

CHAPTER 1

The street of expensive homes could have been an exclusive neighborhood in any sunny part of the world. Block walls or wrought iron fences surrounded many of the homes. Lush landscaping on large lots secluded each house from its neighbors. All were set well back from the street. It was seven-thirty on a Tuesday morning in early May, eighty-five degrees already and sunny. Another monotonous repetition of every other day for the last three weeks.

A much abused and rusted stake truck pulled into a driveway entrance to a large estate surrounded by a ten foot stucco wall. The wall was topped with coiled razor wire. Security here was more important than aesthetics. The truck was stopped at the heavy steel gates by two soldiers armed with American M-16 assault weapons. An officer approached from a guard house concealed around the corner of the wall. The affluent tranquility was just a veneer in this Central American police state. This was El Salvador.

The guards were not relaxed. Both had brought their weapons to their shoulders. Even the officer had drawn his sidearm.

These were violent times with the continuing civil war now ten years old.

"Out of the truck, now! Everyone!" the officer shouted.

The two men in the front opened the doors and stepped down.

"You in the back. Get out of the truck. Hands on your head. What is your business here?"

The driver answered, "We're here to work on the grounds, Señor."

"You're not the regular crew."

"That is correct, Señor. Señor Mendez said we were to come here today because Colonel Solorgano has complained about the work. My crew is the best. All our customers"

"Shutup." The officer was in no mood to listen to the prattle of this idiot.

"Face down in the grass," he ordered.

All four laid face down in the grass next to the driveway. The officer returned to the guard house while the two soldiers trained their weapons on the four workers. He called to the house and spoke with the duty officer. After giving the information he was ordered to stand by and the duty officer would get back to him.

The duty officer then called the maintenance company to verify the identity of the gardening crew. Eduardo Mendez, the owner, assured him the men were reliable and would do better work than the previous crew. The officer took down the names of the workers from Mendez and hung up.

The officer called his subordinate at the gate and told him to verify their names and papers, and then search the truck thoroughly. If everything was in order, he was to let them pass into the grounds.

"You did well Mendez. In a short while we will leave you." The stranger said. He was still holding the barrel of the gun behind Mendez's ear.

A man and a woman had broken into Mendez's office through a rear window early in the morning before Mendez arrived. As they heard him unlocking the door, they pulled nylon stockings over their heads. It was important to not have their faces seen by Mendez otherwise he would have to be killed. As it was, Mendez' life would later be in danger even with his story of being held at gunpoint.

After examining the identity papers of the crew, one of the soldiers searched the truck thoroughly, including the undercarriage. The truck was allowed to pass through the gate. The driver pulled up behind a jeep with a mounted 30 caliber machine gun parked in the circular driveway in front of the house. In front of the jeep was a black Mercedes sedan. The gardener's truck was able to park in such a way as to conceal any activity in the rear of the truck from either the house or the gate.

All four workers began unloading their tools. The driver put on gloves that reached to his forearms. Two fifty-five gallon drums stood at the back, filled with cow manure for fertilizer. They had made sure it was fresh in order to discourage too close a scrutiny. One nose full in the hot sun had been enough to divert the soldier from probing further.

Reaching down in the still moist manure, the driver pulled out several plastic bags from each drum. While two of the men kept a lookout as they arranged shovels, hoes, and rakes, the driver and the other man laid out the bags on the bed of the truck.

The contents of the bags consisted of four Israeli made Uzi machine guns, four Soviet 9mm Makarov pistols, eight U.S. fragment grenades, several pieces of steel wire cut in two foot lengths, and four black commando balaclava hoods. The hoods would offer sufficient disguise of identity for contact with anyone after getting by the gate guards. More importantly, they added a romantic flavor of terror the leader liked.

Unfortunately, the knit masks were not only hot, but the plastic had not effectively insulated out the odor.

"Mother of God, I can't wear this." The other man in the truck said as he pulled the hood on then quickly removed it.

"Carlos, put it back on. The smell will pass." The driver said.

Reluctantly Carlos did as he was told without further comment. The driver was not only the leader, but obviously commanded a special respect. Even dressed as a laborer with a stained shirt, old denims, and work boots, he generated authority. He was average height, physically fit, in his late thirties. Older than the others. His black hair was stylishly cut although uncombed for his present disguise. He had near-black eyes that fixed intently on whoever he was speaking to. A black, close-trimmed beard and moustache. Dark Latin complexion.

The leader and the other three put on their balaclavas. All of them took an Uzi and stuck a Makarov 9mm pistol in their belts. Into their pockets, each put two grenades and several coils of the steel wire.

"Now," ordered the leader.

All four men ran in a crouch to the side door. The line of sight from the guards at the gate was obstructed by the stake truck. There were no perimeter guards visible from this end of the house. The leader carefully looked through the window of the door. The quick glance revealed at least two people in what appeared to be the kitchen. He held up two fingers signaling to the door. Stepping back he nodded to Carlos who pulled open the door. The leader took two steps into the kitchen.

"Quiet. Don't move," he said in a loud whisper to the two startled occupants of the kitchen. One was a young soldier in uniform, the other an older man in an apron, probably the cook.

The leader pushed the barrel of his Uzi under the chin of the terrified soldier. Carlos coming in right behind him did the same to the cook. The other two assailants quickly took positions to cover the door leading to the rest of the house.

"Where is the colonel?" the leader asked the soldier. The soldier said nothing, not so much from resistance as from sheer terror.

The leader pulled a hunting knife from his boot, and substituted it for the Uzi at the soldier's throat. "I will not ask again. Now tell me where the colonel is."

The leader's manner was calm and pragmatic. He had every intention of ramming the broad blade knife into the throat of the soldier if he didn't give him the information. That would certainly make an impression on the cook.

"Straight down the hallat the endhis officeI think" The soldier was stumbling over his words.

"Slow down. At the end of the hall?" the leader asked.

"Yes."

"Right or left side?"

"Left. Facing out to the rear of the house."

"Who else is in the house?"

"Threeno, four other soldiers and an officer."

"Where are they now?"

"They're in the room next to the colonel's office, at least the soldiers are. I don't know where the captain is. Maybe with the colonel."

"Anyone else?"

"No."

The leader ordered both the soldier and the cook to get down on their knees on the floor. Carlos quickly wrapped the wrists of both men with the steel wire. The wire cut sharply into the flesh and the older man started to whimper from pain and fear.

"Shut up old man. Be glad you will live. The pig will not," Carlos Perez said. The leader gave Perez a sharp glance of rebuke and told him to hurry. Perez pulled the bandanna from his neck and used it as a gag on the old man. One of the other attackers offered up his for Perez to use on the soldier.

Both men were pushed face down on the floor. Perez finished by tying their ankles with wire. Only two minutes had passed since they had entered the house.

Using none of his group's names, the leader pointed to one and said, "Stay here in the kitchen. If there is shooting, prevent any of the soldiers outside from entering." To the other two, "You and you take the guards down the hall. I'll take the colonel. If there is trouble, kill everyone. No more prisoners. And make sure you destroy any radios and telephones."

The leader cautiously opened the swinging door leading to the rest of the house. He saw no one. To the left was a large formal dining area. The polished mahogany dining table could easily seat fourteen. To the right was a large sunken living area with striking cream colored furniture, contrasting with the dark gray slate tile floor. Beyond was a hallway leading presumably to the guards and their target.

Hearing voices, they stopped outside the doorway to what served as the guard contingent operations room. All three assailants were sweating profusely. They would either bloody the enemy today or die in the next few minutes. They would become a force to be reckoned with, or just a few more, unremembered martyrs.

The leader nodded to Perez and the other man named Rafael. The two burst into the room with Perez in the lead covering to the right and Rafael covering to the left. Three soldiers were sitting at a table playing cards and smoking. Their assault rifles were propped against the wall.

The room was approximately twenty feet square with two large windows facing the back yard. To the left was a door which was closed. On a table on the right hand wall, stood a field communications radio and three telephones.

"Hands on your head!" Perez ordered in a loud whisper. All three soldiers obeyed immediately. The black hooded figures

made a terrifying impression. A cigarette dropped from one soldier's mouth. Another's bladder involuntarily let go.

"Where is the other one?" Perez said. Before any of the three could answer, the door to the left opened apparently from a bathroom. The fourth soldier immediately pulled his sidearm and fired at Rafael. The first shot missed, but the next two caught Rafael in the chest. He went down without firing his own weapon. Perez turned and emptied a burst from his Uzi in a wide arc, mostly as a reflex action. The three soldiers sitting at the table scrambled to get down on the floor. One attempted to pull his own sidearm. His eyes locked with Perez's for a fraction of a second. He knew he was dead.

Perez emptied a sustained burst into the three men now on the floor. At this close a range, the damage was substantial, particularly those rounds that struck the head. Turning to the left, he hit the door with a short burst to pin the attacker who retreated back inside the bathroom. Perez then backed out into the hallway for cover.

Perez turned quickly to the right in the direction to the door to the colonel's office. No one was in the hallway. Several more shots came from the soldier behind the bathroom door. Perez pulled a grenade from his pocket. He pulled the retaining pin ring, waited a couple of seconds, and threw it like a baseball at the partially closed door shielding the fourth soldier. The grenade dropped to the floor with the door partially open. Probably recognizing what was happening, the soldier slammed the door shut a second before the grenade exploded.

Perez had never exploded a grenade before. Inside the house, the noise was awesome as it reverberated off the walls, blowing out the windows. He pulled a second grenade, tossed it underhand where the door had been, and held his ears. The second grenade made sure the fourth soldier was no longer a threat.

Simultaneous with Perez and Rafael rushing the guards, the leader kicked open the door to the adjacent room, the room presumed to be the colonel's office. Two men were standing in the middle of the room. One had the shoulder board insignia of a full colonel on his beige uniform blouse, the other a captain dressed in camouflage fatigues. Both put their hands up in response to the gesture from the Uzi.

"On your knees, hands behind your heads," the leader said.

"You'll never get away with this you filthy son-of-a-bitch," the colonel said, as he quickly got down on his knees.

"You're the fucking"

"Yes, we're the gardeners, idiot," the leader finished the sentence for the captain, whose face was reddening, maybe more from anger than from fear.

As the two officers got down on the floor, automatic fire broke out in the next room. Preparing for the worse, the leader got behind the two kneeling men in order to watch the door. If he was to die, at least he would take the colonel with him.

It seemed like minutes, but only a few seconds had passed before the first grenade exploded, closely followed by the second explosion. With the grenades, he at least knew that his men had inflicted damage.

Perez quickly but cautiously shot a glance into the office. Seeing the situation, he entered and reported to the leader. "Rafael is dead. The four guards are dead."

"The telephones and radio?" the leader asked.

"I ...I don't know. I'll take care of it." He turned to leave, but the leader halted him.

"Wait. First tie their wrists. The colonel first."

Perez took a coil of wire from his pocket and tied the colonel's wrists. Putting a hefty twist to the wire, he was rewarded with a sharp grunt of pain from Colonel Javier Solorgano.

While Perez was tying the colonel, the leader stepped behind the captain. As soon as Perez finished, the leader fired a single

round into the back of the captain's head. The entire head appeared to explode. Blood and tissue sprayed in a wide pattern across the room. The colonel was splattered with blood on his left cheek. Perez was surprised but he was used to such carnage from fighting with the rebel insurgency.

Colonel Solorgano could not control the effect on his stomach as he retched and vomited.

The leader moved to the door and looked down the hall. Roberto Salas had opened the door from the kitchen at the sound of the gunfire. He was trying to maintain a position to cover an attack from the outside while trying to understand what was happening inside down the hall.

"Roberto, what's happening outside?" the leader asked.

"One man is approaching the kitchen door cautiously. From the picture window I can see at least two approaching the front."

"Where are the keys to the car?" the leader asked the colonel.

"In my desk drawer," the colonel answered weakly.

"Carlos, quickly. And rip that phone out."

Perez located the keys then tore the phone loose from the line. The ornate glass case displaying a collection of pistols and revolvers became a likely target for the disconnected phone. He pulled the colonel to his feet and pushed him into the hallway. As they moved down the hall, a phone was ringing from the guards' operations room. The leader picked up the receiver. "Yes?"

"Who is this?" the voice demanded.

"Listen. We have Colonel Solorgano. Who are you?"

"This is Lieutenant Aviles at the gate. I demand to know what is going on."

The leader smiled as he realized this was an internal line. "Listen to me, Lieutenant. You will order your men to pull back from the house immediately. If you attack we will kill Colonel Solorgano. You can't get to us without killing Solorgano. In one

minute we will leave the house and get into the Mercedes. Do not attempt to stop us."

The leader disconnected the call by yanking the cord from the wall. He did the same to the other phones, and smashed the radio with the butt of his Uzi.

All three assailants moved quickly down the hallway. Looking outside through the large window in the living area, they could see two soldiers on the front lawn in prone firing positions with rifles trained on the house.

"Roberto, come with us, we're leaving now. They know we have Solorgano. They won't shoot," the leader said.

The leader moved down the two steps into the sunken living area and across to the foyer and front door. Behind him, Perez dragged the colonel with Salas following.

"Roberto, get two grenades ready," the leader said, as he also pulled a grenade from his own pocket.

Opening the front door a few inches, he yelled, "We are coming out. If you shoot, the colonel dies. We have grenades. Even if you were to kill us, Solorgano still dies."

"Okay, ready?" the leader looked at his two men.

Each nodded.

"Carlos, you hold Solorgano's arm tightly. I'll be on his other side. Roberto, stay behind us."

The leader opened the door and edged out with Carlos Perez pushing Solorgano ahead of him. He held the grenade in his left hand with the Uzi in his right. Holding the grenade up, he hooked a finger in the ring, and pulled the pin. Holding the spring loaded handle from releasing, the grenade was now live. It would explode within seconds after releasing the handle.

Ramming the grenade under Solorgano's chin he told him, "Tell them."

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" Solorgano shouted.

The Mercedes was only fifty feet from the front door. The leader opened the back door and Perez pushed Solorgano in.

Salas moved in right behind. Perez opened the front door and got behind the wheel. The leader surveyed the scene. Two soldiers were still lying on the lawn maybe a hundred feet away. He could see at least one more behind a tree to the left. The gates were closed. Someone was standing in the guard house, presumably the lieutenant.

The leader got in the back on the right side of Solorgano. "Let's go, Carlos."

"The gate? What do we do?" Perez asked as he turned the key in the ignition.

"He'll open it, or we will."

Perez eased the car around the circular drive toward the gate. The lieutenant clearly did not know what to do. As the Mercedes moved closer, he retreated back from the guard house and gate. Perez brought the car to within ten feet of the still closed gate. The leader got out slowly. He moved to the gate still holding the live grenade in his left hand, the Uzi in his right. He released the latch and pulled the inward opening gate open.

Perez eased the car forward. Before jumping into the car, the leader threw the grenade in the direction of the officer. Salas tossed another grenade into the guard house as Perez hit the accelerator, gravel flying with the spinning tires.

As the car sped down the street, sirens could be heard in the distance. Perez jerked the Mercedes through a series of turns as he worked his way through the residential area. He had familiarized himself with all of the streets for the past several weeks and knew exactly where he was going. Minutes later, the Mercedes slowed and turned onto a main street, assuming a moderate speed equivalent to the sparse traffic.

At 7:50AM a call was received at the Salvadoran Treasury Police, Policia de Hacienda headquarters. The caller identified himself as a Sergeant Moreno. The state of the sergeant's agitation brought the duty officer to the line.

"This is Captain Jimenez. Identify yourself."

"Sergeant Moreno. At the colonel's house."

"Colonel who?"

"Colonel Solorgano."

"What's the problem, Sergeant?"

"He's been taken. They killed five men."

"Taken? Who's been taken?"

"Colonel Solorgano."

"Taken by who?"

"I don't know. There were four men. Well armed. Disguised as gardeners." The words were tumbling out.

"Standby, Sergeant," the captain said.

Turning to the other staff in the communications room he said to a sergeant, "You, take this call. Get all the information you can from this fool. Lieutenant Flores, gather a squad of men immediately and go to Colonel Solorgano's residence."

"What's going on, sir?" the lieutenant asked.

"Now lieutenant, move it!" the captain ordered without further explanation.

The news of the attack spread quickly through the chain of command. The duty captain informed the deputy commander of the Treasury Police, Major Jaime Rivera, second in command to Colonel Solorgano. Rivera in turn placed a call to national military headquarters reaching a Captain Ramirez, aide to Colonel Francisco Benavides. Benavides was deputy chief of staff, the third highest ranking military officer in the country.

Captain Ramirez walked down the hall and stopped in front of Colonel Benavides' closed door. He knocked and opened the door without waiting for a reply to enter.

"Captain?" Benavides said, slightly perturbed at the intrusion.

"Sir, we have a report that Colonel Solorgano's residence has been attacked and the colonel taken."

"Taken? What do you mean taken?" Benavides stood up abruptly from his chair behind his desk.

"Apparently abducted, Sir. They took heavy casualties. There is not much information yet. Major Rivera is investigating."

"Investigating? What the hell does that mean? Does he know what happened or not?"

Before the captain could answer, Benavides said, "Get Rivera on the line, I want to talk with him."

The captain came to the side of the desk and picked up the colonel's telephone. He ordered the operator to get Rivera on the line immediately.

While the captain was attempting to contact Major Rivera, Benavides considered his next steps, assuming that Colonel Solorgano had in fact been kidnapped. The initial shock of the news had passed. He started to consider the potential opportunities this presented. Benavides' career had been built on accurately assessing situations and determining how best to personally profit. Benavides was a skilled strategist and politician as well as a creative opportunist.

The rebels had never attempted this bold an incursion into the capital. Benavides was most concerned about the negative implications of an apparently successful attack on the military, not about the well-being of Colonel Solorgano. Solorgano was an embarrassment anyway. A sadistic pig. Benavides had no moral compunctions about the use of torture to extract information, but Solorgano liked torture for its own sake. He was a stupid thug.

As a brother officer of the same *tanda*, one's graduating class from the military academy, Benavides was constrained by tradition from doing much about Solorgano's excesses. With increasing frequency, he had to explain away those excesses to the Americans. As the American military attaché would repeatedly point out, it was increasingly difficult for Washington to justify military aid when these *incidents* appeared in the foreign press.

Benavides detested having to *explain* anything to the Americans, especially making excuses for someone like Solorgano. If he could gain command then he could overhaul the structure of the Treasury Police. Remove the thuggish tactics while enhancing the intelligence collecting effectiveness.

He contemplated this new situation. The army chief of staff would want immediate recommendations. Did they kidnap Solorgano to simply facilitate their escape, or was he the target? To use for bargaining? Possibly as an exchange for rebel prisoners? Not likely. He could not imagine them ever releasing Solorgano, not with his reputation. Clearly, they would kill him, probably after making some ridiculous demands. Solorgano was publicity. Maybe he was dead already. The thought brought a subtle smile to Benavides' face.

Benavides contacted his superior, Army Chief of Staff, General Arnulfo Garcia, in the office of the minister of finance. After a summary of the events, Benavides recommended a course of action to exploit the situation.

Increase security for all senior officers. Place all barracks on alert. He himself would assume temporary command of the Treasury Police. Make immediate arrests of suspected dissidents. Wait for demands from the rebels if any are forthcoming. But take a hard line, non-negotiation response. Write Solorgano off. Take the opportunity to make changes in the Treasury Police command. General Garcia also thought Solorgano was a liability.

The unsaid part to the last action was for Benavides to gain personal control over the Treasury Police permanently. Benavides still had unfulfilled career ambitions. Control over the Treasury Police would add tremendous personal power.

The Salvadoran military was organized into two groupings. The first consists of the army proper with a few hundred in the navy and air force. The second and smaller group was comprised of several command organizations responsible for inter-

nal security. These security forces consisted of the National Guard, National Police, and Treasury Police. The National Police handled typical police duties in the urban areas, while the National Guard performed a similar function in the rural areas.

The Treasury Police was a bland name for a secret police force rivaling the most brutal and repressive in the world. Their function was ostensibly intelligence. Their real mission was to do the dirty work to support the military's hold on power through fear. Their techniques of torture were learned from the U.S. CIA and U.S. Army Green Beret Special Forces. Acquiring command, even temporarily, would provide Benavides exceptional advantages.

Benavides was essentially the number three ranking military officer in the country. His immediate superior was the army chief of staff, who in turn reported to the minister of defense. Currently, with a civilian president, the minister was the highest ranking military officer.

With control of the Treasury Police, Benavides would have access to highly sensitive files. Some of this information would not even be known by his boss, General Garcia, since Colonel Solorgano reported directly to the Minister of Defense, General Ruiz.

After relaying the news to national command headquarters, Major Rivera made straight for the communications room with Captain Jimenez close behind. A sergeant on a telephone saw the Major Rivera come into the room and said, "Sir, I've got a Sergeant Moreno on the line from Colonel Solorgano's residence. He reports they were attacked and the colonel abducted. They have casualties. Do you wish to speak to him?"

"I've already dispatched a squad under Lieutenant Flores to investigate, sir," the captain reported.

"Very well, Captain, tell the sergeant help is on the way," Major Rivera said. "I've notified National Command. I want road blocks at all exits from the city. Call the commander at the

Alvarado Barracks for additional manpower for the road blocks. Order all our off duty personnel to report back to duty immediately. Order all staff personnel to my office in thirty minutes."

"Yes, sir," the captain responded. He immediately started issuing instructions to the communications personnel in the room.

The Mercedes left the city and moved north on the Inter-American highway. Ten miles out of the city it turned onto an unpaved rural road. After a couple of miles, it pulled to a stop behind a sixty's-vintage Ford station wagon with the hood raised. All three men got out. Colonel Solorgano was removed roughly by Perez.

The young man under the hood of the station wagon closed the hood and opened the tailgate of the station wagon. Perez pushed the colonel into the back and covered him with a blanket. All four got into the car without a word. The driver swung the station wagon around and returned to the main highway. They continued away from San Salvador and eventually turned onto another road which led deep into the hills. Bumping along the rutted dirt road, they eventually arrived at a small rundown tenant farmer's house secluded on a remote coffee plantation. It was a little over two hours since they had attacked Solorgano's estate.

"Miguel, the binoculars," the leader said to the driver. "Carlos, get him into the house," he said referring to Solorgano.

Miguel Cortina got the binoculars from the front seat of the car and ran back to the leader. "Santiago, you got him," Cortina said excitedly. "Where's Rafael?"

"Rafael was killed." Santiago Molina said with no particular emotion. His thoughts were focused on the next step. Rafael was a casualty. On balance, his loss was well worth the gain. The attack was an unqualified success. After surveying the area, Molina went inside the dilapidated house. He gave the binoculars to

Cortina who immediately took up an observation position outside. The interrogation of Solorgano should not take long.

Solorgano was sitting on the earth floor against the wall. He looked up with renewed terror in his eyes. He was a small man, no more than five-six, stocky, out of shape, probably in his early fifties. He had a round, squat head with a broad nose. His hair was sparse on top and streaked with grey at the temples. Right now he was sweating profusely. He smelled like an animal. By any assessment, Solorgano was ugly.

"Who are you?" Solorgano asked. He received no answer.

"My wrists please."

The wire had cut deeply into the flesh. Dried blood covered his hands. The swollen flesh over the embedded wire had turned black-purple.

"I will ask you questions, Colonel. I expect answers. I have little time, and even less patience. We will inflict even greater pain than you now feel. In fact, you will lose your hands unless the wire is removed soon. We will remove the wire only after you have told us all we want to know. You of all people know the effects of torture. Eventually everyone talks. You don't look the type to have a high threshold for pain."

"You're going to kill me aren't you?"

"Of course, Colonel. But how you die depends on you. Tell us what we want to know and you die like a soldier. A drink of alcohol, a cigarette, a quick painless bullet in the back of the head. The alternative is to die screaming in agony for hours."

Solorgano wailed like an old woman for several minutes, pleading not to be killed. Eventually he regained some measure of control.

"Give me water, please. I'll tell you what you want to know. My wrists? Please?"

"Water now, the wrists after you answer some questions."

Perez retrieved a plastic jug of water from the car. After tending to Solorgano, he sat down at the rough hewn table along

with Salas. Salas had writing materials to take notes. Santiago Molina began the questioning. He paced about the small room as one answer prompted the next question.

The interrogation lasted almost three hours. Somewhere during that time, the wire binding Solorgano's wrists was removed. This turned out to be a mistake. The surge of blood through the damaged wrists caused Solorgano to almost faint with the pain. Trying to improve the situation by giving Solorgano some bread only worsened matters by his choking and vomiting. After a delay of thirty minutes, they bond his wrists loosely with a cloth rag.

By half past noon all three men were showing fatigue from the stress. Salas had filled a notebook with information that poured out of Solorgano. Solorgano had gone into such detail that Molina had to frequently cut him short and go on to new questions. The only thing you could respect about Solorgano was his memory for detail.

Molina eventually exhausted all his questions. Solorgano had even volunteered a wealth of additional useful information.

"Well, Solorgano, you have cooperated. However, it is now time."

Molina motioned to Perez and Salas. They got up and pulled Solorgano to his feet.

"No, please!" he whimpered. Tears ran down his face and his legs buckled. Perez and Salas half carried, half dragged him from the farm house.

"Solorgano. I promised you a cigarette," Molina said. Solorgano only stared blankly. Molina lit a cigarette and stuck it in Solorgano's mouth. The cigarette bobbed up and down with the trembling of his lips. Solorgano coughed. Tears ran down his cheeks.

"And a drink. I almost forgot. Some Mexican tequila? A moment please."

Molina walked behind Solorgano who was being held upright by Perez and Salas. He drew the Makarov pistol from his waist, put it within an inch of Solorgano's back, and fired three times in rapid succession.

All three shots tore through the heart and exited the chest in what appeared to be one massive wound.

Perez and Salas were expecting the execution, but not in this manner. They released their grip on the arms of the now lifeless body as if it was contaminated. It pitched forward into the dust.

"Carlos, bring me the machete," Molina said.

Perez now understood what Molina was planning to do. Clearly their leader embraced the use of violence without any hesitation.

Perez returned with the machete. Molina pointed to the body and nodded to Perez, "You know what to do, Carlos."

The other two watched with the fascination of horror as Perez decapitated the head from Solorgano's body with two strokes of the machete. Salas stood numb. Cortina turned away and vomited.

"The information he gave us will damage the fascists. His head will send a special message to the military high command. The colonels do not get this close to killing. This will remind them they are vulnerable," Molina said. "Carlos, get a container for that," pointing to the head. "We're leaving."

Solorgano's body was dragged into the house. No need to have it spotted from the air. His head was placed in a wicker basket in the back of the station wagon. Two hours later they re-entered the capital, San Salvador. Road blocks had been established, but only for vehicles apparently leaving the city and its suburbs.

Shortly after entering San Salvador they pulled into an alley behind what had been a restaurant in a poor section of the city. The street was unpaved. The neighborhood was a collection of small, single story buildings housing mostly small shops. Many

of the buildings were boarded up. The former restaurant was one such building. There were few people to be seen about. Safer to remain indoors. All four men got out of the station wagon.

The alley ran behind a string of shops at the rear of which were gutted hulks of old automobiles and lines of hanging laundry. Most of the merchants lived in the rear of their businesses. Four small boys could be seen at the end of the alley a block away. They were engrossed in their game of kicking a soccer ball. Cortina took a tire iron from under the seat. He used the iron to pry off the boards securing the door. It took little effort since the boards were secured with only a couple of small nails to facilitate easy removal. Perez opened the rear of the station wagon and took out the basket.

Molina, Perez, and Salas entered the building and closed the door after them. Cortina quietly replaced the boards over the door by using the same nail holes. He then went to the car and raised the hood to the engine. Under the guise of working on the engine, he took up his duties as lookout.

The three men were inside the old restaurant less than ten minutes. Molina opened the door carefully until Cortina signaled all clear. Behind him, Perez pushed an ice cream vendor's cart. Molina had noticed the abandoned cart in the back of the restaurant when they had checked it out as a safe house. Perez had also donned a large hat and poncho.

"Good luck, Carlos" Molina said.

Perez nodded and left the alley pushing the cart. After re-securing the boards across the door, the other men drove off in the car.

Colonel Benavides had taken personal command of the search. Road blocks had sealed the city. The security forces had units raiding known gathering places of those who opposed the government. Benavides did not expect any real results from these actions but it would satisfy those expectations for an im-

mediate response. At a brief meeting with the Defense Minister and the Army Chief of Staff, he was assigned the task of devising an operations plan to deal with the incident. He had scheduled a meeting that afternoon with selected senior officers.

Benavides was making notes for the upcoming meeting when Captain Ramirez opened the door abruptly.

"Sir, they found Colonel Solorgano's car."

"Where?"

"On a back road, off the Inter-American highway west of the city. No sign of the colonel. There were tracks of another automobile nearby. The officer at the site says they are recent tracks."

"Very well, Captain. Pass the information on to the necessary commands."

"Since we found the car, sir, do you want to issue any new orders?"

"Not yet, Captain. We'll take the question up at the meeting."

The crisis meeting convened in the conference room of the Army National Command headquarters. In addition to Colonel Benavides, there were two other full colonels and two lieutenant colonels from brigade commands and the National Guard, the commandant of the military academy, Major Rivera from the Treasury Police, and Captain Ramirez, Benavides' aide. Benavides had selected this particular group since they shared generally the same political position. All but Rivera could be counted on to support Benavides proposals.

Benavides opened the meeting by updating them on the discovery of the car. Captain Ramirez presented the details of the attack on Solorgano's residence assembled from the witness accounts at the scene. He reported that they had not yet identified the terrorist that was killed at the scene. After reviewing the security measures that had been put in place, and paying lip service to concerns over the fate of his brother officer, Benavides got down to his real purpose for the meeting. This was to ex-

plore ways to exploit the situation. Before getting very far, the meeting was interrupted.

Bursting into the office, which caused one startled colonel to come out of his chair, a junior officer excitedly reported, "They found Colonel Solorgano! At least"

"Where?" a colonel asked, cutting off the rest of the young officer's words.

"It's his head sir!"

"Lieutenant, slow down," Captain Ramirez ordered.

"Sir, they found Colonel Solorgano's head."

After the initial furor had subsided in the room, the lieutenant reported the details of this latest development.

"At approximately 1850 hours, the headquarters for the 8th National Police Brigade received a call instructing them to examine an abandoned ice cream vendor cart across the street. Fearing a bomb, it took over thirty minutes before they were able to open the lid. Colonel Solorgano's head was found in the cart. In the mouth was a type written note. The note is on its way over here right now."

The note arrived fifteen minutes later at Army National Command Headquarters. It read:

To all military officers:

The head of the butcher Solorgano is only the first.

All military officers will be considered legitimate targets. The blood of thousands of your countrymen is on your hands and those of your predecessors.

Only the destruction of the military can atone for these atrocities. We demand only your death.

La Mano de Justicia

