

Hot Weather Thwarted More Killings, Informant Testifies at Letelier Trial

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WASHINGTON — An FBI informant testified Wednesday that one of three Cuban exiles on trial in connection with Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier's death told him the assassins also had plans for three other murders.

But, informant Ricardo Canette said, those plans were disrupted or postponed because "the climate in the South was too inhospitable, too hot."

He said he didn't know the names of the alleged "targets," but was told one of the three was a news reporter.

Canette, also Cuban-born, is a surprise government witness in the case against Alvin Ross Diaz, Ignacio Novo Sampol and his brother, Guillermo Novo Sampol. The three are members of the Cuban Nationalist Movement.



ROSS DIAZ

CANETTE TESTIFIED that he learned of the alleged plan to kill three others during a conversation with defendant Ross in July 1977.

Canette, an admitted forger, apparently had

won Ross' confidence because he had provided both Ross and Ignacio Novo with false identity cards. Those papers later would be used by the defendants in an attempt to elude capture, according to the indictment.

Canette said Ross boasted to him that he had made the bomb that killed the former Chilean ambassador to the United States as Letelier drove to work in Washington on Sept. 21, 1976. Letelier lived here in exile.

But Canette said Ross denied planting the bomb, saying that had been done by two "brigade members" and a "fair-haired man."

The two "brigade members" apparently are fugitive co-conspirators Jose Dionisio Suarez and Virgilio Paz. The "fair-haired" person is apparently Michael V. Townley, the government's key witness, who has admitted directing the assassination on orders from the Chilean secret police agency DINA.

CANETTE, IN cross-examination by defense attorney Lawrence Dubbin, said Ross told him of the three other targets while boasting about the militant Cuban group's activities.

Ross said the plans had to be altered because of the Letelier assassination and because "the climate in the South was too hot," Canette said.

In a side comment, Canette also said that after he reported this conversation to the FBI,

agents asked that he submit to a lie-detector test. He said he agreed.

Judge Barrington Parker Jr. quickly instructed the jury to disregard that comment, which apparently was inadmissible, in his view.

During most of the day, Canette was subjected to a sharp cross-examination by defense attorney Dubbin, who questioned Canette about his lengthy record as a forger and con man, in an attempt to discredit his testimony.

Dubbin also tried, with only small success, to catch Canette in minor discrepancies by comparing his testimony in the case with statements given by him previously to the FBI or the grand jury.

HIS TESTIMONY is crucial to the government's case because it independently bolsters many of the details brought out last week by Townley, the confessed DINA agent.

Canette told the jury Tuesday that fugitive Paz — in Ross' presence — admitted to him that "We did it [killed Letelier]. We know it. They know it. But let them prove it." Ross nodded in assent, Canette said.

Canette also said Ross once complained to him that if Chile didn't help him elude federal agents, he could "lay this into the hands of Manuel Contreras."

Contreras was the head of DINA and the man who allegedly ordered Letelier's death.