

Around the Americas

Envoy: Chile's Ruler Sought Passports for Letelier Killers

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WASHINGTON — Chilean military ruler Augusto Pinochet allegedly helped obtain false passports for two Chilean intelligence agents subsequently indicted in the assassination of Orlando Letelier, according to a senior U.S. diplomat's statement.

The statement was made by George W. Landau, U.S. ambassador to Chile, to FBI agents investigating Chilean government involvement in Letelier's car-bombing death.

In the statement made available to reporters Thursday, Landau said he was told of Pinochet's involvement by an aide to Paraguayan President Alfredo Stroessner.

Landau and the FBI, however, remain skeptical of that account, according to other sources.

LANDAU SAID Stroessner's aide, Conrado Papalardo, told him that Pinochet telephoned Stroessner and asked his help in getting official Paraguayan passports for two Chilean agents so they could enter the United States without being recognized.

The two agents — Michael Townley and Armando Fernandez Larios — have been indicted here for their roles in the Letelier assassination. Letelier died Sept. 21, 1976, in downtown Washington, about three months after the alleged telephone conversation be-



George W. Landau
... ambassador to Chile

tween Pinochet and Stroessner.

Pinochet has vigorously denied any involvement in the assassination. However, a federal grand jury has indicted Chilean Gen. Manuel Contreras Sepulveda in connection with the plot. The Justice Department is seeking his extradition here to stand trial. (Chilean Foreign Minister Hernan Cubillos said Thursday that it is unlikely that Contreras will be extradited.)

CONTRERAS, HEAD of the Chilean intelligence agency called DINA, was responsible directly to Pinochet for DINA operations.

Landau's statement to the FBI was made known to The Herald as he was called to testify on behalf of three Cuban exiles. The Cubans are on trial for allegedly carrying out the bombing under the direction of DINA agent Townley.

Before testifying however, Landau reached an agreement with the defense and prosecution not to be questioned on Pinochet's alleged role as outlined in the FBI statement.

Sources said that request was based on Landau's belief that any testimony he gave of it would be detrimental to him as the envoy to Pinochet's government.

Others close to the investigation also have expressed deep doubts

about Papalardo's account of the alleged telephone call.

ALTHOUGH IT wasn't brought out in the courtroom Thursday, these sources acknowledged that Landau made the statement and that Papalardo has not refuted it.

In his testimony, Landau said Papalardo notified him of the Chilean request for Paraguayan passports as a favor. Landau said that Papalardo told him the two Chilean agents wanted to go incognito to the United States, purportedly to investigate the activities of exiled Chileans who were trying to cause economic harm to the military junta.

The passports would be issued in the names of Juan Williams Rose and Alejandro Romeral Jara, aliases for DINA agents Townley and Fernandez.

Townley already has admitted his role in the Letelier assassination. Fernandez has been indicted for the killing but has not been extradited from Chile.

LANDAU SAID he was "suspicious of [the request for passports] right from the beginning. My normal reaction would have been to deny the visas [to enter the U.S.]."

But, at Papalardo's urging, Landau said he went ahead and issued the visas for "Williams" and "Romeral."

At the same time, however, he made copies of the passport pictures and wrote a detailed account of what he had been told of the alleged mission and sent it to former CIA Deputy Director Vernon Walters.

Landau said he received a reply from Walters saying that he had since retired from the CIA. Walters added, however, that the CIA would have no interest in the two DINA agents.

As it turned out, according to Townley's testimony, Townley and Fernandez decided against using the Paraguayan passports because they suspected that the CIA had become aware of them.

Both traveled under different aliases — and on official Chilean passports — when they came to kill Letelier, Townley testified.