

Letelier Assassination Evidence Seized Illegally, Court Is Told

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WASHINGTON — The FBI illegally obtained evidence that possibly links a Cuban exile defendant to the assassination of former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier, defense attorneys argued Thursday.

The contested evidence includes some parts for making a bomb similar to the one that killed Letelier on Sept. 21, 1976, as he was driving to work in downtown Washington.

It also includes a sales receipt from a New York City electronics store for the purchase of a paging device. Government prosecutors contend the device was used to detonate the bomb that had been fastened to the underside of Letelier's car.

The evidence was seized by FBI agents when they were called to a vacated office above a store in Union City, N.J., that had been leased to a Cuban exile named Carlos P. Garcia.

Federal prosecutors contend that Garcia is an alias for Alvin Ross Diaz, one of the three Cuban defendants whose trial in connection with Letelier's assassination

began here on Tuesday.

Ross and Guillermo Novo Sampol, both of Union City, have been indicted for allegedly joining with Townley — the government's key witness, who already has pleaded guilty — in carrying out the murder. It was ordered by high-level Chilean government officials, the prosecutors allege.

Novo's brother Ignacio, who lives in Miami, is charged with withholding knowledge of the assassination conspiracy from federal officials and lying to a federal grand jury.

U.S. District Judge Barrington Parker Jr. interrupted the laborious process of selecting a jury late Thursday to hear arguments on the defense motion to keep the items seized by the FBI in the Union City office from being used against the Cubans.

Parker listened to about two hours of arguments, then delayed ruling until today or possibly Monday.

Federal prosecutor Eugene Propper has contended that the items seized in the Union City office forge a crucial link in the chain of evidence tying the Cuban exiles to the assassination conspiracy.