

Key murder trial witness a terrorist

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An anti-Castro radical who in 1969 had his right hand blown off while attempting to bomb a Hialeah factory is the key state witness against seven associates accused of conspiring to murder outspoken Cuban exile Luciano Nieves.

William Salon, a 36-year-old Bay-of Pigs veteran, "is the man who put the case together for us," according to Assistant State Attorney Ed O'Donnell.

Salon, a convicted felon, is named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the case in which police said members of Pragmatistas, a right-wing, anti-Castro group plotted to kill Nieves because he favored peaceful co-existence with Castro.

A state indictment handed down two weeks ago charges that Salon, a former prominent member of Pragmatistas, con-

spired with Jesus Lazo, Valentin Hernandez, Jose Patricio Rodriguez, Jose Nazin Elias, Raul Hernandez, Hector Carbonell, Enrique Velasco, Guido Carillo and Jesus Gonzalez-Cartas from Oct. 1, 1974 through Feb. 22, 1975, to kill the 43-year-old Nieves. Gonzalez-Cartas was killed by terrorist bullets five months ago.

Only Lazo and Valentin Hernandez are charged with murdering Nieves Feb. 21, 1975 in the parking lot of Variety Children's Hospital where Nieves had taken his ailing son.

Carbonell and Velasco, who accused police of beating them after they were arrested Oct. 13, have repeatedly denied taking part in any conspiracy or being members of Pragmatistas.

O'Donnell said Salon "got all the information from Lazo and Hernandez the day it (the murder) happened and from other people, too.

"The whole case rises and falls on him (Salon) as far as the conspiracy is concerned," O'Donnell said. He added Salon is also an important witness in the murder case, but that he had nothing to do with shooting Nieves.

O'Donnell said Salon, who has been given immunity in the case, was a member of Pragmatistas and was "an active conspirator" against Nieves. Salon, he said, is now in the federal witness protection program and the state reimburses the federal government for that cost.

"He has a new identity and he's long gone, but he will be back for the trial," the assistant chief of the major crimes division said.

O'Donnell said Salon has "contractual immunity" from prosecution.

He said Salon "has agreed to do certain things in exchange for certain things. If he

fails to do them then the contract is off and we could prosecute him."

As part of the agreement with Salon, the state on Thursday declined to prosecute Salon on a Sept. 13 charge of possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

As an unemployed ambulance driver, Salon on Nov. 30, 1969 had his right hand blown off when a hand grenade he was carrying exploded prematurely at the strike-bound General Electric Apparatus Service Shop, 1062 E. 28th St. Hialeah.

Police theorized at the time that Salon had planned to use the grenade to set off a bomb he had placed at the door of the factory.

Salon told investigators he was hired to bomb the plant and planned to use the money to fight Castro.

Salon turned state's evidence in that case, and in 1971 was put on five-years probation.