

Tuesday

Probers say anti-Castro groups linked

Combined Miami News Services

WASHINGTON — For five years, the FBI and police have been on the trail of two anti-Castro Cuban exile terrorist organizations calling themselves Omega 7 and Cero (Zero) Group. Now officials say they have evidence the two groups are decoy names for the Cuban Nationalist Movement (CNM).

The discovery last week is a major breakthrough, said officials investigating terrorist incidents attributed to the groups.

The incidents include three in the Miami area: the bomb-murder of Cuban exile leader Rolando Masferrer in October 1975, the assassination of exile leader Jose Elias de la Torre in Coral Gables in April 1974, and the maiming of WQBA radio commentator Emilio Milian, who lost both legs in a bomb blast in 1976.

They also include the near-fatal shooting of Chilean politician Bernardo Leighton in Rome in October 1975 and the bomb explosion last month in luggage about to be loaded on a plane at Kennedy International Airport.

Responsibility in each case was claimed by Omega 7 or Cero Group. Cero claimed responsibility for the Milian case, the shooting of Leighton, the murder of Masferrer and the killing of de la Torre.

Omega 7 claimed to have carried out the airport bombing and two others a week ago Sunday, one at the New Jersey Cuban Refugee Program office in Weehawken, N.J., and the other at a Union City, N.J., pharmacy.

Investigators in Miami say they know of connections between Omega 7 and the Cuban Nationalist Movement but have no evidence to warrant prosecution or documentation that the groups have common memberships.

Felipe Rivero, founder and ideological leader of the CNM, said here last night the CNM is dormant and has not engaged in militant acts for several years.

He denied Omega 7 and Cero are affiliated with CNM.

"That's a theory like any other theory," said Rivero, 54, a Miami car salesman.

Rivero, a Bay of Pigs veteran, said CNM has members in several cities. He declined to elaborate.

The group stopped its militant actions several years ago, he said, when the Justice Department began pressuring U.S.-based anti-Castro groups to abandon overseas terrorism.

The CNM was formed in 1959 and was the first exile anti-Castro group to take credit for bombing Castro targets around the world. The CNM claimed responsibility for the 1966 bazooka attack on the United Nations building where Ernesto (Che) Guevara was speaking, and the 1966 bazooka attack on the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa.

During the recent trial of three CNM members convicted in the Orlando Letelier murder in Washington, Omega 7 stickers were pasted on walls in the federal courthouse and the Omega 7 symbol was drawn with lipstick on a women's room wall.

Now investigators believe the Omega 7-Cero Group gambit was a decoy to take some of the heat off the CNM. They claim evidence shows the two terrorist groups and CNM are identical, explaining why FBI and police had never been able to find membership lists for Cero Group or Omega 7.

FBI officials refused to comment, but one veteran investigator of domestic terrorism said, "CNM and the fictional organizations Cero Group and Omega 7 are the same."

The new evidence is based on documents and information from informants, sources say.

In July 1976, New York police caught two alleged CNM members at Lincoln Center in the act of trying to plant a bomb. They were Alfredo Chumaceiro, 26, and Armando Santana, 27. They also got the license number of a car circling the block and traced it to Jose Dioniso Suarez, whose apartment investigators searched. A letter was found there marked with the figure "7" written backward seven times followed by a minus sign with the figure "7" inside a large "0" followed by another minus sign and a 7 and the

mystifying end, "equalCero."

Last week, an investigator determined the inscription in the Suarez letter meant Cero Group and Omega 7 were one and the same. Sources say it then became apparent, because of the known membership in CNM, that all three organizations were identical.

Asked why the terrorists would leave their calling cards, along with evidence that the supposedly peaceful CNM used its members for acts attributed to Omega 7 and Cero Group, a source close to the investigation said:

"They're just stupid, I guess, but until we made the connection, they had us looking all over the place for groups that don't exist."

Investigators say Michael Townley sought out Rivero in 1976 when Townley first came to the United States on a mission for Chile's secret police to recruit Cuban exiles to kill Letelier.

They say Rivero sent Townley to the New York-New Jersey area where Townley cemented the conspiracy with Guillermo Novo, leader of the New Jersey group of CNM. Novo and Alvin Ross Diaz recently were convicted of conspiracy and murder in the slaying of Letelier.

Rivero said yesterday he doesn't remember meeting Townley or referring him to Novo.

In the New Jersey group were Suarez and Virgilio Paz, both fugitives under indictment in the Letelier case. Investigators say at least one of them may have been in New York when the bomb exploded in luggage of a plane about to take off. Omega 7 said the incident was carried out because Trans World Airlines had been flying charters to Cuba. It said the two sites bombed in New Jersey had been cooperating with the Castro government.

But FBI agents are convinced the real reason for last weekend's bombing was retaliation for the sentencing of Guillermo Novo, Ross and Ignacio Novo.

Investigators believe that Guillermo Novo's place as New Jersey leader of CNM has been taken by Armando Santana. Associated with him is his brother, Eduardo. Jorge Gomez, 30, another member of CNM, is on probation from the Lincoln Center bomb attempt.

Guillermo Novo News Service # 00782-016

Three anti-Castro groups claimed one and the same

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They also include the Port Elizabeth, N.J., bombing of the Soviet ship Ivan Shepetkov in September 1976, the near-fatal shooting of Chilean politician Bernardo Leighton in Rome in October 1975; and the bomb explosion last month in luggage about to be loaded on a plane at Kennedy International Airport.

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OMEGA, from 1A

of Leighton's head.

Italian newspapers reported he was shot in the face and did not identify the weapon.

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"That's a theory like any other theory," said Rivero, 54, a Miami car salesman. "If they have proof, they should come out with it. Otherwise, it's just another opinion."

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FBI officials refused to comment, but one veteran investigator of domestic terrorism said, "CNM and the fictional organizations Cero Group and Omega 7 are the same." Sources close to the hunt for Cuban terrorists say this makes their task easier.

The new evidence is based on documents and information from informants, sources say.

Cero claimed responsibility for shooting Leighton and included details never published about the pistol used and the precise location of the wound in the back

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See OMEGA, 4A.

Gomez, 30, another member of CNM, is on probation from the Lincoln Center bomb attempt. Another key figure in CNM is its fund raiser, identified as Jose Tenreiro, 44, who was a prominent spectator at the Letelier trial, wearing the lightning bolt symbol of the CNM.

Chumaceiro and Armando Santana also are on parole for the Lincoln Center incident.

GUILLERMO NOVO SAMPLE
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