

July 8, 2000

Mary Dean's testimony given in federal court Columbus, GA

I chose to cross the line on behalf of the millions of victims of U.S. military training, weapons, and economic policies in Latin America and around the world who cannot speak out because of threats to their own and their families' lives. As a child growing up in Chicago on the south side, I began to question why in the richest country in the world people live on the streets or in slums, children go to under-funded schools, families wait in soup lines and have no health insurance. In 1992, I first saw with my own eyes the suffering of the people of Latin America when I traveled on a human rights delegation to the war zones of Central America. In El Salvador, we met with the Mothers of the Disappeared and saw unexploded bombs in tiny bombed-out villages in the countryside molded with the words "made in the U.S.A." We visited the home of Archbishop Oscar Romero, killed by graduates of the School of the Americas, as well as the home of the six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter where they were murdered in cold blood. 19 of their 26 assassins were trained at the SOA. In Guatemala we met with the women of CONAVIGUA, a group of widows, as well as numerous other ordinary people who were tortured, displaced, threatened, and whose family members were killed. Over 200,000 people in Guatemala alone were killed in the war there including 448 Mayan villages completely obliterated.

In 1994 I met my former husband, Carlos, an indigenous Mayan from Guatemala. He was severely tortured in the early 1980s by the G-2, the intelligence unit of the Guatemalan Army, many of whom were trained at the SOA. During his torture, Carlos was beaten, raped and forced to watch the torture and killing of others. The soldiers placed him in a pit filled with dead bodies, rats, urine and feces. Carlos was also threatened with the killing of more members of his family. When he refused to participate in the torture of others by interpreting his Mayan language for the military officials, he was again tortured. In addition to the torture Carlos himself endured, his brother, fiancée, and many uncles and cousins as well as hundreds of his friends and neighbors were murdered.

During his time on the military base, he saw truckloads of bodies dripping blood being brought to the morgue. He also witnessed U.S. military advisors at work on the base. Carlos was finally forced to leave his country and escaped to the United States. He required several emergency surgeries to repair the physical damage the torturers had caused. I do not know if Carlos will ever, or if it is humanly possible, to recuperate from the depression, nightmares and anxiety that he suffers from. I cannot begin to express the often overwhelming sadness and despair I feel knowing that my country is complicit in and greatly responsible for his suffering and the genocide of his people.

In 1998 at my second meeting at the Pentagon with a delegation from the Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America, we met with Colonel Roy Trumbull, the commander of the SOA at that time, along with other military officials. I asked him during our discussion how he would feel if someone in his family were screaming in the middle of the night. Colonel Trumbull had no answer for me. There has never been any war crimes tribunal in Guatemala or in the United States for that matter. The Catholic Church in Guatemala, led by Bishop Gerardi, came out with a report in 1998 about the atrocities committed during the war. He was killed 2 days

after publicly reading the report. One of his killers, Colonel Byron Lima Estrada, is a graduate of the SOA and ran the G-2 military intelligence agency with the help of two other SOA graduates. Forty per cent of the cabinet ministers who served the regimes of Lucas Garcia, Rios Montt and Mejia Victores studied at the SOA.

Last year the name of the SOA was officially changed to WHISC. Even Senator Paul Coverdell from Georgia called the name change "cosmetic." WHISC's graduates continue to commit atrocities in Colombia and elsewhere. Since 1994 I have been working to close the School of the Americas now called WHISC. I have organized and participated in fasts, congressional visits, protests and educational events. For me crossing the line at Ft. Benning is a small step compared to the suffering of those who have born the brunt of the U.S. Army School of the Americas/WHISC.