

Novo, Diaz plead innocent to Letelier murder charges

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WASHINGTON—Two Cuban exiles from Northern New Jersey, indicted in the car-bombing murder of Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and his aide Ronni Moffit, pleaded innocent to murder charges in federal District Court here yesterday, only hours before the government's key witness pleaded guilty to his role in the 1976 assassination plot.

Guillermo Novo Sampol of North Bergen and Alvin Ross Diaz of Union City, accompanied by a battery of defense lawyers, pleaded "not guilty" in firm tones before Judge Barrington D. Parker to charges of conspiracy to murder a foreign official, murder of a foreign official, two counts of murder and murder by use of explosives.

A third Cuban from Northern New Jersey, Ignacio Novo Guillermo's brother, pleaded innocent to charges of lying to a grand jury and concealing knowledge of a felony.

The three Cubans were named in an indictment issued two weeks ago that also named two other Cuban exiles and three Chilean secret police officials.

The two other Cubans are fugitives, while the government is attempting to have the three Chilean officials extradited to stand trial here.

Letelier, an outspoken critic of the current military junta in Chile, died when a remote-control bomb

blew apart the car in which he was riding on a Washington street September 21, 1976. Moffit, Letelier's co-worker at a Washington think-tank, also died in the blast.

The government has charged that the Chilean secret police hired the Cuban exiles—all members of a nationalist, anti-Castro Cuban group—to help carry out the plot.

The government has received much of its information from Michael Townley, an American expatriate and former member of the Chilean secret police, who yesterday pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to murder Letelier.

Townley has agreed to be the government's chief witness in exchange for receiving a 10-year sentence. He could be paroled after three years and four months.

Judge Parker accepted the statement after listening to Townley explain his role in the plot, but deferred sentencing him immediately.

Guillermo Novo and Alvin Ross Diaz could receive a maximum life sentence on each of the five counts against them. Ignacio Novo could face eight years.

At one point during yesterday's lengthy court proceedings, prosecutors protested to the court a defense lawyer's public comments on the death of Dr. Juan B. Pulido, a leader of the New Jersey Cuban community who died of an apparent heart attack earlier this week.