

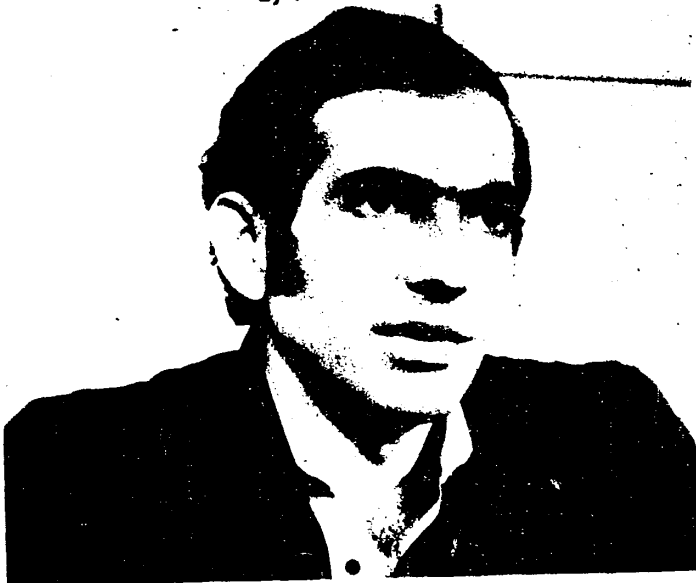
Defector Describes 'Bloody,' 'Corrupt' Regime

By PETER SAMUEL

The State Department describes him as the "most valuable defector from Nicaragua," a "treasure trove of detailed information" about how the Communist government of Nicaragua works, and "the world's expert on its human rights record."

He is Alvaro Jose Baldizon Aviles, former chief of the Investigation Department of the Directorate for Internal Affairs of the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Interior. On July 1 this year he waded through the Coco River into neighboring Honduras and asked the Americans for political asylum. For over two months he was "debriefed" by U.S. officials and now he is telling his story publicly in Washington, where I recently had a chance to interview him.

Alvaro Baldizon is a handsome young man, only 26 years old, sad and serious. Outside the office where I interviewed him stood two Spanish-speaking and armed U.S. marshals, a measure of the American government's assessment of the danger he faces. The wife he left behind, and his brother in Nicaragua, are under arrest and have been charged with treason since he came over, but he says he wants to tell his story of what's going on in the Soviet state to America's south.



ALVARO BALDIZON

Teenager Under Somoza Dictatorship

Baldizon grew up as a teenager under the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza. He left day school at age 16 and worked as a driver for a plastic pipe company in Managua, while continuing his studies at night school. He drove a white Volkswagen van and delivered plastic pipe all over Nicaragua. In among the pipes he hid guns and ammunition as a courier for the Sandinista forces.

Came the revolution and the Sandinistas' assumption of power, Baldizon joined the new police force.

He says: "I joined the Sandinista police with a romantic outlook. I hoped to participate in the creation of a different type of police, one which would be characterized by humanitarian principles."

Baldizon did well, quickly rising to the post of Chief of Police at a small police station, No. 15 at Ciudad Sandino on the outskirts of Managua. In September 1980 he was chosen to go to the Soviet Union for a year's professional police training, which he got in Volgograd. On his return he got rapid promotions and in April 1982 the extremely sensitive job as a Special Investigator at the Ministry of the Interior.

The Nicaraguan government created a special investigations commission within its Ministry of the Interior as part of a scheme to handle criticism of its human rights record. This was coming principally through the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,

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which was asking the Sandinista government for explanations of hundreds of missing persons and the deaths of political opponents.

Baldizon was given the job of investigating all complaints of atrocities and the authority by the minister for the interior, Tomas Borge, to see all official records and get depositions from witnesses and participants. He has a copy of a "To Whom It May Concern" letter with the seal of the Ministry and the minister's signature, typed on a Selectric IBM typewriter, in which he "orders that civilian and military authorities present all necessary collaboration that Comrade Sub-Lieutenant Baldizon requests." It says that he is directly subordinate to the minister.

His job was to objectively investigate atrocities and report all the facts to Borge. Another unit of the department, called the Technical Commission, would write a very different public report, if one was needed to do a white-wash for the government.

'Rules Concerning Special Measures'

"In the early days of the Revolution, I understand there was a lot of unruly killing, but by the time of the commission there was a set of rules called Rules Concerning Special Measures."

"Special Measures," Baldizon explains, is the official term used in Nicaragua to describe the torture and killing, without charges or trial, of people judged to be opponents of the revolution. The Ministry of the Interior maintains the Rules provide that "special measures" must be authorized by direct order of Minister Tomas Borge and his first vice minister, Luis Carrion Cruz.

The killing of political opponents has to first be proposed to the minister or his deputy by at least one of 11 people — the chief of police, the chief of state

security and nine regional secret police chiefs. Baldizon reels off the names in resonant Spanish: Comandante Doris Tijerino Haslam, Comandante Guerrillo Lenin Cerna Juarez, Comandante David Blanco Nunez, Comandante Christian Pichardo....

"There are authorized killings and unauthorized killings under Special Measures," he says. In the case of unauthorized killings, the perpetrators "just receive a letter" and invariably go unpunished, says Baldizon. Special Measures apply to political opponents or potential opponents and are unrelated to the deaths of Contra rebels actually engaged in combat with the Sandinista army.

How many political killings have there been?

"No one has an accurate count. My estimate based on my experience is over 2,000," says Baldizon. Minister of the Interior Borge, he says, authorized so many political killings he could not remember many of them and had to ask if he had approved killings. Unauthorized killings were also frequent. Baldizon says the best thing he can do is to describe some examples of political killings he personally investigated.

Protest Signs Noted By Interior Ministry

Ramon Eberto Torrentes Molina, 20, a college student in the town of Chinandego, became known to the Sandinista Ministry of the Interior as a writer of protest slogans on walls. He painted on walls slogans like "EDEN VUELVE" meaning "Eden [Pastora, a Contra leader] will return" and a slogan calling for freedom for political prisoners.

The chief of the Second Region of the ministry, Comandante David Blanco Nunez, proposed Torrentes be the subject of "special measures," and this

was approved by Vice Minister Luis Carrion.

Sandinista secret police arrested Torrentes in December 1982, burned him with cigarettes, left him without food or water in a tiny cell for three days, then took him to a country road where he was killed. The official version said Torrentes was shot while attempting to escape detention. Baldizon says when he looked up the official file on Torrentes in the Department, someone had written on it: "Case closed, Special Measures taken."

He used his powers of investigation to find and talk to the two officials who killed Torrentes. They were a secret policeman named Vanegas (other names forgotten) and a counter-intelligence officer, Jose Maria Benavides. Baldizon tape-recorded them, telling him they had tied Torrentes' hands behind his back and told him to walk away. Vanegas had brought him down with a Galil rifle and Benevides had finished him off with three shots from a Colt .45. The killing had been properly proposed and approved by Vice Minister of the Interior Carrion, it turned out, but it was one of the cases Carrion first forgot he had approved, though later remembered when reminded of the details.

Investigated Deaths Of Two Shopkeepers

Baldizon also investigated the deaths of a shopkeeper couple, Guillermo Lorio, 45, and his wife Jamilette Sequira, 37, in the town of San Miguelito in July 1983. They were loyal citizens in most respects. They participated, for example, in the "neighborhood watch" programs of the Communist government but came to the attention of the secret police because they were pacifist-inclined, and talked among friends against the country's military buildup. They were also members of the Catholic Church's missionary organization called "The Word."

The chief of the Fourth Military Region, Saul Alvarez, told Baldizon the couple had been arrested around midnight of July 19, 1983. The arrest caused a fuss because the Lorios' children were woken and screamed and yelled when their parents were dragged off.

A passerby, Juan Luz, intervened to try and stop the arrest and was gunned to death. The Lorios were taken five kilometers away and kicked and stabbed with bayonets. The wife was raped, then bayoneted at 1 a.m. on the morning of July 20, 1983, alongside the road at Los Pantanos near Chantales, says Baldizon. She was left for dead that night, but the two official killers — a State Security officer, Lugo Marengo, and a Special Troops lieutenant, Victor Romero — returned the next morning to find the women gravely wounded but still alive and on her knees praying. She was finished off. The two bodies were buried there by the side of the road.

Baldizon says: "I was in charge of this investigation. On July 30, I per-

sonally had to dig up and remove the corpses. It had one of the most deep effects on me when I heard the full story."

The killers were subjected to a secret trial but "let off," says Baldizon, and no action was taken against the Military Region commandor who ordered the killings, though he was never "authorized" as required by the Rules Concerning Special Measures.

There continue to be mass killings by firing squad of the Miskito Indian minority in Nicaragua, says Baldizon. He investigated cases involving the deaths of 150 Indians in Matagalpa, Jinotega and Nueva Segovia.

"These produced the deepest effects on me," says Baldizon. He describes how Subcomandante Javier Lopez of the Sixth Military Region has been responsible for many of the mass killings of Miskito Indians.

"The pattern was for them to choose the strongest of the Indians for killing. They would say they were 'suspected of aiding Contras' or call them 'potential enemies of the revolution.' They take them in groups, always groups of 10, 12 or 13 and shoot them."

Cover Stories For Miskito Deaths

In the summer of 1982 Baldizon was in charge of an investigation into 150 Miskito deaths. He documented the case with sworn statements from soldiers and others and made a report to the ministry of 100 pages. He then attended a meeting at the ministry where officials were encouraged to think up cover stories, suggesting they could explain the disappearances by saying the slaughtered people had joined the Contras, or fled to Honduras, etc.

Baldizon says he found the regime increasingly "repulsive." He says the Ministry of the Interior that runs the secret police has about 200 Cubans in key positions and that drug trafficking is a major source of revenue for the Sandinista regime and its top personnel.

Baldizon had to investigate a case where an ordinary policeman reported that Borge and a captain in his personal office had met a plane carrying cocaine from Colombia and drove the sacks of the drug away from the airfield. A couple of days later, Borge telephoned him personally and ordered him not to continue the investigation into the cocaine import. The matter was "a state secret and not to be mentioned further."

Baldizon sums up the Sandinista regime as "bloody and corrupt." He had wanted to defect for a long time, but had to wait until an investigation took him close to the border, enabling him to get out. A year before he had tried to get away from his job of atrocity investigations and had been told his knowledge was so sensitive this was not possible. If he left, he'd go into a military detention camp, he was told. Toward the end he feared for his life, thinking he was likely sometime to be murdered to ensure his silence.

Baldizon is a very old 26. He chain-smokes, blinks nervously at times, and has a somber demeanor. He says, however, he has a "duty to be a witness." ■