

WR 222
politics

13Jul89 CUBA: FOUR OFFICERS EXECUTED IN CUBAN DRUG SCANDAL

By **Lionel Martin**

HAVANA, July 13, Reuter - Cuban revolutionary hero Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez and three other cashiered officers were executed by firing squad at dawn on Thursday after their conviction on drug and corruption charges, the Cuban news agency AIN said. They went to their deaths after Cuba's Supreme Court and its Council of State, headed by President Fidel Castro, refused to overturn the sentences of a Military Tribunal.

Ochoa, a former comrade in arms of Castro, and the three others were found guilty by a military tribunal last week of drug trafficking and hostile acts towards foreign nations. All admitted their guilt during the four-day trial.

The four were among 14 convicted of embezzlement and helping Colombia's notorious Medellin drug cartel smuggle six tonnes of cocaine into the United States. They were said to have accepted at least 3.4 million dollars in bribes.

All of them were cashiered from their services and stripped of all medals prior to the trial, which began on July 1.

The death sentences were carried out despite appeals from Pope John Paul II, Amnesty International and other human rights organisations to the government to show clemency.

The executed men, with the ranks they held at the time of their arrest on June 12, were General Ochoa, Captain Jorge Martinez, Colonel Antonio de la Guardia and Major Amado Padron.

The Military Tribunal sentenced 10 other officers to long prison terms in the same trial.

Most Cubans watched transfixed as each episode of the process that led to the sentences was shown in three-hour nightly shows on national television. They watched as the much-decorated and popular hero, General Ochoa, stood before his peers, 45 generals and two admirals and admitted that he betrayed "Fidel and the Revolution."

Ochoa, dressed in his general's uniform, with Cuba's highest decoration, Hero of the Republic of Cuba pinned to his jacket, said: "One pays for treason with one's life."

The Military Honour court recommended that Ochoa be given the death sentence.

Only days later millions watched as Ochoa, shorn of his uniform, medals and membership on the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist party, sat with 13 co-defendants before a Military Tribunal.

"In acting against the credibility of Fidel, Ochoa, with all the other defendants, have stuck a dagger in the back of their country and people," the prosecutor told the military court.

Overshadowing the legal aspects of the trial was the official view that the defendants had dealt a blow to the prestige of the Cuban leader and the revolution.

What produced the greatest consternation among Cubans was that Castro had vehemently denied his nation's participation in drug trafficking activities.

However, a small group of high officers of his army and intelligence apparatus were secretly doing business with drug runners and had even met in Colombia with Pablo Escobar, the "King" of the Medellin Drug Cartel.

Another allegation that determined the harsh penalties was that the defendants had done serious harm to Cuba's intelligence operations. The head of counter-intelligence of the Ministry of Interior said candidly that "with these activities we consider that the operative mechanisms of State Security have been damaged extraordinarily."

Those who stood trial were found guilty not only of drug trafficking but also of hostile action against foreign nations, a crime under Cuban law. The Military prosecutor called this their most serious crime.

"The United States," he said, "with its need to fight against drug trafficking, feels injured by the activities of these illustrious persons who are here accused."

The prosecutor declared that their activities could have become the motive "for a war or for reprisals against Cuba."

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