

Notorious Pinochet security agent dies

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SANTIAGO, Chile --

Osvaldo Romo, a security agent who became a symbol of torture and repression under Gen. Augusto Pinochet's former military dictatorship, died in prison Wednesday, authorities said. He was 70.

Romo died of heart and respiratory problems, the tional Corrections Service said.

He was serving two prison terms totaling 15 years for the killing of three dissidents during Pinochet's 1973-90 regime. He faced several other trials on human rights cases.

Scores of court testimonies detailed Romo's participation in dozens of cases of torture.

As a civilian in Pinochet's feared Dina security service, Romo was even more prominent than some high-ranking officers who gave orders for repression. He was a field operative openly involved in repressive actions, some of which he later even boasted about.

While in prison, he once said in a TV interview that he told the Dina commander, Gen. Manuel Contreras, that it was a mistake to leave some of the jailed dissidents alive.

"'Let's not leave any of these kids alive, my general,' I told Gen. Contreras," Romo said, facing at the camera.

Contreras is now in prison indicted in one of the scores of human rights trials he faces.

Romo also gained notoriety for having infiltrated leftist groups prior to the 1973 military coup in which Pinochet toppled Marxist President Salvador Allende.

Posing as "Comandante Raul" in an ultra-leftist group, Romo was later able to point out group members to security agents. On the day of the coup he was seen wearing a military uniform in patrols that crushed the weak resistance in some working class neighborhoods of Santiago.

After the Pinochet regime ended in 1990, Romo fled to Brazil but was arrested there and extradited back to Chile.

According to an official report, 3,197 people were killed for political reasons under Pinochet and thousands were tortured.

Pinochet was also under indictment for human rights abuses when he died last December at age 91.