

‘Battle-Scarred’ Chilean Miners Unveil Emotional Wounds

Pulitzer-Prize-winning writer Hector Tobar says the 33 Chilean miners trapped deep underground for 69 days in 2010 were left “battle scarred” from the ordeal, despite quickly becoming minor celebrities after their improbable rescue.

“They had lived through this event that a billion people had seen unfold on television. But what I found out when I got to speak with them was how hurt they were, how wounded they were,” Tobar, whose 2014 book *Deep Down Dark* chronicles the miners’ tale, told Reuters in an interview.

“They were like guys who had been through war.”

The miners’ rescue drew heavy international coverage, and Chile’s then-president Sebastian Pinera personally greeted the workers as they emerged from a freshly drilled shaft one-by-one in October 2010.

Eventually, the miners chose Tobar to author the official account of their experience. That account in turn forms the backbone of *The 33*, a film about their ordeal to be released in the U.S. on Nov. 13.

Initially, the 33 vowed to maintain a pact of silence about their time underground so no individual would profit unduly. But that scheme soon broke down, as outlets offered to pay miners for media appearances, leading some to say the survivors were being opportunistic.

For Tobar, however, who recorded hundreds of hours of interviews with the miners, such criticisms hold little merit.

“They feel like they have been treated with a lack of respect.

That people sort of see them as these ordinary guys who accidentally got buried underground and hoped to get rich and famous off of it,” Tobar said.

“And what they hope that the movie and the book will show them, will show Chile, is that they went through a war underground, that they are battled scarred.”

Tobar added that many survivors were drawn to tears by *The 33*, a fictionalized retelling of the miners’ time underground which was released in Chile on Aug. 6.

“For many it was a kind of rebirth and so to see that your near death experience and rebirth played out on the big screen was very emotional for them,” he said.

“So there were many tears shed at the screening in Chile.”
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