

Townley: I Never Told Exile That I Worked for the CIA

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WASHINGTON — American expatriate Michael Townley Tuesday denied telling a prominent Cuban militant in Miami — Armando

López Estrada — that he worked for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Townley's denial came during the second day of a lengthy, disjointed cross-examination of his testimony against three

LOPEZ ESTRADA Cuban exiles on trial in connection with the 1976 bombing assassination of Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier.

Townley, 36, has pleaded guilty to masterminding that assassination on orders from the Chilean secret police agency, DINA, for which he worked.

He is the government's key witness against the three defendants. Guillermo Novo Sampol and Alvin Ross Diaz, both of Union City, N.J., are charged with participating with Townley in the assassination conspiracy.

The third defendant, Ignacio Novo Sampol of Miami, Guillermo's brother, is charged with lying to a federal grand jury and participating in a coverup of the conspiracy.

LETELIER, a member of former Chilean President Salvador Allende's Marxist government — toppled in a bloody coup in 1973 — died when a bomb attached to his

'Did you know [López Estrada] was connected with the CIA? Did you tell him you were with the company?'

— Paul Goldberger
defense attorney

car exploded in downtown Washington. A young assistant, Ronni Moffitt, also died.

Townley has testified that DINA ordered Letelier killed because he had become an enemy of the ruling military junta.

Defense lawyers, however, have contended that Townley was a CIA double-agent placed within DINA. They alleged that the CIA masterminded the assassination and an elaborate frame to place blame on the Cuban Nationalist Movement and DINA. Townley has denied working for the CIA.

IN REMARKS last week, defense attorney Paul Goldberger told Judge Barrington Parker Jr. that he would provide a witness who could bolster the defense theory by linking Townley to the CIA as recently as early 1976 during a trip to Miami.

During Tuesday's cross-examination of Townley, Goldberger revealed that his witness would be Armando López Estrada, leader of the Brigade 2506 "military" wing.

Townley admitted that he met López Estrada during a trip to Miami in early 1976, although, he

said López Estrada used an alias in the meeting.

At the time, Townley said he was preparing for a DINA mission to Mexico City. He said he had been ordered to disrupt a meeting of Chilean exiles and "eliminate" two Allende supporters — Carlos Altamirano and Volodia Teitelboim.

TOWNLEY SAID he went to Miami to get false identification cards for that trip when a man he knew as "Croatian Col. Blado" put him in touch with López Estrada.

López Estrada, in turn, offered to provide false Puerto Rican documents, Townley said.

Goldberger then asked Townley if he hadn't told López Estrada that the worked for "the same company," a reference to the CIA.

When Townley appeared confused by the question, Goldberger continued: "Did you know (López Estrada) was connected with the CIA? Did you tell him you were with the company?"

Townley answered sharply: "I most absolutely deny that."

IN A TRIAL in Miami last year, López Estrada testified that he had close connections with the CIA. He also appeared on a CBS News special entitled "The CIA's Secret Army."

The CIA has denied working with López Estrada beyond the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

Goldberger offered no other evidence to challenge Townley's denials of CIA contact, and turned to another line of questioning.