the capital and other cities in Chile gathered to voice their support for the leaders of the coup. As Chile slept, soldiers went into action in the cities of Concepcion and Valparaiso. Before daybreak, the two cities went under the absolute control of the military.

In Santiago, at 6.20, President Allende was awakened with the news that a coup led by his new army chief was in progress. Within the following hour, the military, by now rapidly moving to gain control of the city and planning to seize the Moneda presidential palace, sent a message to Allende, offering to let him leave the country. The president spurned the offer.

The air force systematically strafed the palace and hit its targets with precision. By 9 a.m. Santiago passed into the hands of the army, units of which fanned out to various parts of the city. A half hour later, President Allende made what would turn out to be his final broadcast to the nation. He promised defiance and pledged to fight on to uphold constitutional government in Chile. Sometime later, he appeared on the balcony of La Moneda, an AK-47 in his hands and a helmet on his head. Moments later, he went back in. It was the last the world would see of Salvador Allende. By early afternoon, he was dead.

One of his aides, who had managed to escape from the presidential palace, would later tell the world that he had seen Allende place his gun between his feet and, as he ran from the place, had looked back to see the president's skull fly off from his head. The man added, though, that he had heard no gunshot. His report was widely ridiculed. The more accepted version of how Allende met his end came from other sources, who pointed out that soldiers had stormed into La Moneda and stabbed and shot the president to death. After an autopsy that really was not, Allende's body was buried in his ancestral village. However, no stone or any other sign marked his grave. The coup leaders wanted no trace to be left of the dead president. Allende was sixty five when his life came to an end.

In the days following the coup, terror took over Chile. Thousands of people were rounded up by the soldiers and detained in the local stadium. Many of them were murdered. Officially, the number of those who died from the excesses of the military regime was 3,192. Many more simply disappeared. Hundreds of Chileans, many of them prominent citizens, went into exile in neighbouring countries and in Europe.

Carlos Prats left the country and moved on to Argentina. Orlando Letelier, the former envoy who was Allende's last defence minister, had been seized on the morning of the coup and tortured over the next twelve months before being freed and allowed to leave Chile. He would eventually make his way to the United States. The poet Pablo Neruda, ailing at the time of the coup, would be dishonoured by soldiers ransacking his home. Within days of the coup, he would die. The popular singer Victor Jara, a vocal supporter of the Allende government, was picked up by the army and murdered in the very Santiago stadium where he had once roused his fans to ecstasy with his music.

Salvador Allende's widow would make her way out of Chile. The dead president's cousin, the writer Isabel Allende, too, would leave the country and settle abroad. The Pinochet regime, having put a brutal system in place, would not, however, rest until it had dealt with its enemies, real or assumed. Agents of the Chilean intelligence organisation, DINA, murdered General Carlos Prats and his wife by blowing up their car in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on September 30, 1974. Two



years later, on September 21, 1976, Orlando Letelier, busy marshalling support for Chilean democrats in the United States, was blown up in Washington by DINA agents acting with assistance from their American friends.

The Pinochet dictatorship kept tight control over Chile till 1990, when General Pinochet left office, albeit after ensuring immunity for himself and his men over the 1973 coup and the subsequent measures taken by his regime. In his later years, Pinochet became a target of human rights groups around the world and, at one point, was arrested in London upon a warrant issued by a Spanish court. Eventually allowed to go back home by the British government, he saw a resurgent Chilean democracy strip him of his immunity and charge him with human rights violations during his years as dictator. He died, aged 91, in December 2006.

Chile is today governed by President Michelle Bachelet, who as a young woman was subjected to torture by the army after the coup in 1973. Her mother, too, went through similar repression. Her father, a senior air force officer and Allende loyalist, was tortured to death by soldiers soon after the coup.

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