

Beginning Anew

THE STORY OF A POLICE OFFICER
HELD KIDNAPPED FOR 9 YEARS BY THE FARC GUERRILLAS

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Intendant Jhon Frank Pinchao regains his freedom after 9 years of being kidnapped by the FARC. His smile shows the energy and desire he has today to begin his life anew.



Photo: Courtesy of the National Police Force

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The story of a police officer held kidnapped for 9 years by the FARC guerrillas

The only ones to blame, the only ones who are responsible for keeping the kidnap victims from returning home are the kidnapers. Their crime produces pain in the victims and despair in their families.

As we will see in the following interview, Police Intendant Pinchao and his companions in captivity have been kept for years, some for almost a decade, in the most terrible and prolonged concentration camp heard of.

But from that concentration camp built in the middle of the jungle,

Intendant Pinchao was able to flee, facing an infinity of dangers.

He and his companions in captivity are an example of self-denial and of the capacity for sacrifice.

This interview is in homage to his integrity and is an encouragement to the worldwide movement to obtain the liberty of the kidnap victims in the power of the FARC.

Press Secretary

The President of the Republic, Álvaro Uribe, and Police Intendant Jhon Pinchao review the site where he was held kidnapped for almost 9 years by the FARC.



Question: How did you manage to escape from the FARC?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: As a kidnap victim I have always felt, along with my companions, that a kidnap victim should try to get free on his own, or wait for the government to free us through a humanitarian exchange, but somehow we have to get free. And one of the ways was escaping, and the conditions came about and I was able to escape.

Question: What was the mechanism for you to escape?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: A dark night with some noise.

Question: And was this a long-term plan you had, to watch for

these conditions, to know what you were looking for?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: It was being patient; knowing when it was the right moment.

Question: So you waited for noise to keep them from hearing you move. And the chain, how did you manage to loosen it?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: I looked for a way to get rid of it. I managed to walk and get away from the site where we slept. I began to walk and I managed to get to the river. In the river I began to swim and sometimes I swam and sometimes where there was ground I walked, combining the two methods. After 17 days I managed to arrive at a Jungle Command of the National Police, who rescued me.

The Director of the National Police, General Oscar Naranjo, in his first appearance before the media, accompanies Intendant Jhon Pinchao, who fled from a FARC camp after 9 years as a kidnap victim.



Question: How did you keep track of the time? Did you have watch? How did you know where you were, and how did you survive those 17 days?

Intendant, John Frank Pinchao: I knew how long it had been by the nights. I said, the first night I bathed and I slept without anything. I slept sprawled on the ground and with my body wet. I said, the second night I managed to make a house with some leaves that protected me a bit.

So I said, ok, I made so many houses of leaves like this; in each region and altitude there are different kinds of plants. There are regions where there are no plants and you have to sleep without anything, and there are regions where there are plants that

have giant leaves that you can place close together to make kind of a roof to protect yourself from the rain.

So I said to myself: ok, two nights wet, plus two nights of such and such type of leaves, plus two nights with palm branches, plus this many nights, and I added it up. So I could kind of keep track of the number of nights.

Question: And for food, did you eat some kind of fruit or animals?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: I managed to save my food. I saved rice and other food. The last day I saved rice, and what they gave us that day I put it in bags and kept it there. And I knew I could find a few fruits along the way. So I tried to keep going with

Jhon Frank Pinchao was in the jungle for 17 days before being found by a special corps of the National Police. The Intendant survived bad weather and the difficulties of the jungle.



those fruits. But the food that I had stored, well I would save it bit by bit and renew it. In other words, I saved some from lunch, but then I would eat that at night, and store some of the fresher good, so that I would always have a margin of days to be able to feed myself.

But that food was in bags and it got wet. When I got in the river the water got in the bags because they were broken, and I had to eat 'rice soup' and whatever else I had in there.

Question: How did you know which way you were going after you escaped?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: With the sun, but there was an error with the sun. I discovered

when I stopped that the shadow of the sun in the morning is toward the west, and at noon it is toward the east. In the afternoon it is toward the west again. So at noon I [couldn't] use the sun to guide me. So I would use the sun to guide me while I walked in the morning, then stop around midday to wait for the shadow to take a direction, and then I would follow the shadows.

Question: And during those 17 days, was there any danger that the FARC, your kidnapers, would capture you again or you could have a dangerous adventure with animals or rough terrain?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Well, that they might recapture me was obvious. I imagine that when they found out I had escaped



they started looking for me. I was aware that I was going to have personnel behind me.

As far as animals, an animal went by that I found out when I got here could have been a 'sabino.' It's a kind of giant pig with a trunk kind of like an anteater, but sticking up. And it passed by close to me, and I managed to run to a tree and told myself to climb up it, but then I realized, 'If I run the animal might be faster than me and it might attack me.' So I just stayed really still, and the animal kept walking and went right on his way. And one night near a pool, I heard something walking and splashing loudly, and I imagined it was a tiger or I don't know what kind of animal. And I stood up and I climbed up the first tree I ran into and felt I could more or less climb.

And up there I heard the animal start to fight with another animal or with its prey. It hit it against the trees and took it away. But when I heard it taking it away I said to myself, well, if it already ate, then it won't eat me.

Question: And was there any site that was almost impossible to get by where you said, 'now what do I do?'

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Yes. When I was walking I found what are called pools, where the water is deep. If I were to go around those sites I was afraid of losing the course of the river. I am not a very good swimmer – I have to swim like a monkey. But instead of hanging from my tail or my hands, I swam from branch to branch to keep track of the course of the river.

Question: At any time during those 17 days, did you feel the guerrillas were about to catch up with you?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: No, well, I mean I assumed they were behind me. But I never saw them like right behind me. But it was logical that they would be pursuing me.

I had lost my faith in God like four or five years ago. I lost it in captivity. But during the captivity I found God again and I remembered some cards that my family had sent me back when they could send letters. The cards said that someone looked back and couldn't see God's footprints following him because he always saw his own footprints and God's footprints beside him, walking together. But when he looked back he only saw one set of footprints. So he said, God abandoned me, or something like that. And God said to him I didn't abandon you, that is when I was carrying you. I was carrying you in my arms. So I said, «God get in my body and walk, wherever you think is the best, and He would indicate to me this way, and I would go that way.

Question: You felt the presence of God?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: I felt it. I found Him again in the jungle.

Question: And was there any moment of despair in those 17 days of despair?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Yes. When my food got wet. Because I thought, 'I'm going to die here because what am I going to do without food?' But I was able to ration out the food. I had planned for the smallest ration possible, and along the way I found fruit. I found jungle fruit and I tried it. There were some very colorful ones that looked like they would be delicious, but when I tried them they were very bitter. I had to spit all day and wash my mouth out a thousand times to get back to normal.

And the fruit that I saw and tried that was kind of sweet, I would save to be able to eat them later.

Question: OK, and at what point did you finally make contact with someone?

Intendant, John Frank Pinchao: When I met up with the Police Jungle Command.

Question: And what was that encounter like with the Command?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: I was swimming down the river when I saw houses and when I saw uniformed people there. I said, «Help me. Help me.» And I don't know what the Jungle Command of the National Police said. I came out of the water and threw myself on them to embrace them and I cried from happiness at being free.

Question: Was there anyone you knew in the group there, the group of policemen?

Intendant, John Frank Pinchao: No.

Question: Were they looking for you?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Were they looking for me?

Question: Were the Police looking for you?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Oh, I don't know what they were doing there. I think they were doing coca fumigations or something like that.

Question: Why did you end up in the hands of the FARC?

Intendant, John Frank Pinchao: I ended up in the hands of the FARC, because I went to work in the Department of Vaupés, in the city of Mitú, and I was working there when one day all of a sudden in the early morning the guerrillas attacked us. Unfortunately their numbers were greater than ours. They said they had approximately two thousand men and we didn't even have one hundred. So they wore us out through numeric superiority and our munitions ran out and they managed to kidnap us.

Question: During the first days of your kidnapping, how did you live, what did you think about, what do you remember?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: I remembered that there had been a release of soldiers from Las Delicias, and I told myself, 'they weren't there that long. But who knows what this type of kidnapping is for?' But I thought, 'no, they are going to release us just like happened with Las Delicias.'

But time passed, and more and more time. At the beginning we

counted the days, then the weeks, and then the months. Then we ended up counting years and we almost had to count decades.

Question: First you were held in a determined site. When did you start to see the change and the difference between soldiers or between policemen and sub officers and officers. When or how was the procedure to separate you and all that?

Intendant, John Frank Pinchao: you are accustomed to addressing your superiors by their grade. So out of habit you ended up giving them away even if you didn't want to. So, you would call them Colonel, Lieutenant, Captain, and they would define which ones were officers. And in fact from the beginning they had it defined because they do intelligence in the towns before they attack. They already know that in a small town it is easy to find out who is who in a group of policemen.

Question: Was the treatment you received proper treatment?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: How is kidnapping proper treatment? No. Just being kidnapped is improper. A

kidnapping cannot be classified as proper.

Question: What was daily life like?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: We would get up at 5:00 in the morning to listen to a radio program called «La carrilera a las cinco,» broadcast by Antena 2 at RCN, and we would listen to it from five to six in the morning. We got up at six in the morning, and they would take us coffee. We would brush our teeth, drink the coffee, and then came breakfast. Each one would do their activities – some exercises, others read, or do handcrafts. Then what they called a snack arrived, which is water with a bit of Kool-Aid in it; sometimes there were cookies, but not very often. Then lunch. After lunch we would rest a bit, and every day we would take a bath. We almost always would bathe, and after the bath another snack around 3 in the afternoon, and finally dinner before 6. And at 6 they would put the chain around our neck to sleep, until 6 in the morning the next day.

Question: What was the chain like?

Intendant, John Frank Pinchao: they would chain two people

together. They make little houses, and two units sleep in each house. And so the chain goes around the neck of the one and the neck of the other.

Question: What was your contact like with the kidnapers? What did they say to you?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: They are prohibited from talking with us. They just stand there like a statue ready to shoot and in total silence. Their mission is for no one to jump out of the perimeter that they have defined for where the kidnap victims should be.

Question: Not even the members of their hierarchy talked to you or gave you some sort of hope?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: The only, only hope given us was the last proof of life. I lost track of time. Over time I didn't keep track of whether it was June or May or if it were 2005 or 2006. I didn't care what the date was. The only thing important to me was for that day to come when I would be free. So I am not very clear on the dates.

But the most recent proof of life was sent when a journalist

with the last name Botero visited, and Mono Jojoy was there. The only hope he gave us was that this is going to go on a long time. 'Get prepared for it to be a long time.' And we understand that during this government it would be difficult for there to be a humanitarian exchange.

Question: Nor during the Pastrana government?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Yes, but Mono Jojoy, or the will of the guerrillas as a whole... when he told us that, we understood that the guerrillas as guerrillas will not negotiate with this government.

So after those words, I thought personally, just me, that even if they demilitarize what they want them to demilitarize, everything they want demilitarized, even so there will not be a humanitarian accord.

Question: And at what point did the last group of kidnap victims join you that you were with? How long ago and how did that come about?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: The last group that was together...there were 10 of us and

Intendant Jhon Pinchao and his companions in kidnapping spent most of their time with a chain around their necks, he tells President Álvaro Uribe in the Casa de Nariño.



the gringos came about ten months ago I think. Like I said I am not very clear on dates or lengths of time, because I wasn't really interested in keeping track of time.

Question: And who are the 13 kidnap victims in this last group you were with?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: The three gringos, Ingrid Betancourt, Luis Eladio Pérez, a policeman from the attack on Larada (Tolima), Castellanos Armando Gaona, and six military personnel, of which there were two officers, Captain Bermeo and Lieutenant Malagón. And of the sub officers there was First Sergeant Marulanda, Sergeant Amauros Pantoja, Corporal William Pérez Medina, and Corporal José Miguel Arteaga.

Question: How are they doing?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: One of the Americans is sick. When I left he had hepatitis. There are others like Dr. Luis Eladio who have problems with diabetes, and others that have high blood pressure.

Question: When someone needs a doctor do they allow you be attended to by a doctor?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: There are no doctors there. They call a nurse with a lot of experience. And he manages, like a witch doctor more or less, to guess what treatment can be given for the problems the person has.

Question: Do you think that if a kidnap victim gets very sick and is perhaps in danger of



dying...would they free him, or let him die?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: we already experienced the case of Major Guevara, where they let him die. So I think that based on that, they would let him die.

Question: Were you in the camp when Major Guevara died or when he was sick?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: No, I found out by radio that he had died.

Question: What do you remember about your companions in captivity?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Tom was teaching me to speak English, but unfortunately my notebook ran out and my pen ran out, so I had to stop the classes.

Keith was teaching me about how an airplane flies, how they get ice off the wings, the turbine system. And Marc was going to start the English classes again because he was working on figuring out how to get me a notebook. He was asking the guerrilla commander for a notebook and a pen. They are nice people. They have already learned Spanish. We were teaching them how to haggle for prices in Bogotá, so that they can ask for a discount.

Ingrid Betancourt is a brave person. A warrior. Dr. Luis Eladio Pérez...we got along well.

The rest of my companions... Captain Bermeo is a character, and Lieutenant Malagón too. They are valiant guys, just like the rest of my companions.

Question: Did Ingrid Betancourt at any time make any suggestion to you? Did she share any concern, or any pain?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Of what type?

Question: Personal or political or about the circumstances you were in.

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: No, we talked. We talked about many things. When you are there you talk about things, but mostly the issues are the news of that day. So you say what you think about a certain piece of news. Sometimes people take positions; sometimes we agree and sometimes we disagree.

Question: Did you at any point hope there would be a rescue operation?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Although we knew that a rescue operation practically meant death for part of the kidnap victims, we hoped, or at least I did, because we did not all agree on this. But I said, if there is a rescue and I am lucky and come out of it alive, well, I welcome it. But if my fate is to die in that rescue, well at least there is the hope that my

family is going to have the certainty of a body. They will rest by having a body they can bury, instead of the uncertainty of an indefinite kidnapping.

Question: And who was the one who most opposed the possibility of a rescue in your conversations?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: No, anyone. There were even changes in position. One day you would think a rescue was good, and the next people thought a rescue was bad. And months later they would think it was good again. So there wasn't any stability in the opinions...

Question: And was there anyone who always thought a rescue was bad?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Anyone.

Question: Did you at any time feel an operative was imminent?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Yes. On one occasion we were in a camp, and the helicopters were flying overhead. And we thought they were going to get us out because it was night. What they did was surround the camp, place guards around the camp, and

we don't know why, whether it was that they were going to kill us that day if there was a deployment. And on other occasion the operatives were during the day, and they managed to take us out of there walking.

Question: And did they tell you they would kill you in the case of a rescue?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: They told us that their mission is to get us out alive, but if it weren't possible to get us out alive, they would not let us be taken alive...

Question: In other words, they would kill you; they would shoot you.

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Well, not in so many words, but they would kill us.

Question: Did their faces look like they were capable of doing it?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: It's not in the face; it's in the heart. Many times there are people with very noble faces whose heart is rotten. And there are people with embittered faces who have a sweet soul.

Question: Did you ever feel like you were treated like a human shield?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: But talking about the faces, just by the fact that they were guerrillas, you have to assume they would kill us, because guerrillas, whether their face is embittered or sweet, you know he is a guerrilla and his mission is destruction and death.

Question: At any time did you feel used as a human shield, used to avoid an attack? Or did you see in these nine years that the kidnap victims were used in that way?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: No, instead of placing us in front of them as shields, they tried to flee from operatives, flee and get us out of there, put us out of the reach of an operative.

Question: What do you remember as far as food and hygiene?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: There are times when food gets scarce. The food is based on rice, pasta, rice and peas, rice and beans, rice and lentils. There is no fruit or vegetables. Once in awhile, maybe two times a year

He was held kidnapped for 9 years at the hands of FARC terrorists. In the photo, he reunites with his family at National Police headquarters in Bogotá.



to give you an example (because I don't have the dates in good chronological order) you get a bit of plantain, some cabbage, or some vegetables. But that doesn't last long. So you have some good meals for say 2, 3, 4, or 5 days. But that isn't constant. The rice and pasta are constant.

OK, one component that changes your life is which guerrilla leader has you. The higher in the hierarchy the guerrilla, the less painful the conditions. Because I think they have access to more money. So, when you have the possibility of money, you can provide more elements. And as the rank goes down, since they don't have access to a lot of money, well, the conditions also go down.

Question: And what is the explanation for the rank getting

lower of the guerrillas taking care of you?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Because at the beginning they managed large groups. So for a large group you have an important leader to take care of the group. But when it becomes necessary to divide them into small groups, then of course you have to give them to leaders who are lower in the hierarchy.

Question: How often do they move the group or change it?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: I reckon (because I don't have a good sense of time) about every three months, or six months. I don't know.

Question: Movements of how many kilometers more or less?



Photos: Courtesy of the National Police Force

Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

I don't have a good sense of kilometers walking on pavement and much less so in the jungle, because you can't measure. You just have jungle, jungle, jungle, and you can't define how many kilometers.

Question: Did they ever punish you?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

Punishments? Of course. For example take off our boots and walk around the perimeter barefoot. The area was small at least, the smallest they could make it.

Question: How many meters was your space?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: At that time I think it was some 12

meters long, or 10, by around 8 or 10 meters. Say about 10 by 10.

Question: With barbed wire?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

Yes, with barbed wire.

Question: And so there were some hammocks there and some roofing, that was all. And so you were all in an area of about 10 by 12 meters more or less?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

Yes, at that time there were 10 of us. The group of Americans had still not arrived.

Question: So the punishments... why did they take off your boots?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: To keep you from escaping with the

Jhon Frank Pinchao, accompanied by the Director of the National Police, General Oscar Naranjo, and the Minister of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos, grants his first press conference before national and foreign media in the conference room at the Casa de Nariño.



boots. So they would leave them in a place under guard. When we were going to take a bath, which was in a creek next to the barbed wire, they gave them to us to go and bathe, and then we came back, we dried off, and we gave the boots back to them to put them there outside in the custody of a guard.

Question: And didn't that lead to diseases in your feet?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Sure. Of course. Fungus. I have a fungus from the very beginning. I have had it for 9 years. And I haven't been able to get rid of it. I am going to see if I can get rid of it now.

Question: What other punishments do you remember being applied in captivity?.

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: They tied us up. If they decided to punish a person, they would leave a person chained up 24 hours a day, for one, two, three, or four months. And they would decide when to end the punishment.

Question: In the open air?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Tied up to the place where you sleep, chained to the foot of the bed or the hammock.

Question: Without moving?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Well, just the movement the chain allows you to make from one side to another.

Question: And would the bad behavior of one person sometimes

During the 17 days of his escape through the jungle Jhon Frank Pinchao held on to the chains that had held him for almost 9 years under the torture of the FARC. He shows the media the chains he wore while kidnapped.

imply punishment for the entire group?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

Yes, but lately they were punishing individually.

Question: And you?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

One time I think I had a punishment.

Question: And Ingrid?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

She has had them because the guerrillas treat her disrespectfully. And she is brave and she demands respect. So the guerrillas take reprisals, and they have had her chained up 24 hours a day.

Question: And the North Americans?



Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

No, they don't chain them up, because they say they have not tried to escape or anything. And up to the time I got away, they didn't keep them in chains.

Question: And Luis Eladio Pérez?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao:

He is chained up.

I am going through an emotional time now. All I want to do is spend time with my family and with my institution. And I am going to take my time to make a good decision.

Question: Tell us about your family.

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: My family is my parents, my sisters, and my son.

Question: Did you meet your son?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Today I met my son.

Question: Tell us a bit about your son and how he has developed during the time of your captivity.

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: My son was born when I was in captivity and I saw him in a video when he was little. They sent it to me when we had access to correspondence, and I saw photographs later in other letters. And after that I didn't hear anything else and I was left with that image of him of when he was about oh, 2 or 3, I don't remember exactly. And now he is double the size, so I said they tricked me with the photo.

Question: Speaking of children, would you say there are many children recruited to the guerrillas?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Yes. We have seen children grow up. Children who have to carry a pistol because a rifle would drag on the ground. And we have seen them grow up. And now they are young people of 17 or 18 years, but when we arrived they were children of 14, 13, 15 years of age.

Question: And you didn't have conversations with them?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: No, because their order is to not talk to us.

Question: Did they let you read?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: There was a time with one commander that we had good books. I think I managed to read about 100 and something books. And I took advantage of the time to read the whole Bible. At that point I read it as a text, not as a devotion or anything, but as a text.

But now the reading I did at that time has served me, after the experience I had of reencountering God.

Jhon Frank Pinchao, his father Luis Evelio Pinchao, and his mother Rosa were reunited after 9 years of kidnapping at the hands of the FARC. His joy is indescribable after years of anguish and despair.



Photo: Courtesy of the National Police Force

And more lately, they got about 10 books for us, but pocket-sized books. And we read them, about three a day, until one day we didn't have anything else to read. So we haven't had reading material for years.

Question: As a kidnap victim for such a long time, from what you could see of the movement, is the guerrilla movement stronger, weaker, larger?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: No. It is not strong, but it is big. It is like a bubble that will pop if you prick it. It is big but it is not powerful. It has a large number of children recruited, and they have used the opportunity to recruit many children. Like the

ones that have grown up that have been our guards. So that makes them big, but not strong.

Question: Have the guerrillas been discouraged lately?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Yes, there are people in whom you can see it. You see the sadness or discouragement in their faces. These guerrillas are generally made up of coca pickers, people who have no other option, so they opt for joining.

Question: What message would you send to those who continue in captivity?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: They are not going to receive it,

because they don't have a television or means to...

Question: If you could send it by radio, because this is also going to be broadcast on the radio, what would you say to them?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: Well we can't via radio either if they broadcast on normal channels, but I would tell them to have hope that some day one way or another they are going to be free.

Question: Do you believe the group may have been punished because of your escape?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: I think they might have taken some measures.

Question: Did the threat exist or do you just imagine they might have?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: No, because other times they have taken measures without explaining why, and the logical thing for them to do would be to take some measures.

Question: After this nine-year experience, such a hard, bitter experience, what would you say to many people in Europe and in the United States who have never come to Colombia, and who believe the guerrillas want to do justice and are seeking political improvements in Colombia?

Intendant John Frank Pinchao: I would say that no one can make improvements by taking away the liberty of another person. The only improvements a group can offer are ideas – clear ideas, not twisted ideas like taking liberty and life away from people.

After these nine years to begin my life again.. I don't know... to define whether to continue in my institution. To define and reestablish my family and share with them. I won't say what we didn't share because what we didn't share is lost, but to share what will come from here on. To live what is still to come, because what was lost is lost.

Jhon Frank Pinchao tells the media about the tortures he experienced while held by the FARC.



Photo: Courtesy of the National Police Force

EXCERPTS FROM THE PRESS CONFERENCE WITH INTENDANT JOHN PINCHAO, AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM THE NATIONAL POLICE HOSPITAL.

Bogotá, May 22, 2007

Question: Did you receive medical attention?

Answer: Well, there have been no doctors out there for over six years. At the beginning there were real doctors. I don't know where they got them, if they were subversives or if they forced them to come from some hospital. But for the last six years we have been attended to by guerrilla nurses who have received a certain level of instruction. Based on their experience they treat our illnesses. They have some notebooks with the instruction they have received, and based on their experience they try to guess what kind of illness we have.

After several days of medical treatment, Intendant Jhon Frank Pinchao is released from the National Police Clinic. At his departure he grants a long press conference to reporters from national and foreign media.



Some of my companions have illnesses that can't be explained and they haven't recovered. So the nurses try to discover what our problem is based on their instruction and experience and they try to medicate us, diagnose us, and treat us.

Question: Who has been in a precarious state of health?

Answer: Ingrid Betancourt has been in a precarious state of health with hepatitis. When I escaped, Marc, the American, also had hepatitis. Captain Bermeo had some unexplainable rashes and when he looks up he gets dizzy and almost faints. There are people with diabetes like Senator Luis Eladio Pérez.

The medicine out there is minimal. They say it is very difficult to obtain, but I thought:

they are capable of obtaining rolls and rolls of barbed wire. What could a jar or a box of pills cost them? Because they bring in a ton of barbed wire, so why can't they bring in a bit of medicine?

First Sergeant Marulanda from the Army has knee problems. Tom, because of his age, has high blood pressure, but he keeps in shape by exercising and that helps him to recover.

There are other companions with knee problems. A Police companion, Intendant Duarte, has gastric problems and has blood in his stool.

Eduardo Gechen has blood pressure problems or something like that. He has had pre-heart attack symptoms seven times. Colonel Mendieta has kidney



Photos: Courtesy of the National Police Force

problems. Captain Murillo, now a Major, has problems I think with his kidneys and also some vision problems.

Consuelo González de Perdomo has blood pressure problems. I don't remember exactly who else, but there are many companions with a lot of medical problems.

Question: What episode of illness most impacted you during the time of your captivity? Who did you see suffer the most?

Answer: Captain Guevara. Major Guevara. When they said that he had died, in reality I wasn't with him. But the Americans that had been with him later arrived to be with our group. They told us the medical conditions he had.

It impacted me because he would faint, no, not faint...he had like

attacks that left him completely dead and they would say, «he's dead, he's dead.» Among the group of kidnap victims there is an Army Corporal (William Pérez Medina). He is a nurse and he is very diligent and studious, and he has put into practice everything they taught him. So he was practically our chief physician and he knew how to resuscitate him.

When Captain Guevara was kidnapped with me...in the attack on Mitú we were divided into two groups of 30 and 31... when we were divided I wasn't with him. At that time he had two of that type of attack, and when they brought us together he had three more attacks. He would be like totally dead, and William knew methods to revive him and give him back his life.

*Jhon Frank Pinchao
will continue narrating for the world
the atrocities committed
by the FARC.
With his newly recovered freedom
he will head up a crusade in favor
of the liberation of all the kidnap
victims in Colombia*



Photo: Courtesy of the National Police Force

Question: Did the guerrillas never speak of releasing him because of his health?

Answer: No. In fact they let him die.

Question: What do you know about Clara Rojas and her child?

Answer: Clara Rojas had a son. She had him when they put police and military personnel in a house. And in the house behind that one they put the politicians, and then the gringos arrived. I shouldn't say gringos because it is somewhat derogatory – the Americans. So through a crack, because we had no visual contact, we made some cracks between boards and we could look over there. So we could see her there, but I never spoke with her.

When we moved from that place I had the opportunity to talk with her for five minutes.

When we were in that camp with the two houses, the boy was born there and I had the opportunity to hold him in my arms. And then on the hike he had grown a bit more, he was about a year old, I think, more or less. He was very healthy, and that was when the groups separated and I never heard anything more of them.

Question: Is she with the child?

Answer: Up to the time of the hike... they don't leave the child with her. They let her see it and everything, but the guerrillas take care of the child.

Question: She took care of him?

Answer: No.