

Accuser Townley Is a Liar, Defense Tells Letelier Jury

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WASHINGTON — Condensing five weeks of often sensational testimony, defense and prosecution attorneys marshaled their final arguments Monday for the trial of three defendants in the assassination case of former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier.

The defense, representing three Cuban exiles charged in connection with Letelier's 1976 death in a downtown Washington car-bombing, attacked the credibility of the government's key witness, American expatriate Michael V. Townley, calling him a "perversion" and a "liar."

Prosecutors attempted to weave scattered bits of trial evidence into a single fabric designed to corroborate Townley's testimony detailing an international conspiracy to murder a political enemy, Letelier.

"What we have here," said prosecutor Lawrence Barcella, referring to those persons indicted for the murder, "is eight men who combined and conspired ... to bring terrorism to the streets of Washington, D.C."

ONLY THREE of the eight were in the courtroom — Cuban exiles Guillermo Novo Sampol, his brother Ignacio, and Alvin Ross Diaz.

Two other anti-Castro activists, Virgilio Paz and José Dionisio Suarez, remain fugitives. And three Chilean officials who allegedly masterminded the murder plot as agents of DINA, the Chilean secret police have not been returned to the United States for trial.



Michael V. Townley
... his testimony is key

The case against the three defendants is expected to go to the jury today after the prosecution has an opportunity to answer defense attacks on the evidence and on Townley.

Townley, a 36-year-old onetime Miami auto mechanic turned DINA assassin, has pleaded guilty to directing the murder plot.

IN FIVE DAYS as a witness, Townley testified that he came to the United States on orders from DINA, enlisted the Cuban exiles in the murder plan, assembled the bomb and attached it to Letelier's car, and then left Paz and Suarez to

detonate it.

Prosecutors also attempted to show that the Cuban Nationalist Movement — and Guillermo Novo, one of its leaders — had maintained close ties to Chile's military government because of its strongly anti-Communist views.

These ties enabled DINA to get Cuban exile help in killing Letelier, a former member of Chilean President Salvador Allende's Marxist government and an outspoken critic of the military junta that deposed Allende, Batcella argued.

DEFENSE ATTORNEYS Paul Goldberger and Lawrence Dublin; in four hours of sometimes emotional appeals to the jury, attacked that theory as implausible because, they said, it was based on Townley's testimony.

"When a foundation is made of mush and garbage," Goldberger said, "you can't build anything on top of it."

"The government's case is built on Michael V. Townley," he said.

Both defense attorneys characterized Townley as capable either of cold-blooded killing or of "bald-faced" lying under orders.

They also suggested — although not as strongly as in their opening statements five weeks ago — that the CIA was Townley's real boss and that the Cuban defendants were hapless victims of a frame-up.

"A man who would kill without remorse, without regret; a man who would kill human beings as if they were bugs," asked Goldberger, "and is this a man worthy of belief?"