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# '007' Comes to Life In a U.S. Courtroom

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WASHINGTON — The story includes the stuff of James Bond plots more suited to a novel than a U.S. District courtroom.

There are alleged international assassination schemes, Cuban exile terrorists, remote-controlled bombs, elaborate cover stories, a "mole" (double agent) buried deep within a foreign government's secret police and — most intriguing of all — a frame-up by the CIA to divert blame from itself.

But this is no novel.

These elements and others unfolded Monday in a U.S. District Court during opening arguments in the trial of three Cuban exiles charged in connection with the bombing assassination of former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier.

So far only the ending, as outlined by federal prosecutor Eugene

Propper in graphic detail, remains uncontested:

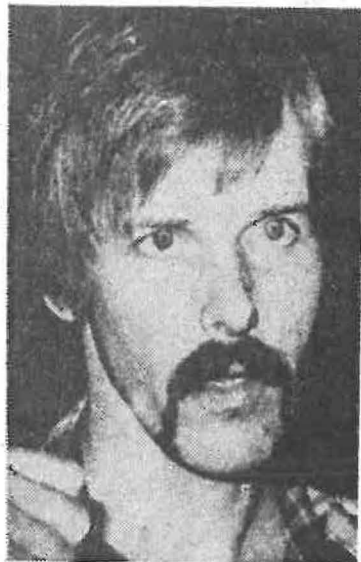
"On Sept. 21, 1976, at 9 a.m., Orlando Letelier left his home ... to travel to his job with a young married couple," Propper intoned in a dispassionate voice.

"A bomb, which had been strapped to the floorboard of the car, was set off ... It was so powerful, Orlando Letelier's legs were destroyed and they were never recovered.

"... He died at Sheridan Circle," Propper continued. "Ronnie Moffit (a passenger in the car) suffocated ... on her own blood."

The rest of the story, including who is responsible for what lawyers agreed was a "monstrous" crime, is in sharp dispute.

Propper and a federal grand jury allege that Letelier was assassinated by militant Cuban exiles under the direction of Michael Townley, an American expatriate who at the



Michael Townley

... on center stage

time was working for the Chilean secret police agency DINA.

Two of the defendants, Alvin Ross Diaz and Guillermo Novo Sampol, both of New Jersey, are charged with carrying out the as-

Turn to Page 16A Col. 1

# Letelier Trial Has the Air Of a James Bond Thriller

▶ FROM PAGE 1A

assassination plot. They are prominent members of the militant Cuban Nationalistic Movement, a violently anti-Communist group.

The third defendant, Ignacio Novo Sampol of Miami, is charged with lying to a federal grand jury about his knowledge of the crime and with helping the other defendants elude capture. He is the brother of Guillermo.

The government's key witness is Townley, 35, who has pleaded guilty to planting the bomb and directing the Cuban exiles in the plot. Townley also claims that he is a DINA agent.

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY** Paul Goldberger told the jury of seven women and five men Monday that the assassination was conceived and carried out by the CIA as part of a plan to silence critics of the Chilean military regime.

"We will show that Orlando Letelier was a documented enemy of the CIA," Goldberger said.

Goldberger, in outlining the defense strategy, said Townley was a "contract agent for the CIA" who used his position in the Chilean DINA as a cover.

Indeed, Goldberger suggested that Townley was a "CIA mole," a double agent placed to "burrow" deeply into another country's intelligence network and provide information on its activities.

Goldberger argued that the CIA ordered Townley to kill Letelier because the slaying would be blamed on either the Chilean government or the Cuban exiles he enlisted in the alleged plot.

"The horrible thought that the CIA is responsible may be hard to live with," Goldberger told the jury. "But that's what we will show."

**HE CITED** the CIA's role in overthrowing the Marxist government of Salvador Allende — of which Letelier was a cabinet member — as evidence of the agency's interest in that Latin American nation. Goldberger contended that the CIA "buried" Townley to protect the military government from new subversion.

Letelier, an exile who had been instrumental in focusing world attention on the military junta's human-rights violations, was such a threat, Goldberger said.

The list of defense witnesses includes former CIA director Richard Helms, who oversaw the agency's activities in Chile in the early 1970s. Testimony will also be heard from three active CIA officials who have admitted Townley had once been "cleared" for use in Chile.

Goldberger and co-defense counsel Lawrence Dubin told the jurors that the three Cuban defendants were ignorant of Townley's alleged



Orlando Letelier

... he was assassinated

assignment to kill Letelier, but that they knew him under an alias as a DINA agent.

"We will prove that these are not assassins who hide in the dark to kill people," Goldberger said. But, he added, their anti-Castro political beliefs made them the ideal "scapegoats" in the schemes.

**THE PROSECUTION'S** opening statement amounted to a scenario that contained an almost equal amount of intrigue.

Propper said he would provide evidence linking the Cuban Nationalistic Movement (CNM) to the Chilean secret police in at least one other attempted act of international terrorism.

He said the evidence would also show that the radical group — of which the defendants were members — sought in return to be recognized by Chile as the Cuban government-in-exile.

Propper said that in early 1975, DINA sent Townley to Mexico to disrupt a meeting of Chilean exiles. Townley was told to contact CNM members in the United States and get their help on the mission, Propper said.

**IN MIAMI,** Townley contacted CNM founder Felipe Rivero, he said, who in turn referred him to Guillermo Novo, the CNM leader in New Jersey.

Propper said that Novo assigned Virgilio Paz Romero of Union City, N.J., to help Townley on the mission. Paz has also been indicted but remains a fugitive.

The purpose of that mission, Propper continued, was the kidnapping of former Chilean Socialist Party leader Carlos Altamirano.

Propper said Novo and others provided Townley with explosives to kill some of the exile leaders.

But the mission failed because

they arrived after the meeting of Chilean exiles had ended, Propper said.

Although the prosecutors have made it clear that Townley will be their key witness, Propper said that an unnamed Cuban exile informant had provided supporting information.

Paz told the informant that he, Ross, Guillermo Novo and another fugitive defendant, Jose Dionisio Suarez, had participated in the assassination, Propper said.