



Brazilian Torturer Found Murdered

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By Michael Uhl

At approximately four o'clock this past Thursday afternoon [4/24/14], Paulo Malhaes, a retired officer who served in the seventies during the years of Brazil's military dictatorship, was murdered at his small farm near Rio de Janeiro.

Malhaes had become infamously well-known in recent weeks for his lurid testimony before the Brazilian Truth Commission, in which he described how the bodies of opponents of the repressive regime had been disappeared after being killed under torture.

According to news reports, Malhaes, his wife and a house mate had arrived at the farm around two p.m. and found three intruders already in their home. The wife, Cristina Malhaes and the house mate, later identified by police only as Rui, were subdued and led into one room, while the former lieutenant colonel was taken to another.

The two witnesses were released unharmed when the assailants departed the scene by car. Neither Cristina nor Rui had heard a sound to suggest their companion was being worked over, or "tortured," as press accounts would style their statements. But when police examined Malhaes' body Friday morning they found marks on his face and neck, and have tentatively concluded that he died from asphyxiation. The only items the murderers removed from the premises were a computer, a printer, and several weapons that had belonged to the victim.

The announcement of Paulo Malhaes' murder sent shock waves through front page headlines all over Brazil, and the only question being debated is which side did him in. It's certainly conceivable that a victim of the dictatorship or a relative of someone who was disappeared might have orchestrated Malhaes's death in an act of vengeance

long delayed. But this hypothesis is being given little credence, as is an alternative theory that Malhaes' demise occurred in the course of a simple robbery unrelated to his notoriety.

The head of the Sao Paulo municipal truth commission, Gilberto Natalini, suggested that, "Malhaes' assassination demonstrates that this page of Brazilian history has not yet been completely turned."

His counterpart on the Rio de Janeiro Truth Commission, Wadih Damous, was more explicit. "In my opinion," said Damous, "the murder of colonel Paulo Malhaes was an act of witness elimination. He was an important agent of political repression during the dictatorship, and a repository of information on what actually took place behind the scenes in that era."

"He still had a lot to say," agreed the former Minister of Human Rights, Maria do Rosario, "and could have been seen as a threat. True, he had already told what happened, but he didn't reveal who did it."

One Brazilian senator, Randolfe Rodrigues, speculated darkly on how far those still operating in the "shadow of the dictatorship" might be willing to go "to erase the past." He warned that the members of the various truth commissions had better start looking to their own security.