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Former Salvadoran official held liable for torture Jury awards \$6 million to four victims

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Nicolas Carranza, a former Salvadoran Army colonel, leaves court on Friday.

MEMPHIS, Tennessee (AP) -- Daniel Alvarado said he was kidnapped by government agents in El Salvador, hung blindfolded from a ceiling, shocked with electrical wires and repeatedly beaten.

More than two decades later, a federal jury in Tennessee has held a former Salvadoran Army colonel responsible for the torture.

Nicolas Carranza, 72, failed to stop crimes against humanity when he was a top commander of El Salvador's security forces, the jury found Friday.

He was held responsible in civil claims by Alvarado and three others who said they were tortured or that their family members were killed by soldiers under Carranza's command.

"For all these years, I had to carry this inside me," said Alvarado, who testified that he was abducted as a college student and tortured into falsely confessing to the murder of a U.S. military adviser.

Alvarado was set free after U.S. investigators determined he was not responsible for the murder. The supervisor of the torture was an Army major who served under Carranza, he said.

"It makes me feel that if you just wait, justice will come," Alvarado said.

Carranza was ordered to pay \$500,000 to each accuser, plus \$4 million in punitive damages -- \$1 million each.

The jury did not reach a verdict in a fifth case, and a mistrial was declared.

Carranza, who has lived in Memphis since 1985, showed no emotion when the verdict was delivered and declined comment. He is a retired security guard for an art museum and has no way to pay the judgment, said his lawyer, Robert Fargarson. An appeal was likely, he said.

Human rights activists hailed the verdict as long-overdue justice.

"It's wonderful and gratifying that they are condemning people responsible for crimes against humanity," said Miguel Montenegro, an activist with El Salvador's non-governmental Human Rights Commission.

"Justice is being done by ordering (Carranza) to pay victims or their relatives," he told The Associated Press.

More than 75,000 Salvadorans died during the 12-year civil war as El Salvador's military dictators sought to crush anti-government forces led by unions, student groups and land reform advocates.

An amnesty that helped end the fighting prevents criminal charges against alleged war criminals in El Salvador. Carranza was sued under U.S. laws giving federal courts jurisdiction over civil claims of human rights abuses abroad.

Witnesses for the accusers included Robert White, a former U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, who described Carranza as "the man who made things happen" for the military rulers.

In 2002, a federal jury in Florida found two retired Salvadoran generals responsible for the torture of three victims, a church worker, doctor and professor who later fled to the United States. In March, a federal appeals court reversed the \$54.6 million verdict, saying the statute of limitations had expired.

Carranza's whereabouts were discovered during the Florida litigation.

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