts jurisdiction over claims for damages because of human-rights abuses abroad.

Carranza is being sued for unspecified monetary damages. An amnesty prevents criminal charges for alleged war crimes in El Salvador.

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