

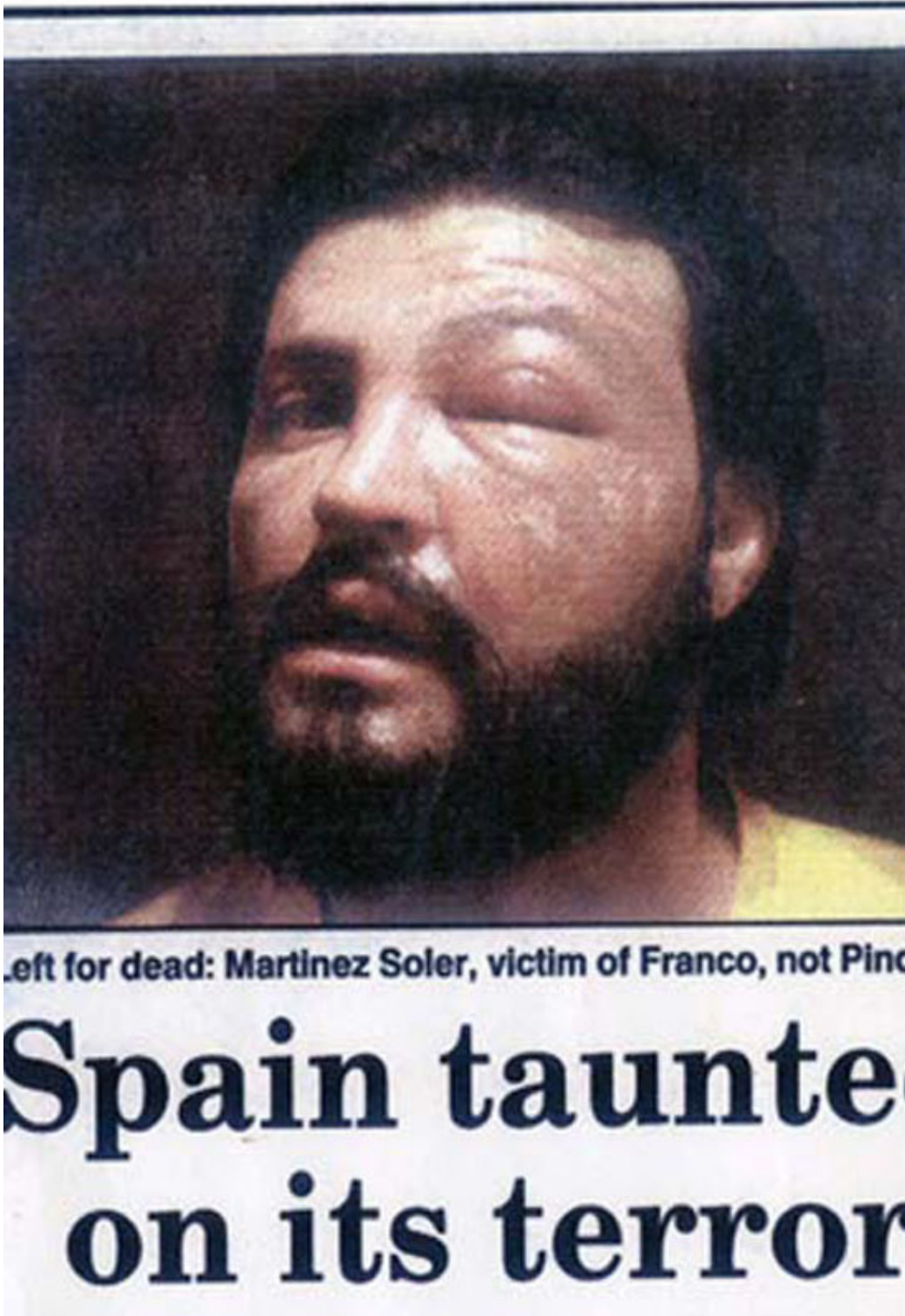
My kidnapping

A day like today, 30 years ago...

By José Antonio Martínez Soler

March 2, 2006

I was driving uphill and had to slam on the brakes. Some idiots had stopped their car in the middle of the street blocking my way. Maybe their car stalled, I thought.



Press clip from London's Sunday Times, published several years ago

I looked in the rear view mirror of my cream-colored Renault-12, thinking I'd back up and take a different route to work. Instinctively, I checked my watch: a little after 9 a.m. I would be late in putting the news weekly **Doblón** to bed.

Everything happened very quickly. Three or four men got out of the car ahead. "How odd," I mused. It seemed like they were briskly taking out some sort of sports bags.

I glanced again in the mirror before starting to back up, and I saw an older man, with curly and slightly graying hair, running uphill toward my car and pointing a gun at me.

I looked ahead and the sports bags had become machine guns (they were not like the ones I had had in the army; these seemed shorter, more compact). Their owners barely covered their faces; one wearing a ski mask came very close, pointing his gun at me and striking it against my car window. The others surrounded my car.



"Ailing." One of Doblón's cover stories on Franco's fatal illness.

It was Tuesday, March 2, 1976, almost four months after the death of **Franco**.

These were times of apprehension about the future. Journalistic, union, military, and clandestine political circles were rife with extravagant rumors about coup scenarios. The remnants of the Franco regime – which we at **Doblón** baptized as the “**bunker**”- wanted to maintain the essence of the dictatorship without the dictator. Before dying, Franco affirmed that he had left “everything tied up and well tied up,” and there was talk that some generals and bankers were taking measures to make sure this was so. Still, there were indications that newly crowned King Juan Carlos was leaning in a different direction. “He was just another prisoner in the Francoist bunker,” we told ourselves.

It was a sunny morning, although chilly. There was still quite a bit of snow in the mountains of Navacerrada northwest of Madrid – a marvelous winter day.

I did not recognize any of my captors and couldn’t tell if there were four of them or five: the older man who came from behind and three or four others in front.

Nuestro director, torturado

El día 2, martes, a las 9.30 de una mañana espléndida, a pleno sol, fue secuestrado nuestro director, José Antonio Martínez Soler, salido de su domicilio de Las Matas (Madrid) camino de la imprenta, donde debería atender, como todos los martes, el asiste de la revista. Martínez Soler montó en su automóvil y avanzó lentamente por el camino terrizo e irregular que le llevaría a la carretera de La Coruña. A los pocos metros de recorrido, José Antonio dividió a un hombre de espaldas, cerca de una espansa. Poco antes de llegar a la misma apareció por la calle perpendicular a la de su itinerario un automóvil que le cerró el paso. A una gran velocidad salieron del automóvil cuatro personas, tres de las cuales armadas de metralletas, que se dirigieron al coche de Martínez Soler, de donde le sacaron violentamente al tiempo que el individuo que anteriormente había visto de espaldas le amenazaba con una pistola. Inmediatamente le hicieron subir en los asientos posteriores de su propio automóvil. le comunicaron que se trataba de un secuestro y le rociaban la cara (especialmente en los ojos) con un «spray» blanco que le ocasionó una ceguera temporal. Acto seguido le esposaron, le hicieron un ancho rollo de espartapuro en los ojos y en la cabeza, le colocaron unas gafas, le calzaron una gorra y le echaron por los hombros un chaquetón del que salieron las solapas. El coche echó a andar al tiempo que le aplicaban una pistola en el costado y otra en el cuello. Poco después fue obligado a trasladarse a otro automóvil y al cabo de unos pocos minutos salieron de la autopista y entraron por un camino de tierra –sin senda forestal– hasta la llegada al punto de destino. Una vez allí caminó un rato sobre la nieve y finalmente le tiraron sobre una roca y allí continuó la tortura que ya se había iniciado en el propio automóvil. Le apertaron las esposas, le hicieron quitarse los zapatos y le propinaron con una preciosa foto muchos golpes en la cara, en el cuerpo y en las plantas de los pies, le golpearon con la metralleta en la cabeza y en otros puntos del cuerpo, etcétera.

Fue entonces cuando le explicaron que sabían que era el director de DOBLÓN y que por ello se encontraban allí y que le iban a matar, así como a su mujer si no colaboraba. «Tu mujer será aún más fácil de matar que tú mismo», le dijeron. A continuación le insultaron sin que casi en ningún momento le dejaran de torturar, y abrieron de la revista, de la que mostraron varios capítulos de números distintos por lo que ellos desconocieron su «línea lapidaria» y «anti-pañolista». Finalmente le dijeron que si quería salvar la vida debería escribir de su punto y letra una declaración. Le quitaron entonces la venda de los ojos y pudo darse cuenta de que se encontraba en un monte bajo de roble muy espeso que impedía toda visibilidad. Cerca se oía el ruido de motos y disparos. De forma muy formalista, uno de los secuestradores abrió una carpeta negra de plástico de donde sacó varios folios y papeles de color. Nuestro director escribió –en original y tres copias– lo que le dictaban sus torturadores.

Martínez Soler fue cuidadosamente registrado. En el bolsillo llevaba su documentación, organizada para la imprenta, su agenda y 1.200 pesetas. Le devolvieron inmediatamente el dinero y la documentación, pero inspeccionaron muy detalladamente la agenda y finalmente se la llevaron. También se quitaron los originales destinados a la imprenta – y todos los medios informativos colaboraron extraordinariamente – en que no se olera noticia de los hechos hasta que no declarara ante el juez y se entrevistara con el jefe superior de Policía, señor Quintana, con el fin de no entorpecer la acción de la Justicia. Una vez que la prensa fue informada sobre el acontecimiento, en la Redacción de DOBLÓN se bloquearon las líneas, debido al alto número de computadores, de amigos, de hombres de empresa y de la Administración, así como de lectores que nos llamaban para interesarse por el estado de nuestro director y para ofrecer su ayuda en todo lo que fuera menester. Ángel Gómez Escorial escribió un magnífico artículo en «Pueblos», en el que decía, entre otras cosas: «La agresión a Martínez Soler es un ataque a toda la prensa española. La violencia, una vez más, se incrusta en el quehacer profesional y queda la sospecha de que los agresores –también, una vez más– quedaban sin castigo. Se quiere silenciar a la prensa desde áreas incomprensibles y culpables. Se acusa a la prensa de ser causante de fenómenos desagradables, cuando lo único que ha hecho –y en solitario– ha sido propiciar una situación más justa y más democrática».

El mismo día –6 de marzo–, en la primera página del mismo periódico, Cándido escribió: «Que más quisieramos que escribir flores. Ahora es saltar por los aires, como estuvieron a punto de saltar los redactores de «Cambio 16», o que le esposaran a uno (¿pero, es que las esposas se venden en las tiendas como los rodamientos?) y le dan una patalla (¿gravemente peligrosa, tal como han hecho con el director de la revista «Doblón».

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prenta no sin antes golpearle al descubrir que uno de éstos consistía en una «miradilla» para la entrevista con Simón Sánchez Montero que publicamos la semana pasada.

A continuación le anunciaron que por esta vez le dejarían con vida, pero que si no abandonaba el país y, por tanto, DOBLÓN en el plazo de tres días, si no publicaba en el diario «Informaciones» un comunicado condenando la línea de la revista que dirige y si denunciaba lo ocurrido darían muerte a él y a su mujer.

Finalmente le quitaron las esposas, pero le ataron las manos y los pies cuidadosamente, le rociaron nuevamente con «spray» los ojos y la cara y le comunicaron a permanecer sin moverse durante media hora y le informaron que encontraría su coche, con las llaves puestas en la explanada del Alto de los Leones.

Cuando José Antonio estimó que había transcurrido dicho tiempo, logró deshacerse con la boca de sus ligaduras. «Cuando me quitó la venda de los ojos –nos ha dicho– sentí un gran amor a la naturaleza que me rodeaba y una formidable euforia por sentirme vivo». Martínez Soler, después de andar algún tiempo desorientado y mirando por un solo ojo –el otro fue golpeado tan fuertemente que no podía abrirlo en ningún grado–, logró llegar hasta un pueblo que resultó ser San Rafael. Entró en un bar y llamó a su mujer, a quien pidió que viniera a buscarle, después de haberse lavado la sangre de la boca que manaba constantemente. José Antonio salió a la carretera para esperar a su mujer, pero ésta pasó de largo, ya que en principio no pudo reconocerle, tal era la deformación de su esposa. Poco después llegaron a Madrid, donde recibió las primeras curas médicas. Horas después, denunció los hechos ante el Juzgado de Guardia.

Solidaridad

Muy pronto empezaron a llegar rumores a las redacciones de periódicos y agencias sobre lo ocurrido a nuestro director, pero el



Doblón 13 de marzo de 1976 7

Doblón magazine account of my kidnapping by “armed men who hated the magazine.”

Instead of lowering the window, I opened the door, by now scared to death, and at that instant, a hand – I don’t know whose – held a white aerosol can and sprayed my face with abrasive liquid that sliced my skin like a bunch of knives. Fortunately, a second

before, I saw that spray can from the corner of my eye and shut my eyes tight, which saved them from damage. I would not open them until many hours later when they ordered me to.

One of them said: **“Don’t move, this is a kidnapping. If you don’t do anything stupid, nothing will happen to you.”**

They pulled me out of the car, yanking the shoulders of my blue double-breasted jacket. One of them crossed my arms behind me and handcuffed me. At the same time, another quickly taped my eyes shut with a wide adhesive strip wound several times around my head, pinning my ears flat.

It was my bad luck that I instinctively shook my head from side to side, trying to avoid being burned by that painful liquid sprayed on my face and on the adhesive tape covering and protecting my eyes.

I say bad luck because whoever was handcuffing me from behind got sprinkled with some of the spray. He shouted out, **“F..k! How this shit burns!”** and spit out a stream of expletives. Naturally, he accused me of burning him on purpose.

I was pushed into the back seat of my R-12. Every so often the kidnapper on my side jabbed his machine gun hard against my ribs, complaining about his burn and blaming me for it.



The cover story of Doblón that provoked my kidnapping: **“From Vega to Campaño. What the Civil Guard is like.”** (General Vega was a moderate general replaced by General Campaño, a die hard Francoist.)

Both cars now set out toward the Coruña highway along the only exit from Las Matas, the town where my wife, Ana Westley and I lived. Once on the road, the kidnappers relaxed a little and, trying to be friendly, said that this was just a kidnapping for money. They said they knew I was from a rich family and kept saying: **“Be calm, man, as soon as they pay your ransom, we’ll let you go.”**

But from the first moment, when I spotted the gun in my rear view mirror and the regular military issue machine guns in front, I knew who they were and what they wanted. Indeed, I had been uneasy the last few weeks. Oddly, there had been no reaction to the sensitive and risky information that **Doblón** printed February 10 in a cover story about the **Guardia Civil**.

My article concerned irregular transfers of moderate high ranking generals but I heard not a word from my anonymous sources. They had suddenly disappeared. Not a single phone call. Nothing. I had begun to think they abandoned me once their objective, in leaking information and pointing out clues buried in official military bulletins, had been achieved: to halt the purge of high ranking moderate generals.

During the drive, my kidnappers talked in code and jargon and I didn’t understand what they were saying. They paid little attention to me –I think because they themselves were a little nervous. **“Why are these guys talking about ransom instead of getting straight to the point?”** I wondered. This beating around the bush seemed so unnecessary.

Later I figured it out. They didn’t get to the point until they had me in a secure hidden location. That way if something unexpected had happened, a counter order or an accident on the highway, no one would suspect that the abduction was related to the purges in the high military commands during Franco’s long sickness and the months following his death.

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Recovering at my publisher's house

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Kidnapping II

Give him alms, woman...

I don't know why, but the moment the cars were moving, I was convinced they were taking me to the Navacerrada mountain pass, to the northwest of Madrid. Disoriented, with my eyes taped shut, my eyelids burning, and with the long lasting effect of the spray, covered with adhesive tape and some glasses, I had no idea of where were driving nor at what speed.

I thought of the blind when they are selling lottery tickets. How terrible to be blind! In that supervened imposed darkness, I concentrated in accumulating a dosage of serenity and calmness to face what would follow, and I asked myself a thousand questions at the speed of lightening.

The mind is wise and has its nooks and crannies to help us survive the worst circumstances. Perhaps because of this, an old refrain from Granada popped into my mind. I concentrated on trying to remember it and could only come up with a couple verses:

“Dale limosna, mujer/ que no hay desgracia mayor/.../que ser ciego en Granada”.

(“Give him alms, woman/as there is no misfortune worse/.../ than to be blind in Granada.”)

I searched my memory in vain for the lost verses. I needed to find a verse ending in “nada” to rhyme with “Granada.”

The kidnapers were paying no mind to me.

Suddenly, the car slowed down and took a sharp curve; I divined that we were leaving the four lane highway. It definitely felt like a roadway full of curves and going uphill. The man in the front passenger seat started asking me slightly absurd questions, along the lines of: ***“What insurance company do you have for this car?”***

It dawned on me that they were digging around in the documents stashed in total disorder in the glove compartment. Glove compartments of cars are to grown ups what pockets are to little boys, I thought: a private museum and archive of useless treasures.

The co-pilot was especially interested in an old salary receipt from the magazine publishing company that employed me. ***“What is the name of your company? How much seniority do you have there? How much do you earn a month?”***

From their sarcastic commentaries and laughter, I knew that the salary of the editor of **Doblón** must have struck them as scandalously high. The person next to me jammed a barrel into my ribs – I didn’t know if it was a revolver or a machine gun. Was it an act of envy, from my supposed wealth? Or of vengeance, from the spray still burning his face?

“Fuck these communists! Just look at what these full of shit communists earn!”

Idiot that I was, I wanted to get in their good grace, or at least to communicate – to be seen as a person – and so I spoke up. ***“I am not a communist and never have been.”***

Immediately the gun barrel struck my ribs and I received a warning, ***“You, shut up! Has anyone asked you anything? Answer only when addressed.”***



A look in the mirror.

The co-pilot intervened. ***“With this salary you are rich and, besides, we can get a big ransom from your family. Don’t you think so?”***

I had been addressed, so I answered. ***“My parents don’t have a duro (a five peseta coin) and my house is mortgaged. My father is an accountant in the gas station “Las Lomas” of Almería and my mother is a housewife. You have the wrong person. This is a mistake...”***

My declaration was met by nervous and restrained laughter, followed by silence. I was careful to address them respectfully, using the formal you (*usted*), to ingratiate myself and recognize that they were in charge. They, however, used the familiar “you” (*tu*) and treated me with contempt and sarcasm, while maintaining a certain distance. I supposed that, come the time of interrogation, it would be easier to torture a complete stranger than someone you know something about.

When you cannot see anything, time becomes confused with space and acquires another dimension, more difficult to measure. I cannot remember how long we were risking our lives on those bedeviling roadway curves.

Without the use of my hands to hold on to something, with my wrists handcuffed behind my back, with my shoulders aching and neck stiff, I was lurching left and right, impelled by the car’s movement. When we lurched right, I banged against the car door. And when we went left, I struck the blunt end of the barrel, which surely by now was producing a black and blue contusion between my ribs.

I was so fixed in trying to make myself a “friend” of the kidnappers that I hardly recognized the gnawing pain in my stomach. I felt nauseous. Fear? Motion sickness? Disorientation? Too many curves taken at excessive speed while traveling in the back seat with my eyes blindfolded?

A very sharp turn, followed by slamming on the brakes, jolted me. Suddenly, I felt a new fear, different from the one before. Fear, perhaps of a new danger, of being abandoned in some secret hiding place with my eyes blindfolded? I didn’t know.

I heard the doors open and distant conversations, probably with the confederates in the car that had accompanied us.

They pulled me out of the back seat and I felt cold. I stepped in a puddle of water. In this hidden basement or hiding place, I thought, there was quite a bit of water on the floor. I thought perhaps we had entered a flooded garage of some sort. They moved me around like a doll. After a while they pushed me into another car and we continued on an unpaved, rural back road.



Several days later.

They spoke among themselves and drove very slowly. We reached our destination. They pulled me out again and pushed me ahead over a rocky terrain with puddles and low brush until we reached a stone wall, which I had to climb over with the help of two of the kidnapers.

We walked on for several more minutes until at some point they ordered me to sit down on the ground. It was very cold, full of wet and rotting leaves from the previous fall. That is where the interrogation began. Soon, my fears were confirmed. The article had prompted my kidnapping. They knew that my pseudonym, with which I signed it, was Rafael Idáñez. I had used it many times and I had a special affection for it. It was the first name of my father and his second last name.

De Vega a Campano

Pocas veces un reagrupamiento militar ha sido tan elocuente e interesante como el que llevó a cabo el último Gobierno de Franco el pasado 10 de octubre de 1975. El movimiento de generales alcanzó a cuatro capitanías generales, pero, sin embargo, la atención estuvo puesta, en todo momento, en el cambio de dirección de la Guardia Civil. Unos días antes ya corrieron rumores sobre esta significativa combinación. Incluso llegaron a oírse entre algunos grupos privilegiados de reconocido ultraderechismo gritos de *Campano, al Vega*, no en la manifestación de la plaza de Oriente. La prensa dio el cambio de generales en la Dirección General de la Guardia Civil señalando en líneas generales que «la línea dura prevaecía sobre la moderada».

El 17 de octubre de 1975, el teniente general Campano tomó posesión del cargo en la Dirección General de la Guardia Civil en presencia del vicepresidente del Gobierno y ministro de la Gobernación, José García Hernández, y del ministro del Ejército, Coloma Gallego. Como publicó DOBLÓN en aquel momento, «Campano, primer «provisional» que accedió al cargo de general, es asimilado, según sus exegestas, a la denominada «línea dura». Fue el iniciador del proceso a nueve militares por presunto delito de proposición a la sedición».

«El teniente general Vega—decía DOBLÓN— se ha caracterizado por el talante moderado de sus intervenciones públicas, como la pronunciada en las exequias tras el asesinato de tres guardias civiles en el País Vasco: «Esto no es una guerra particular, porque nosotros anhelamos la paz.»

Vega, que había sustituido a Iniesta—asimilado con Campano a la llamada línea dura— en la Dirección de la Guardia Civil (Cuerpo que Vega conoce perfectamente y al que está forzosamente vinculado por haber sido guardia civil de 2.ª en 1934, antes que general), volvió a su antiguo cargo de capitán general de Valladolid.

Campano—que inició su carrera en FET y de las JONS— declaró, al tomar posesión, que «son la serenidad, el estudio y la dedicación completa lo que nos puede ayudar en mayor grado a que las aguas, turbulentas y un tanto desahucadas, vuelvan a sus cauces naturales y discurran tranquilas».

Ejército político, pero apartidario

Desde el cese en el Alto Estado Mayor del teniente general Díez Alegria en junio de 1974, y en relación con insistentes rumores sobre la supuesta existencia de «juntas de oficiales demócratas», se han pronunciado importantes discursos por las más altas jerarquías del Ejército. «Quien sienta una vocación política concreta, que se separe de nuestras filas», «Los ejércitos están más allá de las opciones políticas concretas», declaró el ministro Coloma Gallego, hoy capitán general de Madrid. Luis Apostua, desde su columna diaria en «Ya», señaló que «es muy difícil interpretar estas palabras en su alcance concreto, porque son numerosos los militares profesionales que tienen misiones en el Consejo Nacional, Cortes e incluso en el Gobierno...»

El teniente general Díez Alegria, que

El ministro de la Gobernación del último Gobierno de Franco, García Hernández, abraza al nuevo director general de la Guardia Civil, teniente general Campano, en su toma de posesión. Nadie aludió al teniente general Vega

se ha pronunciado abiertamente por la reforma constitucional, declaró: «Espero que las circunstancias no requieran mi presencia en la vida pública desde un puesto de responsabilidad». «España será lo que sus hijos quieran», dijo el prestigioso general tras exponer su oposición ante cualquier presencia del Ejército en la política.

Arbitro moderador

En general, se fue dibujando a través de los discursos una figura de Ejército «político, pero apartidario» (DOBLÓN, número 50), sentimiento bastante generalizado entre la oficialidad de las Fuerzas Armadas españolas, «ya que las facciones de uno u otro signo—dicen—fomentarían las diferencias». Por eso el Ejército, en todos los órdenes, tiene el deber patriótico de «actuar como árbitro moderador para impedir—en opinión del profesor Ruiz Giménez— que los extremismos de izquierdas y de derechas coloquen al país en una situación de preguerra civil».

En honor a esa exquisita moderación nos han sorprendido algunos cambios fundamentales y de capital importancia realizados últimamente— contra los usos que históricamente venían siendo habituales en la Guardia Civil. Los recientes cambios afectan a dos personas de reconocido talante abierto y de alto prestigio profesional en la Guardia Civil. Se trata del general Prieto López y del teniente coronel Martín Díez Quijada.

El general Prieto, a León

El general Prieto López, cuyas declaraciones a «Diario de Mallorca» en agosto pasado le definen como un militar moderado, en la línea del teniente general Vega Rodríguez, fue uno de los que permanecieron en el Club Siglo

El reglamento

El reglamento actual de la Guardia Civil está basado en el circular que firmada por el duque de Abranda, el 16 de enero de 1845, sirvió para redactar la primera cartilla de la Guardia Civil.

En su artículo primero dice: «El honor ha de ser la principal divisa del guardia civil; debe, por consiguiente, conservarlo sin mancha. Una vez perdido no se recobra jamás».

Diversos artículos hacen referencia al prestigio y la fuerza moral como métodos de persuasión. «Siempre fiel a su deber, sereno en el peligro y desempeñado sus funciones con dignidad, prudencia y firmeza, el guardia civil será más respetado que el que con amenazas sólo consigue malquistarse con todos» (artículo 5); «El mayor prestigio y fuerza moral del Cuerpo en su primer elemento» (artículo 2).

En su artículo sexto se define la imagen del guardia civil: «Será prolijo sin debi-

lidad, firme sin violencia y político sin hajeza». Otros artículos completan esa definición. «En ninguna ocasión ni bajo pretexto alguno recibirá el guardia civil regalos, bien sea en dinero, alhajas, ropas o manjares, pues estas demostraciones son siempre el precio a que se compra la infidelidad» (artículo 9); «Se prohíbe a todo individuo del Cuerpo el uso de recomendaciones para lograr la resolución favorable de sus peticiones oficiales; lo contrario implica una provocación a la justicia. El que tal intente será severamente castigado» (artículo 47); «No podrá tener trato con los contrabandistas, con los defraudadores ni con sus agentes ni cómplices, así como tampoco con personas de mala reputación o desconocido modo de vivir» (artículo 10).

Uno de sus últimos artículos hacen referencia al secreto profesional: «La reserva y el secreto en las confidencias que reciba debe ser profunda en la Guardia Civil» (artículo 30).

de Doblon 14 de febrero de 1975

Text of cover story, “From Vega to Campano,” that provoked my kidnapping.

I do not want to go into details about what they did to me. I only want to tell those that are indispensable. Over the last 30 years I tried to avoid remembering every last bit. On the other hand, after so much time, it’s hard to express or capture the intensity of the fear, humiliation, impotence and physical pain that I was subjected to during those seven or eight hours of methodical torture.

But there's more to it. Perhaps it's like the labor pains that a mother forgets when she's presented with the prize of a new baby. Perhaps, to some degree, I forgot the intensity of the pain once I received the prize of a new life: mine.

What they did to me to get information must have hurt a lot but I can't recall all the specifics. Have I erased them from my mind? I think I concentrated more on the questions they were asking me, their reactions, their laughter and their commentaries, than on the punches and kicks.

The interrogation seemed professional – like in the movies. There were good interrogators and bad ones – or rather, there was one “good guy” and all the rest were bad. The “good” one, I believed, was the one I had spotted in my rearview mirror. He acted as if he was their leader. He gave orders that made me think there was hope: **“Don't break any bones. No signs. Have you heard me? No signs.”**

They kept asking questions and beating me. I felt, if I was to survive, I needed to outwit my torturers and come up with adequate answers. My mind was never more alert. All my energy was pinned on staying alive. Maybe, for this reason, I withstood the pain, or at least sent it to some discarded corner of my brain.

XXI. cuando de él se retiraron -por disconformidad con el enfoque- los generales más inmovilistas ligados a «El Alcázar». Hermandades de Alféreces Provisionales, etcétera.

**DIRECCION GENERAL
DE LA GUARDIA CIVIL**

X

Destinos

Por necesidades del servicio y de conformidad con lo prescrito en el artículo 55, del Reglamento sobre provisión de vacantes, de 31 de diciembre de 1974 (D. O. núm. 1725), se destina a la Plana Mayor del 53 Tercio de la Guardia Civil (Burgos), al teniente coronel de dicho Cuerpo, Grupo de «Mando de Armas», D. Angel Martín Díez-Quijada, cesando en su actual destino.

Madrid, 23 de enero de 1976.

ALVAREZ-ARENAS

El general Prieto López ascendió a su empleo el 21 de julio de 1972 y conocía muy bien al anterior director general de la Guardia Civil, desde el año 1941, cuando Vega mandaba la compañía de la División Azul en la que Prieto era teniente. El 17 de octubre, Campano se incorpora a la Guardia Civil, y en el Consejo de Ministros del 3 de diciembre (el último celebrado por el último Gobierno de Franco; el mismo Gobierno que había cesado a Vega y nombrado a Campano) se aprueba un movimiento de generales, y don Manuel Prieto López —a propuesta de Campano— pasa destinado de Valencia a León.

Es generalmente conocido entre jefes y oficiales de la Guardia Civil que a León suele ir destinado habitualmente

**INGRESOS MENSUALES BRUTOS
POR TODOS LOS CONCEPTOS
(Actualizados al 1 de enero de 1976)**

	Por trienio
Guardia 2.ª	25.043
Cabo	28.229
Sargento	31.861
Teniente	48.221
Capitán	51.422
Comandante	54.622
Teniente coronel	58.920
Coronel	63.237

(A todo ello hay que sumar 375 pesetas por la mujer y 300 pesetas por cada hijo, y descontar el 12 por 100 por IRTP y el 5 por 100 por derechos pasivos máximos.)

el general en activo más moderno, el último elevado al generalato, y no hay precedente de que un general de la antigüedad de Prieto López haya sido destinado a aquella plaza. El general Aurelio Herrero Miguel (general en activo más moderno que, efectivamente, estaba en León) ha pasado a Madrid, y uno de Madrid a Valencia.

Como puede verse en el «Diario Oficial del Ejército», la orden es de las últimas firmadas por el ministro del Ejército del anterior Gobierno, y en el mismo Diario, otras órdenes ya vienen firmadas por el nuevo ministro del Rey, Alvarez Arenas.

El defensor de Otero, a Burgos

Pero si sorprendió este traslado en diciembre entre los jefes de la Guardia Civil, hace unos días se acaba de producir otro que ha llamado mucho más la atención. Se trata del cese del teniente coronel de la Guardia Civil don Angel Martín Díez-Quijada, que estaba destinado con Vega en la Dirección General de Madrid, y su traslado, «por necesidades del servicio», a la Plana Mayor de Burgos.

El destino que se le adjudica se anunció en 1.ª convocatoria el 23 de octubre de 1975 («Diario Oficial del Ejército», 240, pág. 348), y al no ser peticionado —lo que da idea de su poco atractivo— se anunció en 2.ª convocatoria el 7 de diciembre de 1975 («Diario Oficial del Ejército» 276, pág. 1049).

Díez-Quijada ascendió a teniente coronel el 8 de octubre de 1965 y es uno de los más antiguos en su empleo. Si



Cuando el teniente general Vega fue preguntado por la prensa vallsolotana sobre su opinión acerca del testamento político de Franco y el discurso de la Corona, respondió: «Estos dos documentos, junto con la homilía del cardenal Tarancón, están contribuyendo ya a la creación de un clima de serenidad y aun de cordialidad entre los españoles que considero muy beneficioso para España».

«por necesidades del servicio» hay que mandar a alguien a Burgos —siguiendo la tradición de la Guardia Civil y de todo el Ejército—, se manda alguno de los que están sin destino en ese momento, o en todo caso, al más moderno en ese empleo. Al parecer, hay ocho tenientes coronels de la Guardia Civil sin destino actualmente (Sánchez Pérez, Pastor Fernández, Hernández Velasco, Reig García, Alvarez Sito, Ramos Calvo, Rodríguez Hidalgo y Briones Espinosa), por lo que ha sorprendido más aún que se trasladara a Burgos a un teniente coronel tan antiguo, contra el criterio habitual seguido en la Milicia.

El teniente coronel de la Guardia Civil Díez-Quijada es, como su esposa, profesor adjunto de Derecho Administrativo en la Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad de Madrid, es uno de los máximos especialistas españoles en Justicia Militar y, sobre todo, su nombre ha salido últimamente en los periódicos por ser el defensor que nombró el comandante de Ingenieros don Luis Otero Fernández, encartado en el sumario 250.75 y acusado del presunto delito de proposición a la sedición junto a ocho capitanes, proceso que inició el teniente general Campano cuando era capitán general de Madrid.

En círculos amplios de la Guardia Civil ha causado extrañeza y cierta inquietud el hecho de que se alteren las tradiciones del Cuerpo en materia tan delicada como traslados, ceses y nombramientos en virtud de planteamientos políticos que pueden parecer muy concretos. Y la Guardia Civil, que por la naturaleza de su propio servicio ha mantenido con grandes sacrificios los pies en el suelo, ha vivido más de cerca que nadie la verdadera realidad española, en contacto con los hombres y los pueblos de todos los rincones, es un Cuerpo que atrae a grandes profesionales de la Milicia.

Por el análisis que acompaña a estas páginas podemos observar que la Guardia Civil no responde ya al viejo tópico de un Instituto anclado en el pasado, sino que ha evolucionado con la propia dinámica de la sociedad española. Y por ello, precisamente, es extremadamente sensible a los desaires.

Ricardo de la Cierwa tampoco ha olvidado en sus «Crónicas de la transición» que «en la toma de posesión del teniente general Campano como director general de la Guardia Civil se pronunciaron tres discursos, y parece que en ninguno de ellos —dice el historiador— se aludió al director cesante, lo cual no comprendo del todo; porque no solamente se trata de un hijo del Cuerpo, sino que, además, marcha para hacerse cargo de una capitania general de singular importancia militar y relevante trasfondo histórico». Lo que no comprendía el profesor De la Cierwa pueden comprenderlo ahora muchos guardias de segunda.

Rafael Idáñez

Doblon 14 de febrero de 1976 59

Until this moment, I had never thought seriously about death as something close and inevitable. I was young, healthy and strong. Almost immortal. Why would I think about death?

They no longer had any need to keep up the appearance of a kidnapping for ransom. We all knew why we were there and they were becoming desperate.

“Who gave you the information to write this article that you sign as Rafael Idáñez about changes in the Guardia Civil?”

“I don’t know. They used pseudonyms,” I replied. (punches and kicks). **“I mean, false names (more beatings).”** **“The person who gave me the clues said his name was José Pérez,”**(not the real pseudonym) I said.

“We know who those two generals were who gave you that information, but we want you to tell us yourself. We want to hear the names of these traitors.”

“Some José Pérez,” I said.

Not obtaining the answers they wanted, my interrogators stepped up the pressure. Some torments, though painful, struck me as ridiculous. They pulled me up by the sideburns without yanking out any hairs, reminding me of the discipline meted out by the prefect friars of my Catholic school, La Salle, though clearly on a bigger scale. Another kidnapper beat me with a rubber police stick – or was it a wooden stick or club of some sort? They took off my shoes, but not my socks, not realizing that the rubber police stick is more efficient when it hits the bare soles of your feet. Divine socks, I thought. I felt sweat run down my face. Later I would find out it was not sweat but blood.

The kidnappers asked me to talk about all the military, civil guard or police officers of rank that I had known in my life. I complied but I warned them that none of the officers had any relationship to the article.

After examining my pockets, they asked me about my relationship to people I actually did know. It took me several names to realize that they were going through my address book and agenda in alphabetical order.

Despite being blindfolded –the adhesive tape still covered my eyes- and totally disoriented, seated on that cold and damp ground, I seemed to detect interjections of surprise from the person digging through my agenda of appointments and telephone numbers.

He found the names of some high level government officials who were clearly Francoists or easily identifiable with Spain’s eternal right wing. Naturally there were also other names that I soon figured out, by the beatings they provoked, that were not to the liking of the kidnappers. And some who were unknown.



Meeting at the Madrid Press Association (today 20 minutos's news room) deciding what actions to take to protest my kidnapping.

“Look who this bastard hangs out with!” they smirked among themselves.

They didn't seem to be in a hurry. The interrogation was going through my entire journalistic life, virtually following the alphabetical order of my various publications. (Hispania Press, a wire agency, the weekly “Don Quijote”, Classroom Television, the documentary “Spain 20th century of Spanish Television, the daily newspaper Nivel, the daily Arriba, the weekly Cambio 16, the project of a new paper, El Pais, the weekly Doblón, and so on.)

I had begun my journalistic career very young and almost by mistake – to earn some cash to support myself as a student of architecture. I worked as a reporter for Hispania Press, where I covered crimes, courts, police, celebrities, business news, and, of course, politics. I had many telephone numbers and addresses accumulated over the past nine years, of both famous people and totally unknown ones, from all parts of the political spectrum, as is appropriate for a journalist.

For example, they thought it was hilarious that I could have any relationship with the famous gypsy singer, Lola Flores, and were troubled to see that I had contact numbers for a Francoist historian, along with those for several generals who could hardly be called anti-Francoists, whom I had met at political dinners or conferences.

This bothered them a lot, along with seeing the name of a man who would later be a minister with **Adolfo Suárez**, the first prime minister during Spain's transition to democracy. But I earned more kicks and punches because of a notation on a loose scrap

of paper that said something like, “pick up article – **Simón Sánchez Montero’s** wife - at laundry room of Los Nardos hospital.”

“So, you say you are not a communist, right? And just how can you explain that the (expletive, expletive) wife of Sanchez Montero is listed on a piece of paper in your pocket?”

I answered, **“His wife works in this hospital and I have to go there to pick up an article of a contributor of the magazine.”**



Illegal demonstration of journalists in front of the Madrid Press Association protesting my kidnapping.



Banners at illegal demonstration say: Freedom of the press and expression. Arrest kidnappers of Martínez Soler.

After several hours of vexing me with absurd questions about all my contacts accompanied by kicks, punches, and blows – all the while done carefully so as not to break any bones – they began to pressure me about my alleged relations with two specific generals of the **Civil Guard**. One was a general of the Command Staff of the Civil Guard who years later I was happy to see played a key role in turning back the abortive coup attempt of February 23, 1981. (**“They were not on the wrong track; that was why those Francoist terrorists were after him,”** I realized then.)

The other general, whom they insistently asked about, had a common name and was completely unknown to me. Even now I cannot remember his name (Gutierrez? Rodríguez? ¿González?) despite having had it practically engraved in my blood.

I told them a hundred times that I had never knowingly spoken with either of the generals.

I had the impression, judging from the comings and goings of members of the gang and from whispered conversations just out of my earshot, that perhaps the kidnapping had failed.

By this time, after several hours of detailed and methodical torturing and humiliations, they seemed convinced that I really could not spill the names of my informers – whom they called “traitors of the Civil Guard and of the Fatherland” – because I simply did not know them.

I did not keep silence out of any heroism. In fact, I really had no idea who had given me the clues in the Army bulletins (with dates and page numbers) that was the basis of my article.

At the time I suspected that some officers of the UMD (Democratic Union of the Military) who knew me indirectly –I had leaked the news of their first arrests to the foreign press – may have passed my name on to my anonymous sources saying I could be trusted. But I never met these sources.

For a moment, I thought my captors had abandoned me in the middle of this field, handcuffed and with my eyes taped shut. I began to squirm around on the cold, wet, almost frozen ground to change my position. My whole body ached but I could not afford the luxury of thinking about the pain.

When one of them told the others not to break any bones, my heart leapt with hope. **“If they don’t want to break any bones,”** I thought desperately, **“it’s because they plan to leave me alive without serious signs.”**

They were still around. I had not been left alone. I could hear them whispering in the distance but could not understand what they were saying. I was soon to know.

They came again and turned me over on my stomach and took off the handcuffs.

What a great relief! Something new was burning my face on the part not protected by the adhesive tape that covered my eyes. It produced a rare sensation – even pleasant. Snow! I could touch it now with my hands.

At least that was something I could use to orient myself. And that is much more important than you can imagine. At least I knew I was near the top of a mountain, with snow, and that I felt sure –I don’t know why, perhaps because I could see it from Las Matas – as Sierra Navacerrada. (I was wrong. It turned out to be Sierra Guadarrama, due west of Madrid.)



Illegal demonstration protesting my kidnapping in Gran Vía, outside Madrid Press Association. Police arrive.

“If you look behind, I’ll shoot you,” one of them said suddenly, jabbing the barrel of their firearm against my back. Look? With my eyes taped shut?



Police break up illegal demonstration protesting my kidnapping. Banner says, “Arrest kidnapers of Martinez Soler.

It was all very fast. Immediately, another of them suddenly ripped off the tape that surrounded my head and covered my eyes. They must have pulled out some hair from the nape of my neck and part of the burned skin on my face.

This sudden stab of physical pain was nothing because instantly I could see some light. I didn’t dare open my eyes at once. In fact, I could not open one eye at all; it was swollen shut (I think it was the left eye). With the other half-opened I could make out daylight. The light... and an enormous gun pointing at my forehead at a distance of about two hands.

Little by little I opened my eye. I could see only the man aiming the gun at me. His face was covered with a dark ski mask. He reminded me a little of ETA terrorists giving their clandestine press conferences. I looked directly into his eyes (green? hazel?), trying to read my immediate future in them, and in the corner of my eye I could see that huge gun, much bigger than any I had seen in movies. Behind him there was an enormous valley full of trees, an idyllic landscape worthy of an elegy of the 16th century Spanish poet **Garcilaso de la Vega**.

“How strange!” I thought. “I am too calm for what awaits me.” Instinctively, with my hands free –and now without the blindfold – I tried to dry what I thought was sweat and wiped my face. My hands came down soaking in blood.

“Where is all this blood coming from?” I asked myself.

Then I recognized the bright red color and warm, slightly salty taste of my own blood. It was gushing from my mouth, and instead of spitting it, I had been swallowing it as if it were saliva.



Banner at illegal demonstration outside Madrid Press Association says, "Freedom for the exercise of journalism." Police arrive.

"If they are going to shoot me, why does he cover his face with the ski mask? He's keeping the ski mask on because he doesn't want me to recognize him and therefore be able to identify him," I reasoned.

For a few seconds I believed I would come out alive from this ordeal. But only for a few seconds.

The one pointing the gun spoke: **“You understand that we cannot leave with empty hands and leave you here alive with all these telltale signs on your face and body. Your time has come. You decide. We cannot waste any more time. This is your last chance. I am going to count to three. At three, I’ll shoot, unless you tell me the names we are looking for. If you collaborate with us, nothing will happen. We will set you free and you can go home. Your car is parked at the pass at the mountain top at Los Leones. If you don’t collaborate, you will rot in this mountain. Not even the buzzards will find you. Do you understand?”**

Looking steadfastly into his eyes, very close to mine, and smelling his perspiration and rage, I began to splutter terrified, repeating the same answer: **“I don’t have any names...If only I knew...”**

He cut me off at once, almost yelling, **“One!”**

Silence. I think back upon it now as an execution by firing squad, an assassination in cold blood and at point blank range, something out of a movie that couldn’t really be happening to me. But there he was, waiting for an answer to his question. There was nothing I could do.

“Two...”

He waved the gun several times from side to side, indicating to the others who were behind me to get out of the way. After all, they didn’t need to be splattered with my blood. Everything seemed not only plausible but suddenly real. I thought that they must have done this many times with others who never told about it or never lived to tell.

They were professionals. Behind me I heard dry, half rotten leaves rustle as people moved away.

Time was running out. I had just a few seconds. I thought –believe me – that this was the end. What do you think about when you believe you are going to die? Many friends have since asked me this question. It took me awhile to come up with the truth. I am ashamed to admit it but finally I wound up confessing it.

Only a few weeks earlier, my wife and I had just signed the deed for the purchase of two lots in Villanueva de la Cañada, northwest of Madrid and papers for the mortgage payments.

Our house in Las Matas was old, very small, and unheated, and if we wanted to have children, we would need a bigger house that we would build from scratch. We had already set our eyes on the doors and windows. They were to come from my home city of Almería, from a 300-year-old house that was to be destroyed to make way for a department store. We had lovingly marked with chalk every one we wanted to rescue from being burned in the local bread oven. We had walked around the land almost daily, memorizing every inch of it. Those two lots were a dream.

At certain times our thoughts narrow and travel faster than the speed of light. I did not think about my family, my friends, or the possibility of an afterlife. I did not even think about my wife –who would never know what was happening to me. Nor about the children that I would never have...

“What a stupid way to die!” I thought after hearing the warning **“Two!”**

“...to die now, just when I have some land...”

“And three!”

Stupidly, I made an effort not to close my eyes and kept looking steadfastly into the eyes of my executioner. I wanted to divine my future (and that of my land!) as if his iris was a crystal ball.

There was no shot. He stood muttering something like **“bastard, son of a bitch”** and other expletives and darted his eyes away from mine. Meanwhile the men behind fell on me, kicking my back and ribs, hitting me with something hard, perhaps the butt of the machine gun or the rubber police club they had used on my feet.

This is when they caused the only damage to my bones: two hairline fractures and one complete fracture. But who could waste even one second thinking about broken bones or about kicks and punches when you have just been resuscitated from the dead? What more could they do to me if the execution itself had been a mere mockery?

They have exhausted the last resource of professional torture, I concluded. Was it the last?

I felt an incredible inner, almost mystical euphoria. There I was: face down with my cheek stuck to the cold wet ground and my hands trying to protect my head from the blows... This is what ecstasy must be: the beatific vision, the transcendence of the saints separating their spirit from the body, losing themselves as the renowned 16th century Spanish mystic, **Saint John of the Cross** wrote:

***“En una noche oscura,
Con ansias, en amores inflamada,
¡oh, dichosa ventura!
Salí sin ser notada
Estando ya mi casa sosegada.”***

*(On a dark night,
Kindled in love with yearnings,
Oh, happy chance!
I went forth without being observed,
My house being now at rest)*

I could almost see myself from above. There, outside my own body, for the first time since the ritual of my simulated execution, I thought about my wife and the future that awaited us. The land disappeared from my mind and she appeared.

Against my face, the snow soothed the burns. It was suddenly a marvelous afternoon, that March day of 1976. I was overwhelmed, perhaps for the first time in my life, by the wonderful sweetness of living...

• FOTOIMPACTO •

A palos con la Prensa

Fernando Bermejo

La cara molida a palos y el miedo en el cuerpo. En marzo de 1976, el periodista José Antonio Martínez Soler estaba al frente de la revista *Doblón*. Cuando en la mañana del día 2 salía en coche desde su casa en Las Matas (Madrid), fue asaltado por cinco individuos que le rociaron la cara de spray y le apuntaron con sendas pistolas en el costado y en el cuello. En un lugar cercano al Alto de Los Leones sufrió todo tipo de golpes y torturas. La amenaza era clara: debía dejar la revista y abandonar España junto a su esposa. Casi 20 años después, todavía se desconoce la identidad de los autores. La "línea izquierdista y antipatriótica" de *Doblón* era la causa esgrimida por los agresores para su acción. Fue una triste consecuencia de la política contra la Prensa (más "canallesca" que nunca) encauzada por el Gobierno Arias. Una estrategia, sin duda, alejada de los aires aperturistas que el Rey se encargaba de promocionar dentro y fuera de España.



José Antonio Martínez Soler, actual corresponsal de Televisión Española en Estados Unidos, después de la agresión en 1976.

PRÓXIMO CAPÍTULO: EL DESASTRE DEL GOBIERNO ARIAS

TRAGEDIAS EN VITORIA Y MONTEJURRA. DÓNDE ESTABAN LOS MINISTROS DE FELIPE. MEMORIAS DE N. REDONDO, COMANECI, LA NIÑA
ESCRIBEN: ALFONSO OSORIO, JOAQUÍN BARDAGUO, MANUEL ANTONIO RICO, SUSANA MENDIZÁBAL, RAÚL HERAS

CÓMO FUE LA "OPERACIÓN LOLITA"

(176)

A 20th anniversary edition of major events in the Spanish Transition to Democracy published in the Spanish press (*El Mundo*). The text adhere to my bare bones version of "unidentified armed men" who were against the "leftist and unpatriotic" magazine. No details were revealed about the Civil Guard.

But my kidnappers were not about to surrender.

As I lay face down on the blood-stained snow, frozen rocks and wet leaves, they continued beating and kicking me. Despite this, I began to relax. **“The worst is over,”** I thought, relieved but still alert so as not to lose control of my nerves.

Some of them walked away and one, the man with the ski mask, sat me down on a rock and used a rag to wipe the blood from my face and hands. He threw it on the ground.

The sun was no longer high in the sky and seemed to be going down behind my back. I noticed it was colder than before and my captors were showing signs of impatience. For the first time, I became aware of a noise not too far away, the sounds of engines that I figured were motorcycles rather than cars. Perhaps they were loud mountain bikes or we were close to a roadway.

Suddenly, they plopped a stiff black notebook on my knees, and on top of that several blank pages with carbon copy sheets between each page. It seemed prepared to make an original and three duplicates. They handed me a ball point pen and told me to press down hard for legible copies of whatever they were planning to dictate.

Thus, with a trembling hand, I wrote my name, National Identification Number, address, and so on, until the man in front of me hit me and yanked away the papers.

“You’re fucking it up on purpose. You’re a journalist and know how to write perfectly. Start over and with good writing, as if you were writing it calmly in an office. You don’t have much time if you don’t do as we say. Don’t be a smart ass.”

Once again they gave me blank papers for an original and three copies.

I began again, and this time I wrote in a script so perfect, so clear, that it didn’t seem mine. I reached back in time and recovered the childish handwriting of my school days, the one surely used for the dictations of Brother Amado de María, the friar of La Salle who taught me to love poetry.

In the heading I wrote again, as if it were an official document, my name, NIN, address, and so on. Then they told me to write “DECLARES:” or perhaps, “CERTIFIES:” I copied both these words but do not remember in what order. In the official sounding language I dutifully wrote everything they dictated, under the prodding of a machine gun jabbed in my back.

I saw I was to construct a convincing legal document that could have some official value, signed by myself. In it I revealed that general Saenz de Santamaría and another general, whose name I no longer remember, were the sources for my article in **Doblón**. They forced me to put down some details –totally false – to lend credence. And, finally, they dictated an official closing, the standard one of those days: **“And for the record and opportune effects produced, I sign the present document in...”**

Silence again. Were they improvising? One of the voices talking behind my back intervened with a tone of command:

“...Guadalajara, fourth of March, nineteen seventy six. Write this all down and then sign it, below, with the same signature that appears on your National Identity Document. You understand?”

So I did. Instantly, they collected my signed declaration and proceeded to the last phase of the kidnapping: the conditions for liberation.

Once again, they wrapped the adhesive tape over my eyes and, instead of using the handcuffs again, by now bloodied, they bound my wrists together in front of me with the same roll of tape.

Now they had something from me – a document to be used against the two generals, but they had to assure themselves that I was not going to renounce it or give them away. And so they began a new round of questions, standing around me, once again blinded by the tape. As I moved my head from side to side to answer them, guided by my ears. I felt a little dizzy and exhausted – the way a bull must feel in the ring when it is cornered and mortally wounded, awaiting the final mortal thrust in the neck. I was at the limits of my strength. Now I felt it was a mistake to have relaxed after the mock execution. I needed to recover my concentration and cold bloodedness not to fall prey to their final provocations.

“We know very well where your wife works as an editor at the magazine Ciudadano; she drives a Citroen Dos Caballos. If you talk about any of this, you and your wife will pay dearly.”

“If someone asks you, you tell them you had an accident. Is that clear?”

One of them remained behind me and pushed the barrel of his gun against my back. I never knew if it was a revolver or one of the machine guns, as I could only feel the pressure of a round metallic object.

He pressed the gun harder, taking care to not break any bones. Almost spitting over my neck he said my wife (“the Yankee”) and I would have to leave Spain in three days, counting from tomorrow. And never return again.

Now you may think that I was crazy or reckless. I have thought about it many times and I still can’t explain why, all of a sudden, just when the end of the kidnapping was approaching, I armed myself with foolish courage. Perhaps I was simply exhausted or feeling a burst of bravado, but I answered instantly without thinking:

“This I cannot do. If, for this, I have to live away from Spain, I prefer that you kill me right now and not within four days. I am Spanish and want to live and die in Spain. You can ask me whatever you want, but don’t ask me to abandon my country.”

It was as if the hand of an angel had suddenly taken over the gun that was pushing against my back. The pressure let up automatically, as soon as I pronounced those patriotic words, which tamed that fascist beast. The gun barrel disappeared from my ribs.

There was a long silence. I suppose they were looking at each other astonished.

One said: **“That’s enough. You can stay in Spain if you don’t say anything about all this, so we can use this declaration that you have voluntarily done. Is that clear? You are going to count to 500 before moving and taking off the tape from your hands and eyes. Your car is at the Leones pass at the top of Sierra Guadarrama. Count to 500.”**

At this moment, two of them picked me up and carried me several meters. I could barely stand, not just from the beatings but also from sitting awkwardly on the ground for so many hours.

They left me standing, tied to a tree trunk and began to walk away. I heard their words and steps fading in the distance when I had counted over a hundred. Before reaching number 200 I could no longer hear any trace of a human being near me. Then I raised my tied hands to my face to peel off the tape from my eyes and recover my sight.

A voice, familiar by then, stopped me at once. It belonged, without a doubt, to the man I had come to know and dread: **“Don’t you move. We told you to count to 500. I hope you will now know what it means to obey orders. You’re going to see how much this spray burns to pay for what you did to me this morning.”**

No sooner said than done. He stood before me and emptied the spray can on my face and chest. My beard and tape served as a shield and saved part of my face. The spray penetrated my shirt and drew a triangle of burned skin on my chest where it was not protected by my vest.

And he left, leaving me with those wounds perpetrated by a monster – against the orders of the commando chief. This time I counted to 500. I unraveled the tape from my eyes and chewed away at the tape from my wrists, thread by thread, until it became undone. I felt as if I’d been through the mill, but more alive than ever.

I washed myself with snow and looked for a way out of that mountain foothill. I painfully climbed over a stone wall and discovered what looked like a path leading to the valley below. I don’t remember feeling any pain.

I felt like jumping with joy. I experienced an indescribable excitement looking at everything with limitless curiosity, as if I had never before seen a mountain covered with oak trees and ploughed by little streams of melting snow.

Soon I came to houses below on both sides of a highway. The chill of a late winter afternoon was setting in and the town below was practically deserted. There were only two young men about my age, one on each side of the roadway, holding sports bags with sharp pointed objects pushing against the sides. I did not want to go near them.

Were there machine guns in these bags? Was I becoming paranoid? Was this a rear command that would follow me?

I went directly to a pharmacy and asked for something for the burns on my face. The snow was no longer giving me relief. The clerk asked me what had happened and I said that my car's radiator or carburetor had exploded in my face. I never understood much about car engines, but I think she understood even less. She gave me a cream for the growing inflammation and cleaned my wounds. I could open my eyes a little more.

From the pharmacy, I went to a bar next door where I asked for a shot of brandy. I couldn't try it. My gums and the entire inside of my mouth were aching. I asked for Anís del Mono, the sweet one, and took tiny sips to rinse the sores inside my mouth; they had stopped bleeding as I descended down the mountain.

I found a phone and called Ana, my wife, at her magazine. She noticed something strange, perhaps in the way I was speaking with my mouth a little twisted. I said I had suffered an accident, nothing serious, and that I was perfectly well but needed her to pick me up in her car. She asked me where I was and that's when her suspicions were aroused – I hadn't prepared an answer and said I didn't know.

“Wait a minute,” I said. And I asked a trucker the name of this town.

“San Rafael,” he answered.

My wife then asked me how to get there – through the tunnel or over the Guadarrama mountain pass of Los Leones. I didn't know. This seemed so strange to her that she asked me, now upset, what was going on.

“How is it possible that you don't know how to get where you are?”

The waiter helped me out.

“Yes, through the tunnel. I came from the other side. Don't ask any more questions. Just come and pick me up without saying absolutely anything to anyone about all this. Please. Don't say anything to anyone. Is that clear? I will be at the crossroads of the town, next to the pharmacy.”

While I waited there, over an hour, it began to get dark. The young men with the sports bags still stood there, each one in his place. Far away I spotted Ana's car and waved, but she passed right by me. She had not recognized me. She turned around and passed the pharmacy again and picked me up, very frightened. I said, **“Don't make any strange signs. Pretend that nothing is wrong. They have kidnapped me this morning and have been interrogating me all day. Two of them are still here watching us. Turn on the ignition and let's go to the top of the mountain at the Leones pass before it's completely dark.”**

My car was there with the keys in the ignition. She wanted to leave it to take me directly to a hospital, but I insisted on taking it. I drove with one eye half opened, very slowly, followed by her car. It took us more than two hours to get to the northern outskirts of Madrid, to the home of the owner of the magazine, Doctor Julio García Peri, in La Moraleja.

My publisher was shocked. In the newsroom, with no news of me, everyone had been tense all day. Ernesto Garrido, the reporter who signed the sidebar “Como es la Guardia Civil” (“What the Civil Guard is like”) next to my story “De Vega a Campano” (“From Vega to Campano”), had fortunately not slept in his apartment. Some neighbors had said that unknown men had come to look for him very early in the morning. No one knew what was happening.

I summarized the events very quickly for **Dr. García Peri**, a very accomplished man whom I much admired and trusted. He decided to take me immediately to a hospital specializing in burns on Calle Lisboa. He called a surgeon, opened a drawer in his desk, and pulled out a revolver that he stuffed in his jacket pocket.

I must say I was impressed as much by his resolution and calmness as by his revolver. I left his garage lying on the floor of his grand Mercedes, so that no one would see me.

In the hospital, they treated the wounds on my face, my mouth and my whole body. In the Operating Room, the surgeon, Dr. de la Fuente, joked, **“Your’re lucky, young man. In Hollywood, many actresses would pay money for what you have. You are going to shed the scabs on your face many times. They will fall off as if you were a leper, but, in the end, you will have the fine skin of a baby... a peeling.”**

Returning to the editor’s house, we found **Judge Clemente Auger** (who would later be the president of the National Audience, the top national court). I told him everything and he advised me that before the fourth of March, I ought to appear before a night court and report that I had been obliged under threats to sign a document, whose contents I no longer remembered, dated in Guadalajara the 4th of March. Ana and I agreed we had to annul the eventual effects of that document against the two democratic generals of the Civil Guard.

I slept like a baby and then went to Night Court accompanied by my wife and the State Prosecutor Jesus Vicente Chamorro, an old friend who, when democracy was fully restored, would become Chief Attorney of the Supreme Court.

The judge on duty was Jaime Mariscal de Gante, ex-Director General of the Press of the dictatorship. He knew me perfectly well, but in my current state he didn’t recognize me until I told him my name.

I made a brief judicial declaration that gave no details. I only said I had signed under pressure something official dated the 4th of March in Guadalajara. That would be sufficient, I hoped, to invalidate the document implicating the moderate generals. I was terrified that my wife and I would be killed if I gave any details that would identify my captors as officials from the Civil Guard, yet I wanted to nullify what I had signed.

The next day we visited the chief of Police, Lt. Col. Quintero, and the Director General of Security, General Castro Sanmartín, both under the supervision of the Minister of the Interior, Fraga Iribarne. I gave them the same brief version that I had related to the night court judge. I claimed I suffered memory loss due to post traumatic stress to justify the lack of details.

I approached a general who had served in Franco's Intelligence; he was the uncle of a friend who said we could trust him not to betray us. When this high official heard the whole story, he recommended that I not repeat it to anybody, especially the police – that I stick to the bare-bone version I had told the judge. And that is what I have done until now, never confirming press reports.

General Castro said that the authorities could not guarantee our safety in the face of the threats from uncontrollable armed groups and suggested that we leave the Iberian Peninsula, maybe going to the Canaries, for example. We decided to take refuge, for a few weeks, in the Parador Antonio Machado of Soria, named after the famous early 20th century poet. And that was a good move. I will never forget those days of convalescence next to the poplar trees of Machado's love poems, along the riverside.

Oh, Soria! From there I brought home a pine seedling in the pocket of my jacket. I planted it in our land.

Today it is thirty years old and stands as tall, stately, and beautiful as Spanish democracy itself.

Epilogue

For the record, the pseudonym for my sources that I provided to my kidnappers, **José Pérez**, was not the one my sources used. I told my interrogators the real pseudonym. It is thus known only by a small circle: my wife and me, the kidnappers, and the anonymous source or sources whom I in fact never met in person. Thinking back over my experience, I think that had I known the true identity of my sources, I would most likely have betrayed them under torture.

Those military sources identifying themselves over the phone as democratic were certainly wise not to provide their real names. One never knows. A couple of months after my ordeal, when I was almost recovered from my injuries, an Army general who said he had been one of my informers approached me after a political conference and dinner and wanted to start up a friendly conversation about the case.

I told him, that after the traumatic shock of the torture, I had forgotten the names that my informer used and asked him what pseudonym he had used in our conversations. He did not give the correct answer. That put me on guard but we continued talking. Naturally, I did not give out any information. I remained very frightened afterward, right up until the following September when I left Spain without looking back, after being awarded a Nieman Foundation fellowship at Harvard University (www.nieman.harvard.edu).

Before leaving the country, I spent several months, until the end of summer, under the continual protection – that is to say, 24 hours a day -- of armed bodyguards from the Civil Guard (who knew nothing about the kidnapping) and the Antiterrorist Brigade of the Police.

It was an unforgettable and enriching experience, both for the daily and intimate coexistence with people who are placing their own lives at risk for you, and for the

lessons taught by the necessary loss of freedom. The bodyguards protect you, but they also remind you of death which you might encounter just around the corner.

The bodyguards were assigned a few weeks after my liberation when we received new death threats from the kidnapers; they were furious that the document I had signed was not usable. In a sense, though, I upheld my end of the bargain. I haven't told the full story of my kidnapping – at least not like this, on the record – until now, 30 years later.

But during all that time, there has not been a single day that I have not thought of death.