

FBI hunts 'Omega 7' in 2 state, JFK blasts

By BARBARA KUKLA

The anti-Castro terrorist group believed responsible for explosions which ripped through two Hudson County storefronts and a Kennedy Airport terminal Sunday night was also involved in the 1976 Washington murders of former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier and his aide, the FBI said yesterday.

Until the Sunday incidents, federal authorities had concluded Omega 7, which claimed responsibility for those three explosions and 14 other bombings during the past four years, was not intent on taking lives.

Yesterday, however, the FBI's criminal division in New York said it considers Jose Dionisio Suarez and Virgilio Pablo Paz, both fugitives in the Letelier case, as "prime suspects" in three bomb-

ings which occurred Sunday and intensified a search for them.

"It has now become obvious to the FBI and police departments that members of Omega 7 are willing to go to any lengths to promote the anti-Castro cause, regardless of how many lives may be lost," the FBI said.

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The federal authorities, however, said they had no physical evidence linking Suarez or Paz to the bombings which occurred about two hours apart Sunday night.

Three other Cuban exiles, who operated out of Hudson County, were sentenced Friday in Washington for the murders of Letelier and his aide, Ronni Moffet, a former Passaic resident, following

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a raucous trial conducted under stiff security.

Two of the men, Guillermo Novo Sampol and Alvin Rosa Diaz, were sentenced to consecutive life terms by a federal judge. Novo's brother, Ignacio, was given five years for lying to a grand jury in an attempt to cover up the assassination.

Letelier and Moffet were killed in Washington Sept. 19, 1976, when a bomb exploded in their car.

The Weehawken and Union City bombings occurred four minutes apart on Sunday.

The first device went off at 11:06 p.m. at the Almacen Pharmacia, 3600 New York Ave., Union City, blasting a hole in the floor and causing part of the ceiling to collapse.

The second explosion, at 11:10 p.m., tore through the leased office of the New Jersey Cuban Refugee Program at 4912 Park Ave., Weehawken, causing an estimated \$3,000 in damage.

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The airport explosion, two hours earlier, slightly injured four Trans World Airways baggage handlers when a bomb hidden in a suitcase went off.

Several hours after the blasts, men who spoke with Spanish accents called news agencies, stating that the sites were selected because they operate "in mutual agreement with the tyranny of Fidel Castro." They said "similar actions will continue."

For several hours yesterday, investigators theorized the bombing at Kennedy might have been a separate incident, prompted by a "love triangle" involving passengers aboard a departing plane. That theory was later discounted.

E. Juan Negrin, who heads the New Jersey Cuban Program headquartered in the bombed-out building in Weehawken, said yesterday that he had "expected trouble."

Negrin said he had received as many as 20 telephone threats from Cuban nationalists since returning from a one-week meeting with Cuban government officials last December. The negotiations, he said, resulted in the "freeing of some 3,000 political prisoners."

In hope of warding off trouble, Negrin said, he later arranged a meeting with several persons he suspected of being involved in the threats.

"I told them, 'You don't bother me, and I don't bother you,'" Negrin said. "But it didn't matter. Just look," he said, pointing to papers and glass strewn throughout the blownout storefront.

Negrin said he has helped about 75,000 Cubans emigrate to the United States since 1964, including about 500 since he

started the Cuban program seven months ago.

For a \$10 payment for monthly "dues," he said, about 250 program members receive assistance in "processing immigration papers and orientation."

He said about 300 prisoners Castro's government agreed to free in December "are here now and the rest are waiting to come in."

Asked if her were "pro-Castro," Negrin replied: "I am pro-American. I am negotiating with the Cuban government so that people can be reunited with their families and find jobs here."

Several of Negrin's associates characterized the nationalist group they believe responsible for the bombings as "crazy."

"If they want to fight and kill people they should do it in Cuba, not here," said one young man.

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Raphael Nogueras, owner of the Union City business that was bombed, was sweeping up rubble yesterday, but refused comment. Nogueras ships medicinal drugs to Cuba.

Edward Foley, who heads the FBI's criminal division in New York, said Omega 7 is a pseudonym used by members of the Cuban nationalist movement.

Foley said the explosion at the airport "represented a marked departure" from previous incidents because other Omega attacks had occurred at hours when there was little chance of injury.

The Kennedy blast was the second to occur at a New York airport in the past three years. Eleven persons were killed and 74 other persons were injured Dec. 29, 1975, when a bomb went off in a TWA baggage claim area at LaGuardia Airport.

Authorities said little is known about Omega 7, except that it is thought to operate from northeastern cities such as Union City where there are large Cuban populations.

The group surfaced in the early 1970s and so far has claimed responsibility for 17 bombings from New York to San Juan, including the Dec. 29 blast that rocked Avery Fisher Hall in New York City, where Cuban cultural groups were performing.

An FBI spokesman in New Jersey said Omega 7 also is believed responsible for a 1975 bombing at the Town and Campus restaurant in Union Township, where a pro-Castro speaker was addressing Cuban exiles during a dinner. No injuries resulted from that incident, he said.

Authorities said the group also is thought to be responsible for a bomb that exploded outside the Almacen Pharmacia's former office in Union City and that it may also have planted a bomb at the business' Elizabeth office which was discovered before it went off.

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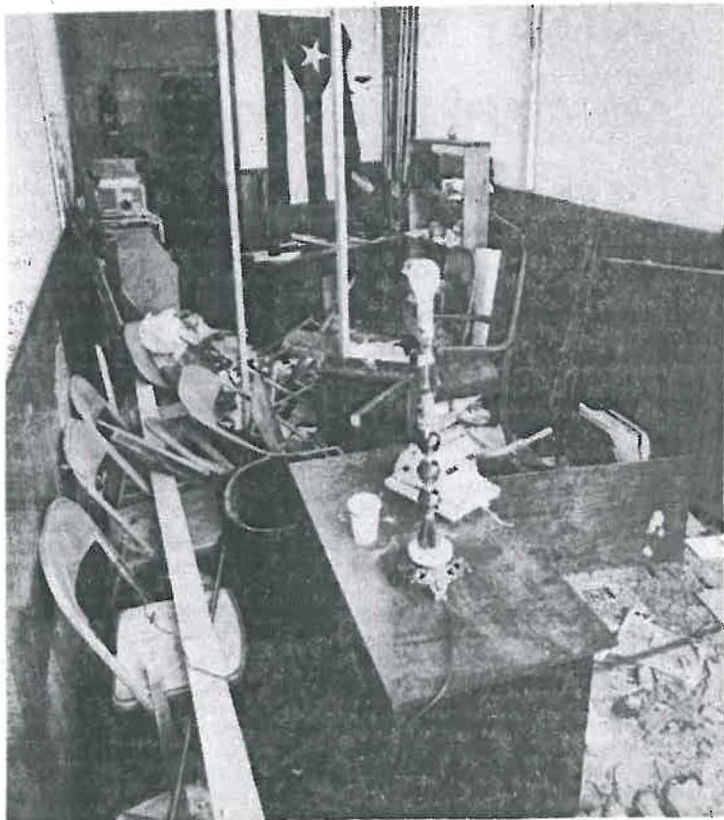


Photo by Richard Raska

The bomb blast at the Weehawken headquarters of the New Jersey Cuban Refugee Program on Park Avenue left the office a shambles