

Military Prosecutor Podlech and Three Former Army Officers Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison for Kidnappings at Allipén River

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The former military prosecutor during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship has been sentenced to over 100 years in prison for crimes against humanity. The Temuco Appeals Court confirmed the state's responsibility for the moral damage inflicted on the families, who will receive compensation amounting to \$1.62 billion.



Original article: [Arrojados al río Allipén: Condenan a exfiscal militar Podlech y 3 exoficiales del Ejército a 15 años de presidio efectivo por secuestros](#)

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The Appeals Court of Temuco upheld a 15-year prison sentence for Óscar Alfonso Ernesto Podlech Michaud, [former military prosecutor](#) during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, alongside three retired officers from the Tucapel Regiment for their role in the kidnappings of eight young individuals, whose bodies were discarded in the Allipén River.

The acts, classified as crimes against humanity, were committed between October and November of 1973 at the Tucapel Regiment in the city, involving individuals identified as H.A.G.O, E.D.G.O, C.S.A., R.A.S.A., J.D.C.F., A.E.V., H.D.A.O., and R.M.F.B.

In a split decision, the First Chamber of the appellate court confirmed the contested sentence originally issued by extraordinary visiting judge Álvaro Mesa Latorre. Along with Podlech, the former officers of the Tucapel Regiment Pedro Guillermo Tichauer Salcedo, Raimundo Ignacio García Covarrubias, and Romilio Osvaldo Lavín Muñoz were also sentenced.

In civil matters, the court affirmed the ruling against the state to compensate the families of the victims, but prudently reduced the total amount to \$1,620,000,000 for moral damages, exonerating the state from court costs.

After September 11, 1973, the 8th Infantry Regiment Tucapel took control of the Temuco territory. The Military Prosecutor's Office and the Intelligence Section (Second Section) operated in coordination to arrest, interrogate, and decide the fate of detainees. According to the ruling, Podlech acted as a de facto prosecutor, making transfer decisions and resolving situations regarding detainees. The officers—Tichauer, García Covarrubias, and Lavín—were aware of and participated in the apprehension, interrogation, and custody processes.

Bodies Discarded in Allipén River

The ruling establishes that «immediately following the military pronouncement on September 11, 1973, the new authorities of the country ordered the systematic persecution and detention of militants and supporters of the Unidad Popular parties, particularly those holding positions in the ousted public administration,” as the armed forces took control of the city of Temuco. In this context, attorney Podlech Michaud, a reserve lieutenant of the Chilean Army, was called to assist the

new regime, operating within the Military Prosecutor's Office of the Tucapel Regiment under the command of Major Luis Jofré Soto.

The eight young individuals, socialists from Villarrica and Curarrehue, decided to flee the country «believing that their lives or at least their physical integrity were in serious danger, as some of their homes had already been raided by Carabineros of Villarrica who were intensively searching for them, and attempted to cross towards the border.»

On September 13, 1973, they boarded a minibus heading to Curarrehue, attempting to cross into Argentina via a border point. However, one of the youths regretted the decision and cried, which led them to all disembark at the Río Turbio bridge, near the fork leading to Caburgua and the Curarrehue commune. They then began walking towards Caburgua, taking care to avoid military patrols and Carabineros to evade detection.

After walking eight kilometers, they were intercepted by a Carabineros patrol and taken to the Pucón Sub-Police Station. They were then transported to the Tucapel Regiment, where they were placed at the disposal of the Military Prosecutor's Office.

Several victims were seen in the gymnasium and internal facilities of the regiment, bound and showing visible signs of abuse.

A practice described as «false freedom» was reported; some detainees were released only to be re-arrested upon leaving the facility, without any real judicial oversight.

Interrogation rooms at the regiment were equipped for torture: beatings, electricity application, and suffocation with bags were reportedly used. Conscripts assisted state intelligence personnel and officers. Eyewitnesses described the conditions of the victims after undergoing interrogations in these rooms.

According to the ruling, a conscript testified that he «witnessed detainees having bags placed over their heads while electric shocks were applied to various parts of their bodies, and he could hear their screams of pain.» He mentioned that although it was difficult to remember the faces of the detainees due to shaving, he noted the victims' faces because they entered blindfolded but exited without covering, enabling him to recognize them perfectly.

Additionally, a conscript identified as M.J.C.S. recalled twice having loaded a military truck with the bodies of deceased individuals from the shooting range on Cautín Island. The convoys headed towards the Allipén bridge, where the bodies were thrown into the river. Fishermen and boatmen reported discovering multiple bodies days later at various points in the Toltén River, some with tied hands and bullet wounds. Among the remains observed, witnesses recognized features that matched some of the identified victims.

After their arrest on September 13, 1973, the victims' families never again heard from them.

Since the initial detention, the families of the victims searched police and military facilities, but never received valid information about their whereabouts. The court emphasizes that to this day, there are no official records detailing the final fate of the eight young individuals, and there was persistent concealment by state agents at the time.

“Currently, only the account existing at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights remains, which records the disappearance of these young individuals following their arrest on September 13, 1973; it can thus be confirmed that, as previously stated, the victims were apprehended outside any judicial process at the Río Turbio bridge, near the junction leading toward Caburgua and Curarrehue by Luis Robinson Bustos Letelier, a Carabineros captain and head of the Pucón Sub-Police Station, before being immediately transferred to that police unit, then taken

as detainees to the Tucapel Regiment in Temuco, released temporarily, and subsequently re-arrested; and in this instance, tortured and abused within the regiment. Moreover, for reasons not clarified in the records, they were transferred to the public jail in Temuco only to return in the same condition to the premises of the Tucapel Regiment, as indicated by the witness M.J.C.S., who recounted loading eight bodies of deceased persons from the shooting range on Cautín Island, recognizing H.A.O., H.A.G.O., and E.D.G.O. as at least three of the eight identified victims. This pattern of detainment, temporary release, and subsequent re-arrest of the same individuals was a routine practice employed by state agents,” the ruling states.

The [court](#) determined that the incidents were known to Alfonso Podlech and that in «his capacity as ad-hoc prosecutor and legal advisor to the Military Prosecutor’s Office, he did not report or inform military superior authorities or any other officials about the investigated crimes, nor was there any evidence of an investigation being conducted, nor any records resulting from these acts.»

Regarding the former Tucapel officers, they are charged with knowledge, involvement, and operational control in the custody, interrogations, and process of transfers that led to the victims’ disappearances.

Podlech Sentenced to Over 100 Years in Prison

It is worth noting that in July 2008, Podlech Michaud, against whom an international arrest warrant was issued, was apprehended at Barajas Airport in Madrid and extradited to Italy, where he was imprisoned for 970 days for the disappearance of Italian-Chilean citizen Omar Venturelli.

In March 2011, the Rome re-examining court granted him supervised release due to his advanced age and no risk of flight.

However, the 89-year-old former military prosecutor has been sentenced to serve over 100 years in prison for his involvement in the crimes against humanity committed during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, currently serving his time at Colina I prison in the Metropolitan region.

Recently, the [Temuco Appeals Court](#) issued a ruling against Alfonso Podlech, affirming a five-year prison sentence for his responsibility in the torture and death of socialist student S.O.F.B. recorded in November 1973 at the Tucapel Regiment in Temuco.

Fuente: [El Ciudadano](#)