

Unmasking of a master terrorist: Omega 7's 'Omar' is on the run

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By JIM MCGEE
Herald Staff Writer

Eduardo Arocena speaks softly but with passion. He prefers three-piece suits, does not drink or smoke and is unfailingly polite with his neighbors. He has been trained in karate, enjoys the music of Wagner and is known as a family man.

Omar lives in a world of patriots and traitors. He makes bombs, orders assassinations and writes cryptic communiques. He is the mastermind of Omega 7, a stern jefe who trains subordinates with care and believes that Communists deserve

Omega 7: The Face of Terror

death. He is wanted by the FBI.

Eduardo Arocena is Omar. Omega 7 is his creation. Miami, where he has lived quietly with his wife and two children, is his base of operations.

Those are the conclusions of law enforcement authorities who consider him America's most dangerous anti-Castro terrorist.

"Omega 7 is a small, cellular group headed by Eddie Arocena," acknowledged FBI Deputy Assist-

ant Director Kenneth Walton, who heads a New York-based anti-terrorism task force. "... Arocena is Omar."

Omega 7 has claimed responsibility for more than 30 bombings and two assassinations. Three more bombings occurred last week in Miami. Despite heavy pressure from the FBI, the group continues to operate with impunity.

Arocena is currently on the run. He disappeared into the terrorist

underground in October after he was named in an arrest warrant issued after an FBI affidavit said he and four associates tried to kill Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations in 1980.

"I haven't got the slightest idea what it could be about," Arocena said in August, after receiving a subpoena for a New York grand jury investigating Omega 7.

There is clearly more to the federal grand jury investigation in New York than that single bombing attempt: "We're talking about 30

Please turn to OMEGA / 16A

WANTED by the FBI



Name: Eduardo Arocena

Age: 39

Height: 5' 6"

Hair: Brown

Eyes: Blue

Sought on a charge of interstate transportation of explosives in connection with a March 25, 1980, attempt to murder Cuba's envoy to the United Nations.

Omega 7: The Face of Terror

FBI ^{Matter 16A col 1} ^{16 Jan 83} pressure fails to silence Omega 7

This report is the first in a continuing series of articles based on a Herald investigation of anti-Castro terrorism, the activities of Cuban intelligence agents and the response of American authorities.

OMEGA / From 1A

bombings and two murders," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Tabak.

Until now, Arocena's status as the nation's preeminent anti-Castro terrorist has been a closely guarded secret.

"He [Arocena] started Omega," said a Justice Department official. "He is probably the most dedicated patriot in the Cuban field that the law enforcement community has ever experienced in seven years of bombings and murders."

Last week, three Miami-area businesses were the targets of bombs fashioned from C-4 plastic explosive, a battery and a timing device. Police recovered one of the bombs intact and say it is similar to others claimed by Omega 7.

'We are back again'

"What's happening is Miami is becoming a war zone," said Police Sgt. Edward Buff, a bombing investigator.

Tuesday's bombings come at a time when Arocena is under increasingly heavy pressure from the FBI. The bombs were accompanied by a communique signed by "Omar, Chief of Commandos, Omega 7."

It referred to "abuses" by a federal grand jury in New York that has been aggressively investigating Omega 7 and to the FBI, which has sought to arrest Arocena.

The note concluded with this chilling warning: "The new betrayal awoke Medusa. We are back again."

During the late 1970s, Arocena

operated from New Jersey, say officials who have studied Omega 7, and his primary targets were in Manhattan.

At the time, he worked for the Newark Waterfront Commission as a longshoreman, the trade he learned as a young man in Cuba.

"He was an honest man," said Salvador Rassi, his supervisor at the port. Arocena often practiced karate, Rassi said, and enjoyed the classical music of Wagner, Beethoven and Chopin.

At night and on his days off, officials allege, Arocena trained and directed a small band of terrorists and also served as a kind of chief executive officer to the suspected ruling council of Omega 7.

Throughout the late 1970s, the Omega 7 operation in New Jersey ran smoothly. The name Omar was widely feared in Cuban communities. The FBI was fooled by what amounted to a clever disinformation campaign.

Operation moves south

In the final months of 1980, however, Arocena made a decision that would later touch Little Havana. Apparently as a result of pressure from the highly regarded FBI-New York Police Department anti-terrorism task force, he moved south.

Arocena quit his job as a longshoreman and moved with his wife, Miriam, to Miami. They bought a \$90,000 home at 10001 SW 14th Ter., near Florida International University. He set up Beta Import-Export, working from a modest office at 1937 NW 22nd St.

Beta's office space is now a tailor's shop.

"They left this place," said the new tenant.

Arocena's neighbors in Miami say he was often seen playing baseball with his two children, a boy and a girl, and caring for the family pet, a small black and white spotted dog. When he left for work in the morning, they said, he was always neatly

attired in a suit and tie.

He was "close to his children, you could see that," said Juana Carrandi, who lives next door. "He seemed a good person. . . . Eduardo was a family man, one who brings everything home for his family. He liked to be home."

Another neighbor said she once thought Arocena was a car dealer because "every day he would come home in a different car" and he seemed to travel frequently.

"He didn't talk at all, outside of saying hello," she said. "[He was] very serious, very reserved."

Arocena's wife declined to comment.

"Pretend that I am widowed or divorced," she said. "I don't want to be bothered any more. . . . Go ask the FBI."

Second exile to Miami

Like many Cuban exiles during the so-called 1980 Freedom Flotilla, Arocena reportedly traveled by boat to the port of Mariel in an effort to help a relative leave Cuba.

About the same time Arocena moved south, a second exile, who investigators allege worked closely with Arocena in New Jersey, also moved to Miami. Pedro Remon left behind a job with a freight company and was hired as a sales representative with Ryder Truck Lines in Miami.

Since the move, officials who have studied Cuban terrorism have concluded that Omega 7's center of gravity has shifted to Miami, that South Florida has become the new setting for Arocena's anti-Castro rage.

"You're having actions and we aren't," Walton said from his New York FBI office. ". . . We [in New York] have not eradicated these people. We have exported them."

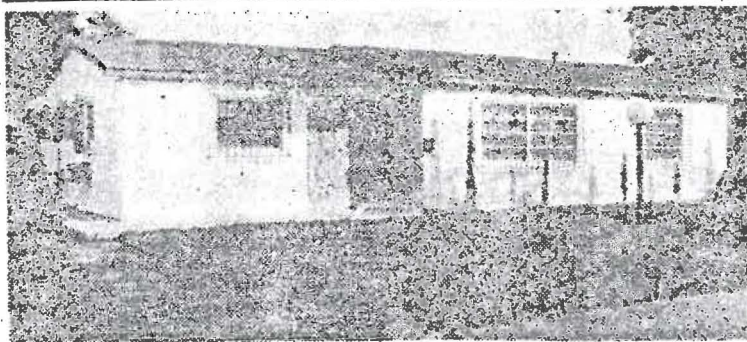
The latest rash of bombings in Miami suggests that the work of the federal grand jury has neutral-

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Eduardo Arocena



Eduardo Arocena, 39, of 10001 SW 14th Ter., has operated Beta Import-Export of Miami for nearly two years. Born in Cuba, he spent much of the last decade in Newark, N.J., working as a longshoreman. FBI officials say he is a leading figure in Omega 7, a secret anti-Castro terrorist organization that has claimed responsibility for more than 30 bombings and murders. He is currently a fugitive from federal charges that he participated in a plan to kill the Cuban ambassador to the United Nations. Arocena has publicly denied any knowledge of Omega 7.



BRUCE GILBERT / Miami Herald Staff

Eduardo Arocena's home at 10001 SW 14th Ter., near Florida International University. *Martin Hejans*

ized only a single, now-inactive cell of the original Omega 7.

Officials say that Tuesday's bombings suggest that there may be other cells of Omega 7 in South Florida and that Arocena's ability to strike appears undiminished.

"It is obvious we don't know the whole [Omega] plan and what he's got access to," said one official. "If it is as bad as we think it is, he's got a pretty long arm."

Arocena at all levels?

Investigators now believe Omega 7's structure probably resembles a pyramid, with Arocena at the top, followed by a ruling council of which he is a member, followed by several "cells" or close-knit groups of "action members." Estimates of the size range from a handful of Arocena loyalists to more than 100 secret supporters.

Whatever the structure, investigators say, it appears that Arocena works at all levels, taking part in the planning, financing and training and the building and placing of bombs.

"Omega 7 is anywhere [Arocena] takes off his three-piece suit," Walton said.

The contradictions that surround his life are characteristic of recurring themes within the anti-Castro movement. They combine a passionate Cuban nationalism with a coldblooded appetite for violence.

Details of his youth in Cuba are sketchy. He was born on Feb. 26, 1943, to a family in the province of Las Villas. He is remembered as self-effacing and a quiet youth, a bit of a loner who gained local recognition as an amateur wrestler.

He was 15 the year Fidel Castro came down from the Sierra Maestra.

In 1965, Arocena stowed away on a cargo ship. His journey into exile led first to Morocco, then Spain and finally to New York, where he arrived in 1966 aboard the cargo ship the SS Independence.

Ernesto Rodriguez, now retired in Miami, was a friend of Arocena's in New Jersey. He said that the longshoreman was an avid student of Cuban history and that together they would often visit bookstores in Elizabeth, N.J.

"To me, he is not a terrorist," Rodriguez said. "To me, he is a patriot. A working man. A good friend. A good Cuban. . . . I don't believe that he is a murderer. He is a man of family."

Observed exile leaders

Arocena was, it seems, always an anti-Communist. During his early

years in the United States, he reportedly circulated among various anti-Castro exile groups and impressed his associates as a quiet and studious observer of exile leaders.

"He sat in the background and watched them make asses of themselves," said one source familiar with Arocena's early life. "He saw their mistakes and he capitalized on them."

During the period leading up to the mid-1970s, it appears that Arocena also studied the art of mayhem, learning most of what he knows about making bombs from manuals that were commercially available.

People who have met Arocena say he projects a compelling sense

of physical power and personal dignity. He can be persuasive when he speaks of "the cause," but is not a braggart and rarely gives rein to his emotions.

"He has got absolutely total tunnel vision," Walton said. "His entire life has to do with Omega 7. Obviously. He left his family. He's on the run."

"[Arocena] is a very erudite, articulate, dedicated anti-Communist Cuban. [But] he's got his head screwed on wrong. . . . What he does is build bombs and shoot people. That doesn't make him a romantic folk hero. He's a killer and a bomber."

Arocena's personal habits are said to be spartan. He scorns drink-

ing, womanizing and drug abuse and demands an unswerving commitment to his personal crusade against Fidel Castro.

"He [Arocena] is not your typical Latin," said a source familiar with Arocena. "There is one Arocena in every 5,000 Cuban exiles."

Officials who have made a career of investigating Omega 7 record its birth sometime in late 1974. Law enforcement sources say they believe it stemmed from Arocena's frustration with the lethargy of the anti-Castro movement.

Attack pattern the same

The first recorded attack was on Feb. 1, 1975, when a bomb was placed at the Venezuelan mission to the United Nations. From that opening salvo to last Tuesday's bombings in Little Havana, the pattern has been basically the same.

Omega 7 would rise up from

working-class Cuban neighborhoods, attack the symbols of their anti-Communist hatred, then disappear into a frightened, tightly knit community where witnesses don't talk and victims don't remember.

Their targets have included Cuban diplomats, exiles who favored a dialogue with Fidel Castro, nations that are friendly with Havana, and airlines that scheduled flights to the island nation. Three men have been killed.

Bombs are their weapon of choice, but they have also used machine guns. An Arocena-planned attack, investigators say, is typically well thought out and skillfully executed. No innocent bystander has ever been seriously injured.

"They are more professional than some of the other [terrorist] groups," said Walton, whose task force is credited with pioneering innovative law enforcement strategies against terrorism. "Their targets indicate a higher degree of selectivity."

Omega 7's most dramatic attack was the Dec. 11, 1979, bombing of the Soviet Mission to the U.N. It caused a diplomatic furor. The most vicious was the shooting of Committee of 75 member Eulalio Negrin in front of his 12-year-old son.

They also took responsibility for trying to intimidate a major Spanish language newspaper, El Diario La Prensa, and were blamed for a harassment campaign against a Roman Catholic priest who favored the dialogue with Cuba.



16 Jan 83 Manta 16A MARICE COHN / Miami Herald Staff
Miami officer puts parts of defused bomb in bag at Replica Magazine office.

Linked to other groups

In the past, law enforcement officials have ventured several theories on Omega 7. Earlier this year, FBI Director William Webster testified that Omega 7 was the "action arm of the Cuban Nationalist Movement [CNM]." Others claimed it was an umbrella organization for all exile groups.

"That's what we thought [referring to the CNM connection]," said Arthur Nehrbaas, commander of the Metro-Dade Police Organized Crime Bureau and a former head of the Miami FBI office. "It's not true."

The CNM is a dangerous anti-Castro group with ties to Miami and it has been linked to such notorious acts as the assassination of former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Lete-

Miami Cubans at the Canadian border.

One was Ramon Sanchez, a Miami exile who has long been associated with anti-Castro revolutionary causes. The other was Pedro Remon, 38, then an unknown quantity to law enforcement.

Telephone toll records later reflected frequent calls between Remon's telephone number and Arocena's, according to an FBI affidavit. That link reportedly led agents to focus on Arocena.

In October, warrants were issued for Arocena and Remon after an FBI affidavit said both had participated in the March 25, 1980, attempted bombing of a Cuban diplomat.

After their arrival in Miami, Remon and Arocena apparently parted ways, according to various sources. Each has denied knowing the other or having worked together.

Remon for his part appeared to prosper, but remained a key suspect in the Omega 7 investigation. In July, Sanchez said he and Remon discovered an FBI eavesdropping device in Remon's car.

"They [the FBI] have been trying to connect us with some of the killings and bombings in New York and Canada," said Sanchez, who said he was speaking on Remon's behalf. He said he and Remon, who are both members of the Organization for the Liberation of Cuba, are not members of Omega 7.

Two issues unresolved

Both Remon and Sanchez are now in a New York jail on contempt charges for refusing to answer grand jury questions. Remon is on temporary leave from Ryder Truck Lines, where he is remembered as a good salesman and sharp dresser who never discussed politics.

"He did a good job for us," said Ryder supervisor Lewis Dixon.

As a result of the grand jury's work, officials now believe the original Arocena-trained Omega 7 cell in New Jersey has been crippled.

But at least two issues remain unresolved.

Defense attorneys representing suspected Omega 7 members say that wiretaps were authorized under the foreign internal security act but that the Justice Department won't say why.

Walton acknowledges: "There is obviously an international connection as it applies to Omar and Omega 7 . . . intelligence, acquisi-

tion of explosives, firearms, transportation, false identity, passports, perhaps even money."

Sources familiar with the investigation say there are indications that Arocena has developed extensive contacts among right-wing groups in Argentina and other South American countries.

If they exist, such links would be reminiscent of the relationship that surfaced between the CNM and the Chilean secret police after the assassination of Letelier.

The second issue is less complicated but more important to Miami. Omar remains free.

Herald Staff Writers Jay Ducassi, John MacCormack and Neil Brown also contributed to this report.

liar. But the CNM was never Omega 7, officials now say. The connection was camouflage.

"Omega 7 . . . is a separate entity," Walton said. "And the connection with CNM, if there is any connection at all, is probably ethnic rather than philosophical."

"They [Omega 7] permitted Armando Santana [a CNM leader] and his brothers to imply a connection in order to confuse law enforcement. And they were very successful."

Law enforcement sources say two characteristics set Arocena apart from other exile terrorists and help explain his success: He has never sought personal recognition for what he views as revolutionary activities and he has generally refused to work with the CIA.

"[Arocena] is very dedicated," said a veteran terrorism investigator. "... He thinks it is the only way to fight."

Much of the FBI's evidence against Arocena and other Omega 7 members remains concealed by grand jury secrecy. But there are some clues to how his New Jersey operation came unraveled.

On Dec. 22, 1980, a powerful blast rocked the Cuban Embassy in Canada. Within hours of that bombing, say investigators, a U.S. Border Patrol official stopped two