

Argentina Starts 'Dirty War' Trial of an Ex-Officer

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BUENOS AIRES, Oct. 18 (AP) — The first trial involving charges of torture at a notorious military prison during [Argentina's](#) "dirty war" began Thursday with a former coast guard officer facing possible life in prison.

The former officer, Héctor Febres, 66, is accused of kidnapping and torture in the case of four people who were seized by government agents and taken to the feared Navy Mechanics School during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship.

Argentine prosecutors have brought a series of charges against former state security agents and their civilian allies for crimes committed during the "dirty war," when the government seized, tortured and killed thousands of suspected leftists.

The Navy Mechanics School was the largest clandestine torture center of the era. An estimated 4,500 prisoners passed through its cells, and many were never seen again.

Official figures put the number of "disappeared" at 13,000 during the seven-year junta rule, although human rights groups say the number is closer to 30,000.

Last week, the Rev. Christian von Wernich, a Catholic priest who had served as a police chaplain, was convicted of being a "co-participant" in the torture and disappearance of several political prisoners. He was sentenced to life in prison.