

# Chronology of the Letelier Assassination Case

A chronology of events in the Orlando Letelier assassination case:

**Sept. 21, 1976** — A car bomb kills Letelier and an associate, Ronni Moffitt, at Sheridan Circle as they drive to work through Washington's Embassy Row.

**Oct. 17, 1976** — A Venezuelan newspaper reports that two unnamed Cuban exile brothers living in the United States have been implicated in the Letelier assassination. The information came from other Cuban exiles being questioned about the Oct. 6 terrorist bombing of a Cuban airliner off Barbados, the newspaper El Nacional said.

**Jan. 15, 1977** — Three Cuban exile veterans of the Bay of Pigs, Miami residents, are summoned to testify before a federal grand jury in Washington investigating the Letelier assassination. At least a dozen more Cuban exiles are called later to testify.

**April 20, 1977** — José Dionisio Suárez, an anti-Castro exile living in Elizabeth, N.J., is jailed for refusing to testify before the Letelier grand jury. He was released after a year in jail.

**March 5, 1978** — The Santiago newspaper El Mercurio identifies a mystery figure sought in the assassination as Michael Vernon Townley, an American expatriate living in Chile.

**March 21, 1978** — Chilean Gen. Manuel Contreras, former chief of secret police, resigns from the army.

**March 29, 1978** — A Chilean military judge questions Townley behind closed doors in Santiago.

**April 3, 1978** — Townley is expelled by Chilean authorities, who deliver him into the custody of two FBI agents assigned to bring him back to the United States for questioning in the Letelier case.

**April 10, 1978** — A U.S. District Court Judge in Washington orders Townley to be held without bond as a material witness.



**TOWNLEY      CONTRERAS**

**April 14, 1978** — Alvin Ross Díaz and Guillermo Novo Sampol are arrested in Miami on charges not related to the assassination.

**April 16, 1978** — Townley, apparently fearing betrayal by Ross Díaz and Guillermo Novo Sampol, begins telling FBI agents details of the assassination plot.

**April 26, 1978** — The government charges Townley with conspiracy in the assassination, and a federal magistrate orders him held without bond. Government prosecutors announce that they are "prepared to prove that ... Townley was a government agent, acting on behalf of the government of Chile" at the time of the slaying.

**May 2, 1978** — Townley's Chilean wife, Mariana Callejas, reports in Chile that he has told U.S. investigators who his accomplices were in the assassination.

**May 5, 1978** — Ignacio Novo Sampol is arrested on charges of conspiring to murder Letelier, and ordered held on \$200,000 bond. José Dionisio Suárez and Virgilio Paz, Cuban exile residents of New Jersey, are also charged with conspiracy. (They remain at large.)

**May 17, 1978** — Ross Díaz is charged with conspiracy to murder Letelier.

**May 18, 1978** — The Justice Department formally charges Guillermo Novo Sampol with conspiracy in the Letelier assassination.

**June 23, 1978** — U.S. Ambassador George Landau is recalled from Chile "for consultations" as a sign of Washington's displeasure over a lack of Chilean cooperation in the Letelier murder investigation. Landau returned to his post after nine days.



**Orlando Letelier**  
... killed in 1976

**Aug. 1, 1978** — The Letelier grand jury in Washington indicts the five Cuban exiles previously charged and three former officials of the Chilean secret police, DINA. The indictment says Gen. Contreras, former head of the DINA, "initiated the action ... and ordered the assassination" of Letelier. Contreras and the two other officers indicted, Lt. Col. Pedro Espinoza and

Capt. Armando Fernández Larios, are reported to be under house arrest in Chile.

**Aug. 11, 1978** — In a plea-bargaining arrangement, Townley pleads guilty to conspiracy to assassinate Letelier. In return for a reduced sentence of 10 years in prison, Townley agrees to testify against the others. He will be eligible for parole after serving one-

third of the sentence.

**Sept. 20, 1978** — The United States formally requests that Chile extradite the three former DINA officers, Contreras, Espinoza and Fernández Larios. The Chilean supreme court has not ruled on the request.

**Jan. 9, 1979** — The Washington trial of Ross Díaz and the Novo Sampols begins.

## 2 Fugitives Twice Elude Authorities

Authorities twice narrowly have missed catching the two fugitive Cuban exiles charged in connection with the car bombing assassination of Orlando Letelier, official sources reported Wednesday.

The sources said the two, Virgilio Paz Romero and José Dionisio Suárez Esquivel, eluded would-be captors first in Miami and later in Ecuador. Law enforcement officials are also said to have missed Suarez in San Jose, Calif., where his former wife lives.

Dates and details for the near-misses were not given. The two fugitives, apparently traveling together, are now said to be probably somewhere in Mexico, living among the Cuban exile community there.

The FBI has offered a reward of up to \$10,000 for information leading to the arrest of either Suárez or Paz.

Suárez was jailed in April 1977 for refusing to testify before a federal grand jury in Washington investigating the Letelier killing. He was released a year later. The grand jury indicted him, Paz and six others Aug. 1, 1978.

The FBI says Suárez electronically triggered the bomb that killed Letelier and Ronni Moffitt.

Paz' fingerprints were found on a bottle of potassium permanganate, a chemical used in explosives that investigators discovered in the Union City, N. J., office of Alvin Ross Díaz. Ross Díaz was one of three men convicted Wednesday.

Like Ross Díaz, Paz and Suárez belonged to the Cuban Nationalist Movement, a militant anti-Castro exile organization.

Suárez, 40, is known in militant circles as *Charco de Sangre* — Puddle of Blood. As a youth, he fought with Castro's guerrillas in the mountains of Oriente Province. After the 1959 Castro takeover, Suárez broke with Castro and was jailed in Havana's La Cabaña. He escaped and fled to the United States, where he lived in Union City.

Paz, 27, also lived in Union City, where he worked as a used car salesman. He is known to have received training in espionage from Chilean agents and the FBI has described him as "extremely dangerous."