

U.S. goofs, sets wrong brother free

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By JAY DUCASSI
Herald Staff Writer

Guillermo Novo Sampol, an anti-Castro militant jailed in connection with the 1976 car-bomb assassination of Orlando Letelier, became a free man Monday.

By mistake.

Novo, 41, sentenced June 26 to 18 months for lying to a grand jury about his knowledge of Letelier's murder, was accidentally released from the Federal Correctional Institute in Danbury, Conn., said E. Lawrence Barcella, chief prosecutor in the Novo case.

"Seems like it's a perfect application of Murphy's law," said Barcella. "Whatever can go wrong, will."

Barcella said prison officials released Novo when they received an order clearing his brother, Ignacio Novo Sampol, 42, of any obligations to the court.

An angry Guillermo Novo called the release an "inconvenience" Tuesday night and said he was trying to find a ride back to the prison. He said he was waiting to appear before a parole board Monday when he was told he could go home. He was eligible for parole from the mo-

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Novo ready to surrender after mixup

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ment he was sentenced because of time he had already served.

Novo found out from one of his attorneys Tuesday afternoon that he was illegally free. And Tuesday night, when he arrived at his sister's house in Union City, N.J., he found that deputies from the U.S. marshal's office in Newark had already been to the house but found nobody home.

Deputy marshal Paul Dietrich had left Novo a business card in the mailbox, with a note saying: "Mr. Guillermo Novo. Important that you call me at home. Keep trying until you reach me."

Novo was trying repeatedly, he said, to reach the marshal, but there was no answer.

"It's unfair to my family, who think I'm free."

His brother Ignacio, who has been free on bond, pleaded guilty earlier this month to perjury charges in connection with the

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Letelier case. The judge set Ignacio's sentence as the 2½ years he had already served in a Terre Haute, Ind., prison and issued an order freeing him.

According to Barcella, the order found its way to the Danbury prison, where Guillermo was being held.

"The order that was sent up to Danbury was the one referring to Ignacio, and the person that was released was Guillermo Novo Sampol," said Barcella. "What can I tell you?"

Barcella also said he was baffled as to why the order was sent to Danbury when Ignacio had never served any time there.

Prison officials would not comment on the mistaken release except to say they were "investigating the matter."

Earlier Tuesday, however, before the mistake was caught, acting warden Albert E. Cox confirmed that Novo had indeed been released Monday afternoon.

"We received a 'forthwith release for time served' [form] yesterday afternoon, dated Oct. 13," Cox said. "When we received that, we had to spring him."

The order was signed in Washington, D.C., by U.S. District Judge Barrington Parker. Parker's office confirmed Tuesday that the only document related to the case issued on Oct. 13 was the one referring to Ignacio.

Guillermo Novo and another anti-Castro militant, Alvin Ross Diaz, were convicted in 1979 of the conspiracy to assassinate Letelier, who was living in exile in Washington following the overthrow of Chile's former Socialist President Salvador Allende. Letelier had been a member of Allende's cabinet and had been Chile's ambassador to the United States.

But the convictions and life sentences were reversed by an appellate court. At a second trial this year, both Novo and Ross were acquitted of the murder charges. The jury, however, found Novo guilty of lying to a federal grand jury investigating the Sept. 21, 1976, assassination.