

Morales going for gun when he was shot, attorney says

RICHARD MAUER
Miami News Reporter

*Miami News 2/28/83
6083 SA*

The man who is the prime suspect in the slaying of admitted terrorist and police informant Ricardo (Monkey) Morales is a 53-year-old apprentice private detective with a long involvement in the gun business in Dade County.

Orlando Torres, whose last address appearing in public records is a townhouse in Key Biscayne from which he was evicted in October for non-payment of rent, was questioned by Metro police last week in Morales' slaying.

Torres has not been charged. His attorney, Michael Von Zamft, said he didn't think Torres would be charged. Morales was shot in self-defense, Von Zamft said, calling it a "justifiable homicide."

"My understanding is that he (Morales) was going for an ankle holster," said Von Zamft. "Mr. Morales went for his gun, which resulted in Mr. Morales being shot."

Morales was shot at about midnight Dec. 20 in Cherries, a Key Biscayne bar in Rogers-on-the-Green, a restaurant leased from Dade County by Rogelio Novo, 59.

Police have maintained since the shooting that it was the result of a "typical barroom argument" and not related to Morales' intrigue-ridden past.

Morales, 42, is best known as the key informant in the Miami police drug investigation known as Operation Tick-Talks. The case was thrown out of court last fall after a judge ruled that Morales — on whose tips the



Morales

wiretap warrant was issued — could not be trusted.

Morales, an admitted drug trafficker and informant for a variety of intelligence and police agencies, had admitted playing a role in numerous bombings, including an in-flight explosion in 1977 aboard a Cuban airliner that resulted in the deaths of all 73 on board.

"You can be assured that the man who is credited with that act (of shooting Morales) will end up with more fame than the man who shot Liberty Valence," said one Miami attorney familiar with Morales and the cast of characters — both enemies and friends — that had surrounded him.

Von Zamft declined to say whether Torres admitted any role in the killing, but said his client would turn himself in if he was named in an arrest warrant.

"Mr. Torres is not fleeing," Von Zamft said. "If a warrant was issued for his arrest, he would surrender in court. At this time, I'm not expecting one."

In his application for an intern detective license filed on Aug. 5, Torres listed two gun shops as previous employers — National Gun Traders, from 1969 to 1978, and Lawman Inc., from 1978 to 1980. Both have gone out of business, he said.

State records list two Miami policemen as directors of Lawman — Sgt. Edward Westby and officer Albert Herr.

Westby, a former narcotics officer, now works with the city's marine patrol. He confirmed that Torres once worked for him, but wouldn't answer other questions. An attempt to interview Herr by phone was interrupted when Westby came on the line, said he was Herr's superior officer, and would not permit

a reporter to talk with Herr.

In recent interviews, Metro homicide detectives said it is possible Morales' death will be ruled justifiable. But they also said charges might be brought in the case.

The assistant state attorney in charge of the case, Sam Rabin, said it may be presented to the Dade County grand jury. Except for a few details, Metro police have finished their investigation and have turned it over to the state attorney's office.

Early in the investigation, Metro homicide Capt. Donald Matthews termed Novo the "more likely suspect." But last week, Matthews said Novo was no longer a suspect.

Novo's attorney, Roy Black, said Novo was first suspected when Nancy Cid, who accompanied Morales to the bar, identified the restaurateur as the shooter. But Black said Cid later retracted that statement.

In a divorce suit filed last year in Dade County against her husband Juan Cid, Nancy Cid said her husband was a secret partner in Rogers-on-the-Green. Juan Cid has denied that.

Juan Cid and Novo appear together in another document: as personal references in Torres' detective application.

Black said Novo knew Torres as a customer. He said there was no business relationship between the two, and volunteered that Torres had never been Novo's bodyguard.

Metro homicide Sgt. Frank Wesolowski declined to comment on any statement made by Torres, Cid, or

any other witness.

In earlier interviews, police and prosecutors confirmed they had spoken to Torres. They say someone has admitted firing the shot that killed Morales, but they wouldn't say who it is.

Metro homicide detectives have maintained since the start of their investigation that the shooting was a "typical bar fight." Though Morales' past has fueled speculation that his killing was not a spur-of-the-moment event, the detectives say witness' statements don't support that theory.

Both police and Von Zamft acknowledge the investigation has taken a long time to complete for a run-of-the mill barroom shooting.

Von Zamft said the length of time

was partly due to extra care police were taking due to Morales' reputation and the great public interest in the case. He also said Morales' connection with "certain" police officers whom he worked for as a confidential informant also created problems for homicide investigators.

Wesolowski said the delay was partly attributed to problems in identifying the witnesses. Most fled the bar as soon as the single shot was fired, the detective said.

In addition, some key witnesses insisted on talking to their attorneys before they talked to police, Wesolowski said. Prosecutor Rabin said that's "unusual, no question that it's unusual."