

Corruption triumphs when honesty fails

The following are excerpts of testimony given in Buenos Aires federal court, Aug. 8, by Maj. Héctor Adrián Romero Mundani, whose brother Col. Jorge Romero Mundani was killed on Dec. 3, 1990.

I address Your Honor very moved, after having heard the testimony of my comrade Major Fernández.

I have been a soldier all my life, since I was 15 years old, I believe since I was born; I have devoted myself only to soldiering, I only know about arms, I only know about leading men. It was enough to see the tip of the iceberg, for me to join the actions of Dec. 3. I thought that what I saw was the whole thing. Frankly, although I was aware of the subject Major Fernández was going to talk about, I did not know the details.

But today, truly today for the first time, I have uncovered definitively the mystery of the reason why my brother, Col. Romero Mundani, was there, commanded and died. . . .

Today I have heard many names named, names of my brother's friends, people I know, who I thought were friends; but I cannot be the friend of a corrupt [person], and I think that my brother, when he thought that all was lost, preferred death rather than joining the corrupt. . . .

When, eight months ago, after living through the most awful experience of my life, I surrendered to a colonel of the nation, I was almost certain that it was to face the bullets of a firing squad. The statements by the President and the attitudes of those who conducted the repression, indicated that to me. I bade farewell to the remains of Colonel Romero with a "see you soon" and asked God not to allow such a heroic sacrifice to be in vain, thinking that my last will would be to say everything my brother had been prevented from saying.

But God writes straight on twisted lines, and today I am here before Your Honor, under circumstances very different from what I expected.

To begin with, I must thank the honorable court for this unique opportunity to allow me to speak all my truth, and not only my truth, but for allowing the truth to flourish, as the result of the testimony of 200 witnesses and innumerable documents, evidence, and expertise. . . .

Now then, what was the essence of Dec. 3?

The state of defenselessness that the nation suffers, is

public and notorious—a state that would never have been reached had the warnings made years ago been heeded—it has been described in this chamber by persons of unimpeachable qualifications and it has been confirmed by no less than the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces.

This situation of defenselessness came about, not so much due to lack of resources, but to negligence, complicity, and premeditation. This is a grave breach of the constitutional obligation to "provide for the common defense" and, thus, not only constitutes an illegitimate act, but also an illegal one; an act of corruption on the part of those who must implement and/or give advice regarding the fulfillment of this aim of the state, and which poses a grave ethical conflict for those of us who are—by decision of the same nation-state—sworn to respect and enforce respect for the national Constitution, even at the price of our lives.

We attempted, by all the legal and legitimate means at our disposal, to sound the alarm about this grave situation, but the only reply, as it has been seen here, was persecution, not only before Dec. 3, but even after. . . .

The corrupt can only triumph if the honest ones fail to act. However, in agreement with the prosecutor, I believe that much can still be done. . . .

We have just heard terrible and concrete reports of corruption in the Army. We have seen how the degradation of the force from all standpoints—spiritual, material, ethical, etc.—has led to the state of defenselessness. I now feel, Your Honor, that I have just now understood in its full magnitude, the participation and death of Colonel Romero Mundani. . . .

If someone had taken a moment to listen, as Your Honor has done; if the senior command had acted with the morality of Lieutenant Colonels Alfonso and Alvarado, by stepping to one side once they realized that events had overtaken them, surely none of what we regret today would have happened, and the President would have had to get involved only to the extent of naming a new Army Chief of Staff, as he is constitutionally empowered to do. . . .

Messrs. Judges, I have been trained since the age of 15 to give everything for the Fatherland. If in a soldier's list of values there is something higher than God or the Fatherland, at the hour of the supreme sacrifice, he will hardly be willing to surrender life and all that is beautiful in it: his good times, his children, friends, a glass of good wine, the pleasures of nature. A civilian is educated for life; the military is educated for death, to die or to cause death so that his fellow citizens can live in peace.

In our beloved Army there remain many senior officers, commanders, officers, and cadre who also have a profound, heroic, sense of that life and who love the institution. I know they will find the path to return the force to its duty . . . beyond "painted faces" and "washed faces," beyond bureaucratic and fighting armies, with one single army, our beloved Argentinian Army, what it was yesterday, what it wants to be today, what it will surely be tomorrow.