

# THE MIND OF THE

It is 16 years since Michael Townley planted his last bomb, and literally shook a nation's capital. Since then he has hidden from his enemies under a false identity. Now he has broken his long silence. PAUL EDDY met him in America to pose the question: how did a small-town boy from Iowa — intelligent, articulate and devoted to his parents — become a killer?



Townley was 17 and Mariana 26 when they met. He pursued and married her, and they embarked on a campaign of terrorism that led him to be named as 'the Murderer of Concepción'

# ASSASSIN



IN THE dead of night, Michael Vernon Townley enters a quiet suburban cul-de-sac like a thief. In the driveway of one of its unpretentious houses, he lies on his back alongside a blue Ford Chevelle. From underneath his sweat-shirt he retrieves an aluminium baking tray, bought that afternoon from a local branch of the Sears department store. It contains four pounds of TNT and a few ounces of more volatile *plastique*, which will enhance the intended explosion. The detonating cord — the fuse — is attached to an 'electric match', which is Townley's invention. He believes his match to be vastly superior to the conventional blasting cap. Nevertheless, a blasting cap is also present in Townley's package, wired in parallel, as insurance; Townley is nothing if not thorough.

The trigger is a 'beeper', a radio pager which has been adapted by Townley. He has removed the miniature speaker and replaced it with batteries bought from Radio Shack. Activated from

a distance by a low-frequency radio signal, the pager will no longer beep but instead produce an electrical charge powerful enough to 'light' Townley's match and detonate his bomb.

Lying alongside the Chevelle, Townley uses electrical insulating tape to attach the baking tray to a crossbeam directly beneath the driver's seat. He is a large man and has only a few inches of vertical space in which to work. Out of the corner of one eye he sees the tyres of an approaching car. Judging by its crackling radio messages, Townley can tell it is a prowling police car, but the occupants do not notice him. When they have gone, he breathes again and reaches for the switch that will arm the device, to discover he has inadvertently covered it with tape. Very carefully, he probes with his fingers to free the switch, acutely aware that if and when he succeeds he may release a latent charge that could prematurely detonate the bomb, and obliterate him. It is, so to speak, his main occupational hazard.

The bomb does not explode; not yet. His work done, Townley gets up from beside the Chevelle

and slips away into the darkness to begin a journey that will remove him as far as possible from the scene of the subsequent, ultimate crime, in accordance with his orders. Townley is the technician and the facilitator, not the button man. The task of transmitting the signal that will complete Townley's mission has been delegated to hired help.

The signal is sent — 'on 31.040 megahertz, if my memory serves me well,' says Townley — as the blue Chevelle enters Sheridan Circle, a roundabout on Washington DC's embassy row. The circle is crowded with morning rush-hour traffic, but Townley has designed his bomb so that most of its force will vent upwards in a narrow vertical band aimed at the driver, thus limiting what Townley calls 'collateral damage', and he has done his work well. The explosion removes a section of the floor, and the driver's legs. The remainder of the driver's body falls through the hole while the car is still in motion, the stumps of his thighs dragging on the tarmac leaving a trail of reddish-black grease. In no more than a few minutes, long before his would-



ALLIANCE'S HEAD OF ARMED FORCES, General Carlos Prats, lived in exile in Buenos Aires. Shortly after Townley travelled there, Prats and his wife were blown to pieces in this car

the service of his cause,' he says. 'I was a soldier in the service of mine.'

It all sounds like something from the pages of a spy novel, but Michael Townley, secret agent, is real enough. So were the bodies he caused to be buried.

ON FIRST meeting, at least, Townley fails to live up to any of the stereotypes of the professional assassin. He has been dubbed 'The Jackal', but only by headline writers who lack imagination and journalists who have never met him. Townley's emotional responses are far too ordinary — too banal — to allow comparison with Frederick Forsyth's cold-eyed creation; and anyway, unlike the Jackal, Townley was poorly

extradited to the United States and brought to account for it, he must remain in the shadows, hidden by a false identity, constantly on watch for his enemies who, in various ways, still seek their revenge.

They are numerous. They include the authorities of both Argentina and Italy, who wish to prosecute Townley for his alleged murderous activities in their respective countries; Cuban nationalists in New Jersey and Florida who did dirty work for Townley, who now feel betrayed by him; an assortment of right-wing European terrorists about whom Townley knows too much; the relatives of his victims, some of whom have obtained a judgment against him for \$6 million in civil damages which they cannot hope to collect unless they find him; and — not least — former members of DINA, the now-defunct Chilean Department of National Intelligence, which Townley served as an agent and assassin.

Above them all, however, stands one man: General Juan Manuel Contreras Sepúlveda, who was DINA's architect and chief conductor. There

AP, UPI/BETTMANN, MARCELO MONTECINO

## THE VICTIMS



Carlos Prats, commander of armed forces under Allende. Blown up in Buenos Aires

Former Chilean vice-president Bernardo Leighton and his wife. Shot in Rome. They survived

Orlando Letelier, vocal Pinochet critic. Blown up outside the Chilean embassy in Washington

Ronni Moffitt, passenger in Letelier's car. Died after shrapnel severed an artery

rescuers can cut him from the wreckage, the man bleeds dry.

However, for all Townley's careful planning and proficiency, his mission is not an unqualified success. Though his orders specified that the driver should be alone when the bomb was detonated, there are two passengers in the car, a man and his wife. The husband, sitting in the back of the car, escapes with superficial burns. His wife, the front seat passenger, is hit in the neck by a tiny piece of shrapnel that severs her carotid artery. Lying by the side of the road, watched by her frantic husband, she also bleeds to death, albeit more slowly than the driver.

For causing her death, Townley eventually says he is profoundly sorry. Speaking of the man he killed, he verbally shrugs. 'He was a soldier in

rewarded for his services. He would prefer comparison to one of John Le Carré's characters, or Adam Hall's Quiller: a soldier without a uniform who killed for his country — but the country Townley killed for was not his own, however much he wished it might have been. And yet Townley was no mercenary, nor a mindless fanatic. True, he believed in a cause, but not unthinkingly. He says he always questioned the order to kill: was there not another way to neutralise the enemy, he would ask his superiors.

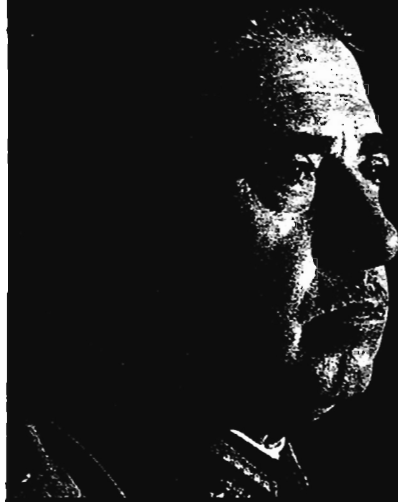
Even so, he did enough that he now drives his car with one eye permanently fixed on the rear-view mirror, and he never sits in a public place with his back to the door. Though it is 16 years this month since Townley caused the explosion in Sheridan Circle, and 14 years since he was

was a time when Townley near-idolised General Contreras; now, he says, he despises him, and it is safe to assume that the feeling is mutual.

Contreras was once the second most powerful man in Chile, second only to President Augusto Pinochet, whose military regime survived from 1973 until 1990 thanks, in large part, to DINA's quick and brutal suppression of any opposition. Today, because of Townley, Contreras faces trial in a now-democratic Chile, accused of ordering the Sheridan Circle bombing and, by implication, of waging an unauthorised 'dirty war' on those he perceived to be Chile's enemies.

But Townley cannot travel to Chile to testify against Contreras — not, in his view, with any real prospect of returning alive, for even in democratic Chile the general retains powerful

# THE BOSSES



President Augusto Pinochet, military dictator of Chile from 1973 to 1990



General Manuel Contreras, Pinochet's head of intelligence and Townley's boss



Colonel Pedro Espinoza, who lured

friends. Which is why earlier this year Townley emerged briefly from the shadows to talk publicly for the first time about his career. In order to 'set the record straight' about Contreras, he agreed to cooperate with a BBC1 television documentary — to be broadcast next Wednesday — and to talk to *The Telegraph Magazine*.

It turns out we have different agendas. His is to explain the historical and political context of what happened in Chile; to justify not what he did but why. Mine is to understand how an all-American boy from a small town in Iowa, of unexceptional background, who seems normal, who is articulate, intelligent, considerate of strangers, and devoted to his parents, his children and his dog, was persuaded to become a killer.

WE MEET one weekend in an airport Holiday Inn somewhere in America. Townley selected the hotel expecting it to be quiet, but this particular weekend it is hosting the regional heat of a teenage beauty contest, and the place is packed — a circumstance that allows Townley to dem-

onstrate his knack of blending in with any crowd; despite his physical size, he becomes almost invisible. In a lobby filled with excited pubescent girls and their solicitous parents, we sit unnoticed, talking quietly of murder and mayhem and debating what made Townley such a willing recruit for DINA. He shrugs off his decision to become an assassin to 'fate and happenstance'. I say it seems more like obsession.

It was not a convenient decision. Townley had just bought into a car transmission repair business with money borrowed from his father, and there was a new home and, by then, five children to support — but nothing would dissuade her. For Salvador Allende had just been elected president of Chile on an avowedly Marxist platform, the first Communist leader ever elected in Latin America; an event that caused upper and middle-class residents of Santiago to jam the road to the airport as they hastened to flee the country. Mariana shared their opposition to Allende but not their willingness to abandon Chile to its fate; to leave it to become, in her words, 'another Cuba'. She was, she told Townley, going home to fight the Communists.

Fight she certainly did. By the time Townley rejoined her on a permanent basis in Santiago almost a year later — having, in the interim, had a brief affair and contemplated both divorce and suicide — she was in the thick of a right-wing revolution aimed at overthrowing the Allende government by any means.

Though she had once flirted with Communism herself, and though she had lived on a kibbutz in Israel, and though most of her friends were writers and artists and distinctly bohemian, Mariana had joined Patria y Libertad, the 'Freedom and Fatherland' party, that took its inspiration from the Spanish fascist writer José Antonio Primo de Rivera, and threatened Allende with a campaign of 'White Terror'. The Townley home had become a nightly gathering place for young men and women, children of the middle classes — 'my boys,' as Mariana called them — who discussed and prepared an orgy of street violence.

Townley himself did not immediately join the revolution — or 'the resistance' as he prefers to call it — until, observing a street demonstration in a middle-class neighbourhood of Santiago, he saw riot police beat a frail old man with batons. 'It was so excessive, so outrageous,' he said. 'If you are looking for a genesis point when something went snap in me, I would say that was the moment.' A little jealous of the increasing amount of time Mariana was spending with 'her boys', and yet disdainful of their 'amateurism' as revolutionaries, Townley volunteered a contribution to the cause: the 'technically correct' formula for the manufacture of Molotov cocktails, otherwise known as petrol bombs.

The formula came from the pages of *The Anarchist's Cookbook*, the would-be revolutionary's How To manual published in America in the Sixties. Townley was a voracious reader of this and other more conventional technical journals, and despite his lack of higher education, had

ried, but though he had captured his prize, Townley was never certain of it. For the next 22 years, he says, he wondered 'when — not if — Mariana would leave me'. She was very much the dominant partner, or as Townley wryly puts it, he made all of the decisions about their lives 'except the important ones'. None was more important, in retrospect, than Mariana's abrupt declaration in September 1970 that she was leaving Miami, where the couple had lived for four years, to return to Chile.

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chemistry, as well as a Jack-of-all-trades understanding of computer and radio technology.

In the summer of 1972, Townley began turning theory into practice, filling bottles with the correct amounts of ingredients, many of them taken from Mariana's kitchen cupboards. 'It doesn't take much knowledge to make a Molotov cocktail,' says Townley. 'I just happen to make a better variety of one.'

Though empty bottles were hard to come by in a Chile then descending into economic chaos, the Townley home became a virtual bomb factory. He soon graduated to making larger bombs from stolen dynamite and TNT, one of which exploded in the compound of the Russian embassy in Santiago. Townley's bombs, planted or thrown by young Patria activists, gutted bus stations and blew up sections of railway line, further sabotaging the economy. His bomb-making skills became legendary in the party, as did his willingness personally to join the fray, which earned him the admiration of Mariana's 'boys'.

'He had this amazing flair for leadership,' she said. 'He was a good man to have around.' Townley admits he became intoxicated with the excitement of it all. Together with his step-daughter's boyfriend, he set fire to a government-controlled printing plant. Together with Mariana, he toured the streets of Santiago at night selecting targets: he driving, she, fearless, sitting in the back of the car, lighting Molotov cocktails and waiting until the last possible moment to hurl them out of the window.

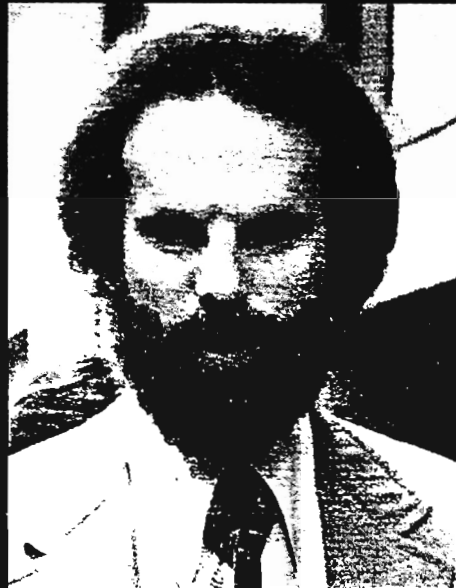
Townley says their aim was to cause destruction rather than death, but it was never likely that they could completely control the consequences of their actions. Ironically, the first death attributed to Townley was caused not by his explosives but by adhesive tape and rope used to gag and immobilise a vagrant found sleeping in a government-owned building in Concepción, south of Santiago. The man was tied up by Patria activists sent to sabotage radio jamming equipment, and he suffocated.

Though Townley was not present that night, he had planned the operation and been to Concepción to reconnoitre the target. When he came under suspicion by the police, and, for once, disregarding Mariana who urged him to stay and 'bluff it out', Townley fled Chile, by bus and on foot, walking across the mountains into Argentina, and returned to Miami.

A little over two months later, on June 9, 1973, *Puro Chile* became the first but not the last newspaper to brand Michael Townley as a killer. His photograph appeared on the front page, under the headline 'Murderer of Concepción', together with a story that described him as an agent of the American CIA. Mariana and the children hurriedly followed Townley to the United States.

Thus, none of the Townleys was present in Chile when the crowning moment of the revolution came three months later: when, on September 11, 1973, the Chilean military under the command of Augusto Pinochet overthrew the government, killed Allende and began a wholesale purge of 'leftists' in which thousands of people were imprisoned, kidnapped,

## THE LAWMEN



FBI agent Carter Cornick (top) and Assistant US Attorney Eugene Propper. Their stubborn detective work linked the Washington bomb to Townley

Mariana returned to Santiago on board the first commercial aircraft allowed to land when the airport reopened. Townley hesitated. Concerned that even in the new Chile he might still be wanted for 'the Concepción matter', he delayed his return until, by using a friend's birth certificate, he had obtained a new American passport that falsely identified him as Kenneth William Enyart. It was, as things turned out, a totally unnecessary act of deception.

COLONEL Pedro Espinoza, who would become second-in-command of the fearsome DINA, had

vant of the Allende government. He was an army intelligence officer who had spent much of 1973 attempting to track down a clandestine radio station that made brief nightly broadcasts to Santiago, taunting Allende with right-wing propaganda and patriotic songs. The station may have been difficult to track because it was located in the boot of Townley's Mini-Cooper, and Townley never broadcast from the same location twice — but then, as Espinoza told Townley when the American eventually returned to Chile, 'we didn't try very hard'.

They met by chance, or so it seemed, because the Townleys' new landlady in Santiago was Espinoza's lover. The colonel, who possesses great personal charm, courted Townley with scrupulous care, flattering him with compliments until Townley was captivated by him, much as a rabbit is mesmerised by a stoat. He expressed admiration for Townley's revolutionary activities, about which he knew a great deal, and appreciated his inventiveness in building bombs and the radio. Espinoza particularly admired the fact that Townley and Mariana had thought to work as a team, enabling them to pose as an energetic courting couple whenever a prowling police car had come across them at night and jeopardised their missions. He hinted that in the new Chile there was a need for people of such imagination.

'It was done very slowly, very gently,' says Townley, talking of Espinoza's courtship. 'It was: "Perhaps you could help us with this small favour?" Then it was: "Will you do this?" Then it was: "Please get this done".'

Townley was more than willing to be seduced. Though he remained an American citizen, he had adopted Chile as his own country and passionately believed in the need to defend it against 'international Marxists', even at the cost of 'stern measures' imposed by a 'benevolent dictatorship'.

According to official records, Townley and Mariana both became full-time agents of DINA on June 9, 1974 — which was two weeks before the department was officially established by presidential decree. Townley was issued DINA papers in the name of Andrés Wilson, Mariana under the alias of Ana Luisa Pizarro, and both were required to swear an oath of personal loyalty to their new boss, General Contreras.

They were under no illusions as to what was expected of them. Even before he became head of DINA, Contreras had acquired a reputation for exceptional brutality when, as a regional military governor in the aftermath of the coup, he had concluded a set of tiresome negotiations with five trade union leaders by shooting the men in the chest. Contreras was hand-picked by Pinochet to defend 'the new Chile', and Espinoza had warned the Townleys 'it will be war', for enemies of the new Chile were 'everywhere'.

The Townleys were given a large, comfortable house in a suburb of Santiago by DINA, which was to serve as both home and office, where Townley established the Centre for Technical Research and Development. He had ambitious plans to equip DINA with all of the technical gadgetry he believed it needed to carry out

fare, arrest and interrogation.

But there was a separate department of DINA called 'Foreign Operations' which soon had other needs of Townley — perhaps because in one respect he did bear a resemblance to Forsyth's Jackal: he was a foreigner, a man Chile could disown if necessary; in Forsyth's words 'an unknown and therefore nonexistent quantity'.

In late September, 1974, Townley, using the American passport of Kenneth Enyart, travelled to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where General Carlos Prats, former commander of Chile's armed forces under Allende, lived in exile with his wife, Sophia. Prats had announced his intention to write his memoirs. It was a safe bet they would not be flattering to General Pinochet, whom Prats regarded as a mediocre soldier.

On what would be the last day of their lives, General Prats and his wife drove out of Buenos Aires to lunch in the country, then returned to the city to spend the evening with friends. It was after midnight when they got back to the block of flats where they lived, and the general got out of their Fiat to open the garage door. He was just getting back into the car when a bomb exploded, the force of it hurling the entire bonnet of the Fiat on to the roof of a nine-storey building. The general, too, was hurled through the air, his right arm and leg severed. He died instantly when his head hit the pavement. Sophia Prats's grossly mutilated body was incinerated in the wreckage.

WE HAVE moved from the Holiday Inn to an Italian restaurant Townley knows, where the chef prepares the *calamari* in accordance with Townley's precise instructions. It arrives in a hot, blood-red tomato sauce which seems perversely appropriate, for we are discussing the morality of blowing up men and women in their cars.

Townley will not discuss the murder of the Prats — other than to say it is 'a matter of record' that he was in Argentina shortly before it occurred — but he does defend political assassination in the abstract as a sometimes 'necessary evil'. Every state recognises that fact, he argues, for every state — to a greater or lesser extent than Chile — has employed secret agents prepared to 'get their hands dirty' for the national good.

He lists some of those countries he says have engaged in dirty, secret wars: 'The Brits in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, the Germans, the Italians, the Israelis, the Turks, the Americans of course . . .' Does that make it right, I ask. 'No, but let's do away with the hypocrisy,' he says. 'Don't call the kettle black without admitting there are pots.'

I concede his point but press him on his definition of 'a necessary evil'. Did he believe that the end could ever justify the means when those means were cold-blooded murder? He hesitates before replying: 'I have to say it can.' What end? 'One death that prevents many others.' But

mainly of civilians, armed with nothing more lethal than anti-Pinochet rhetoric. 'Words,' says Townley, 'can kill.'

IN FEBRUARY of 1975, a number of prominent Chilean exiles prepared to fire a motherlode of words at the Pinochet regime by attending what they called the 'International Commission of Inquiry into the Crimes of the Military Junta in Chile' in Mexico City. Townley and Mariana were ordered by DINA to travel to Mexico and 'eliminate' as many of the attending 'enemies of Chile' as they could find.

Stopping off en route in the US, they made contact in Union City, New Jersey, with the Cuban Nationalist Movement. The CNM was a fervently right-wing group of exiles that, unable to do much about their nemesis Fidel Castro, took some comfort in aiding Chile's robust war on other 'Communists', in return for a promise

'It doesn't take much  
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I just make a  
better variety of one'

of mutual support. The CNM supplied the Townleys with explosives and the services of a Cuban assistant, Virgilio Paz, and the three of them set off by camper-van for Mexico. As it happened, they arrived too late to do any damage: the conference in Mexico City had ended and Chile's leading exiles had returned to Europe where most of them were based. But Townley, Paz and — later — Mariana followed them there, basing themselves in Madrid. For the next nine months, on and off, they gathered intelligence on the Chilean expatriate community and considered how best to terrorise it.

DINA selected as their principal target for assassination Carlos Altamirano, the secretary-general of the Chilean Socialist Party. But because he lived in Leipzig in what was then East Germany he proved too difficult to get at — though Townley repeatedly tried to intercept him whenever Altamirano ventured into Western Europe. Growing impatient for results, DINA substituted as a target Bernardo Leighton, the respected co-founder of Chile's Christian Democrat Party, who, since he lived in Rome, was much more accessible.

In the early evening of October 6, 1975, the 60-year-old Leighton and his wife, Anita, returned from a shopping trip, walking arm-in-arm along Via Aurelia, the narrow cobbled street where they lived, close to the walls of Vati-

save for one tall young man who walked up behind the Leightons and fired two shots at them with an automatic pistol. The first bullet hit Leighton in the back of the head. The second hit Anita in the shoulder as she turned to look at their assailant, who did not say a word. He ran away, leaving the couple lying on the pavement.

Miraculously, they both survived, but the bullet that hit Anita grazed her spine, leaving her semi-paralysed, and because of that her husband lost much of his will to continue the fight against the Pinochet regime. Other Chilean exiles were terrorised into silence. From DINA's point of view, therefore, 'Operation Open Season', as it was called, was a considerable success.

Townley did not personally shoot the Leightons; he could not have done so because he left Rome before it happened, heading for the Austrian-Italian border. But though he will not talk about his involvement 'at this time', there is little doubt that he caused it, sub-contracting the job to a neo-fascist terrorist group in Rome which, among other things, is generally held responsible for the 1980 bombing of Bologna railway station in which 85 people died.

Not long after the shooting of the Leightons, ten members of the group, including its leader, arrived in Santiago and stayed at the Townleys' home for weeks. According to Mariana they were 'strange, strange people' who brought with them their own cook. 'He bothered me immensely,' she told the BBC. 'I never had the chance to go into my own kitchen because he was forever stirring the sauce.'

By then Mariana had become thoroughly disillusioned with DINA. The assassinations she and Townley were ordered to carry out no longer seemed rational to her. 'Every time that something happened, they [DINA] would give me what they thought was an excellent reason for doing things. Actually they all sounded like awful lies; like exaggerations or just plain lies.' While the couple were in Europe she asked Townley to get another job, 'for us to leave, to go someplace else'. But, she says, 'Michael was already entrapped. He was the fly fallen into the spider's web.'

And there was at least one more very prominent Chilean exile DINA wanted dead.

THE ASSASSINATION of Orlando Letelier was to take place in Washington DC and was supposed to look like a mugging. Colonel Espinoza, who passed Townley his orders, thought it amusing that, given that city's high crime rate, the murder would go almost unnoticed; just one more item on the police blotter. It did not turn out that way, of course. It would prove to be Townley's undoing, and eventually it would cause the downfall of DINA, Espinoza and even General Contreras.

Letelier was targeted because he failed to heed a warning. Having served the Allende government as ambassador to Washington, then foreign minister, then, in the final days, defence minister, he was arrested during the military coup and imprisoned for two days short of a year. Released only because of international pressure on September 9, 1974, he was sent into exile

with the stern admonishment that the Pinochet government would not tolerate his interference.

But Letelier was incapable of keeping quiet. For the next two years, based in Washington where he worked for the Institute of Policy Studies, Letelier worked tirelessly to undermine the military regime with his fiery, eloquent speeches. Less than two weeks before he died, he was the keynote speaker at a rally held in Madison Square Garden, New York, to commemorate the third anniversary of the overthrow of Allende. 'In the name of our dead ones,' his speech began. He went on to describe the Pinochet government as 'the most repressive regime the world has known since the destruction of fascism and Nazism in Europe'. By then, Townley was already in America, arranging to have him killed.

He chose to use a bomb because, although Espinoza had told him to carry out the assassination as innocuously as possible, he had also said 'the main thing is to get it done'. Once again, Townley turned to his fanatical Cuban friends for help and they provided the explosives and two assistants — but only on one condition: that Townley not only build the bomb, but also plant it himself. 'They wanted the hand of Chile directly involved,' says Townley.

So it was that on a September night in 1976, Townley lay flat on his back in the driveway of Letelier's home in Bethesda, Maryland, attaching his bomb to the underside of a blue Chevelle. Was he nervous? 'I can barely recall any of the details,' he says. What he does recall is his reac-

tion when he learned that his Cuban accomplices had chosen to detonate the bomb not on a quiet stretch of suburban road as they were supposed to do but on Sheridan Circle, directly outside the Chilean embassy: 'Perhaps it was very smart, because that way nobody would ever believe that the Chileans would be dumb enough to have done it.'

Unfortunately for Townley, two very stubborn men — an Assistant US Attorney named Eugene Propper and the FBI case agent, Carter Cornick — came to believe precisely that and, though it took nearly 18 months, they built a case strong enough to demand Townley's extradition from Chile. In March 1978, for the second time in his life, Townley saw his own picture on the front page of a Chilean newspaper under a headline that branded him a killer. Even so, he did not really believe the Chilean government would hand him over to the Americans. After all, he was a soldier who had merely obeyed orders. He had done what he did for the state — or had he?

Townley was hustled out of Chile with no due process in April 1978. It was on the aircraft that took him back to the United States in handcuffs that Townley first began to believe what is now his firm conviction: that much of what he did for DINA was *not* authorised by the Pinochet government. He now believes that the dirty war in which he fought was the personal campaign of General Contreras who thus 'betrayed me, the institution he belonged to, and his country'. He wants Contreras to admit that he, and

nobody else, gave the order for — among other things — the assassination of Letelier, and to take his medicine. Until he does, says Townley, it is Chile that suffers in terms of its international prestige and reputation because 'Contreras has passed off his own guilt on to an entire nation'.

Contreras seems unlikely to oblige. Under questioning by a judge in Santiago, he has denied any knowledge of Letelier's assassination. Indeed, he continues to insist, as he has all along that Townley was never a DINA agent; that, as a foreigner, he could not have been.

Betrayed and disowned by his general, Townley lives alone with his guilt. 'There is nothing I can do to change what happened,' he says. 'I can go insane. I could kill myself... But life goes on.'

IN 1979 Michael Vernon Townley pleaded guilty to the murders of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt, the young woman who also died in the Sheridan Circle bombing. In return for co-operating with US authorities and testifying against his Cuban co-conspirators, he was given a reduced sentence of ten years imprisonment. He was released on parole after serving a little more than three years, and began his life in hiding. Mariana lives in Chile where she is an accomplished writer. She left Townley in 1983 — as he always knew she would.

Inside Story: The Assassin, written and directed by Christopher Oigati, will be broadcast on BBC1 on Wednesday at 9.30pm

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