

'Highest Priority' Given by U.S. To Capture of Anti-Castro Group

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By ROBIN HERMAN

Over the last five months an anti-Castro group that the Federal Bureau of Investigation regards as the most dangerous terrorist organization in the United States has claimed responsibility for a series of bombings that have taken on global political implications.

The United States Government has placed "highest priority" on seizing members of the group, called Omega 7, but so far not one of its members has been arrested as a bomber.

The F.B.I. says that the organization probably has no more than seven members and that penetrating it has raised unusually difficult problems.

"I need proof, I need documents, I need phone calls," said Larry W. Wack, an agent who has worked on the case.

In a mimeographed sheet, Omega 7, which is based in Union City, N.J., declared:

Violence Against Violence
Violence Against Hypocrisy
Violence for Dignity and Liberty

The handout was given to a Spanish-language newspaper just three weeks after the group had claimed responsibility for a bomb that exploded at Kennedy International Airport in luggage about to be loaded on a Trans World Airlines flight carrying 155 passengers and crew members to Los Angeles.

In recent months, Omega 7 has taken responsibility for bombing the Soviet Mission to the United Nations once and the Cuban Mission twice and the Fifth Avenue offices of Aeroflot, the Soviet airline.

Eulalio José Negrín, a Cuban exile leader who had been organizing trips to Havana, was shot to death on Nov. 25 outside his office in Union City. Omega 7, calling him a "traitor," said it was responsible for the assassination.

"We shall continue our actions anywhere in the world as long as there are commercial enterprises and traitors that support our enemies, allowing them to obtain great quantities of dollars through commerce," the handout said. "We shall continue to struggle in foreign lands until we reach the 'Omega' stage to complete plans of bringing the struggle to Cuban soil." Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet.

It has been nearly 19 years since the failure of the American-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, but a small group of right-wing Cuban émigrés clings tenaciously to the belief that President Fidel Castro and his Communist Government can be ousted from Cuba by violent

means. Until that final stage arrives, the group's members say, they will fight the battle on American soil, attacking President Castro's spies and economic collaborators.

"There is still a little flame here in the United States showing the people over there in Cuba we still think of them; we still think of combat," said Alvin Ross-Diaz, a veteran of the Bay of Pigs and a jailed member of the Cuban Nationalist Movement. The Federal Bureau of Investigation believes his group has provided the membership pool over the years for a myriad of anti-Castro terrorist groups, including Omega 7.

Global Implications

Following the bombing of the Soviet Mission last December, which shattered windows as high as 18 stories above the residential block on the East Side, Donald F. McHenry, the United States representative at the United Nations, said after consultation with the F.B.I. that apprehending Omega 7 members had been given "the highest priority."

That month he appointed a new deputy, H. Carl McCall, charged specifically with America's responsibilities as host country in protecting other missions. At a time when the United States is asking other nations for increased protection of its own embassies abroad, the Omega 7 bombings suddenly have global political implications.

The F.B.I. has been able to make only a few minor arrests connected to the group in the metropolitan region. Agents say it not only is extremely difficult to penetrate, but placing informants on the witness stand also puts them in grave danger and destroys their future usefulness. They say that hard proof is needed while bomb explosions consume nearly all evidence, and that the victims have been uncooperative.

Members Called 'Hoodlums'

Although Omega 7 views itself as a patriotic organization representing the feelings of the Cuban exile community, the F.B.I. says its members are hoodlums who extort money from law-abiding Cuban businesses for "the cause."

"They are hoods who use 'Castro out of Cuba' as an excuse for their criminal activities," said Tom Locke, a member of the F.B.I.'s New York antiterrorist unit. "They were never in Cuba. They can extort money, go about their daily routine, and be big shots in their community by virtue of violence."

Rudy Garcia, the executive editor of El Diario-La Prensa, the Spanish language newspaper, called Omega 7 members "pipsqueak commandos" in a vitriolic editorial in January and asked the intimidated Cuban-American community to help the F.B.I. in exposing them. Omega 7 had bombed the newspaper office,

which is situated in Manhattan at 181 Hudson Street, in October 1978. And just before the editorial appeared, the group threatened Mr. Garcia's life and that of one of his reporters.

"To turn our streets into battlegrounds, to endanger the life of innocent citizens, to attempt to shut the voice of the press through threats and bombs is at the very least ungrateful," Mr. Garcia said, "and at the most a travesty of their alleged reasons for being here — to secure the benefits of freedom and democracy. It is surely a poor way for a guest to treat a host."

"The place to get rid of Castro is Cuba, not Manhattan's East Side."

Since Omega 7 first proclaimed itself after a February 1975 bombing, the group has taken responsibility for 19 bombings in the New York area. But the F.B.I. called the T.W.A. bombing last March 25 "a marked departure" from its previous activity because it showed the group was willing to injure innocent people.

The F.B.I. attributes the escalation of violence to a recent erosion of the group's influence, a dip in its finances and an inability to recruit young members.

The opposition by the right-wing element to any dealings whatsoever with the Castro Government was weakened by the establishment of what has been called "the dialogue." In the fall of 1978 a group of moderate Cubans known as the Committee of 75 (actually, they numbered 140, including priests, academicians, youths and even Bay of Pigs veterans) met with the Castro Government and helped arrange the release of hundreds of prisoners and the visits of 100,000 exiles to their homeland in 1979.

Then President Castro, surrounded by police officers and his own guards, visited New York City last October without incident. "They really lost face in the community when Castro was here and they weren't able to do anything," Mr. Locke said. "There was the one person responsible for all the problems they've been yelling about, and they had him here, and they did nothing."

A Glimpse of Operation

The F.B.I.'s investigation of the 1976 assassination of Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean Ambassador, in Washington, provided a glimpse at the identity, history and mode of operation of the anti-Castro terrorists.

Two Union City members of the Cuban Nationalist Movement were convicted of conspiracy in the crime. Guillermo Novo Sampol, 40, then head of the northern zone of the Cuban Nationalist Movement, and Mr. Ross, 47, were sentenced to life imprisonment. Mr. Novo's 41-year-old brother, Ignatio, was found guilty of perjury.

Two movement members charged in the case, José Dionisio Suárez y Esquivel, 41, and Virgilio Pablo Paz y Romero, 28, are still fugitives and are also being sought by the F.B.I. for questioning in the T.W.A. bombing.

Michael Vernon Townley, an Ameri-

can-born agent of the Chilean secret service who admitted organizing the Letelier assassination and placing the bomb, was the prosecution's chief witness in the trial.

The Novo brothers staged somewhat amateurish anti-Castro protests in the mid-1960's. In 1964 they were apprehended on an island in the East River firing a bazooka at the United Nations, where Ché Guevara was speaking. The shell apparently fell harmlessly into the water. The brothers were subsequently released, however, because the police had failed to read them their rights.

Exiled Cubans Recruited

In 1974 Armando Santana was arrested on charges of placing a crude bomb outside the Academy of Music on 14th Street in Manhattan where there was to be a concert sponsored by a pro-Castro organization. He was paroled two years later and now, at 30, is the local leader of the Cuban Nationalist Movement.

When Mr. Townley, acting on orders from the military Chilean Government of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, needed help in anti-leftist espionage work, law-enforcement officials said, he was referred to the Cuban Nationalist Movement branch in Union City. There he recruited the exiled Cubans who were eager for the support of an anti-Communist government.

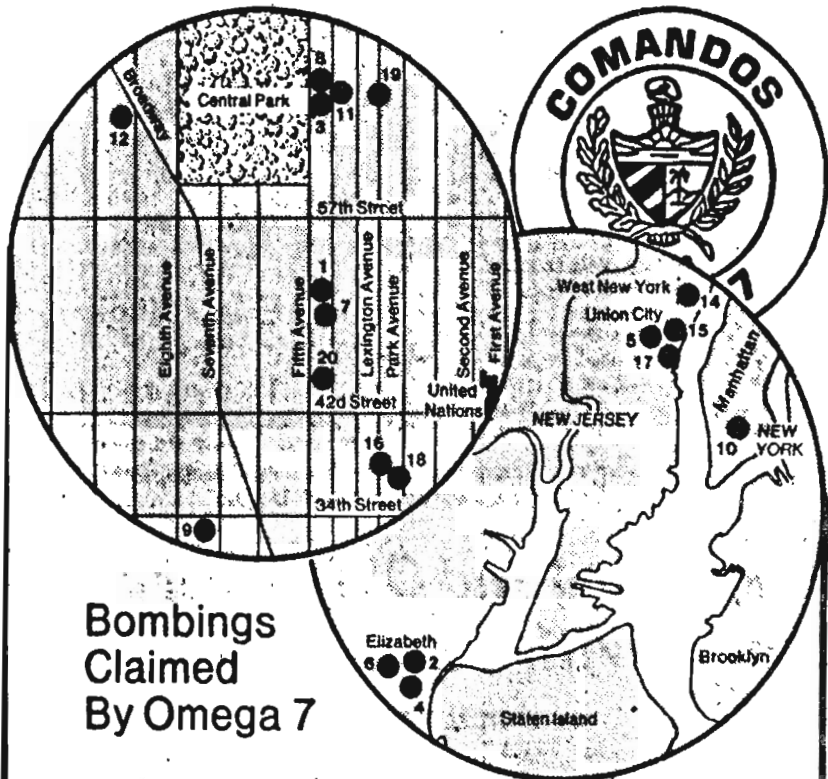
After using the Cubans in other espionage activities, Mr. Townley met with them again in 1976 and planned the assassination of Mr. Letelier, who had been jailed by the dictatorship when Salvador Allende, the Marxist president, was overthrown in 1973. As an exile, Mr. Letelier had remained a harsh critic of the regime and was running a left-wing research organization in Washington, the Institute for Policy Studies. According to testimony during the trial the members of the Cuban Nationalist Movement were eager to gain international prestige and agreed to help kill Mr. Letelier without a payoff.

Mr. Townley testified that he placed the remote-control bomb under Mr. Letelier's car and that the Cubans helped make the device and detonate it. The explosion killed both Mr. Letelier and Ronni Moffitt, an assistant at the institute.

At the trial in Washington, an Omega 7 sticker appeared on the wall of the courthouse lavatory and the insignia was scrawled on another wall. "You can throw all these groups in the air and one comes down and that's the C.N.M.," said Mr. Wack, the F.B.I. agent, who was commended for helping trace the involvement of local members of the Cuban Nationalist Movement to the Letelier assassination.

Mr. Ross, convicted of conspiracy in the assassination and now serving two consecutive life sentences, said he had nothing to do with the plot. Of the connection between the Cuban Nationalist Movement and Omega 7, he said, "If I were Omega 7 I would have the guts to say, 'Yes, we are.' I'm serving life. Let the heat come to the Cuban Nationalist Movement because we know we are clear."

A gracious, neatly groomed man with shiny black hair and gray sideburns, Mr. Ross spoke fervently about his personal



Bombings Claimed By Omega 7

1	Feb. 1, 1975	New York	Venezuelan Mission to the U.N., 7 East 51st St.
2	Feb. 11, 1975	Elizabeth, N.J.	Town and Campus Banquet Hall, U.S. 1
3	June 6, 1976	New York	Cuban Mission to the U.N., 6 East 67th St.
4	Sept. 16, 1976	Elizabeth, N.J.	Soviet ship Ivan Shepetkov
5	Dec. 20, 1977	Union City, N.J.	Almacen el Español, 3504 New York Ave.
6	Dec. 20, 1977	Elizabeth, N.J.	Almacen el Español, 911 Elizabeth Ave. (Stores send medical supplies to Cuba)
7	Dec. 26, 1977	New York	Venezuelan Mission to the U.N.
8	Sept. 9, 1978	New York	Cuban Mission to the U.N.
9	Oct. 5, 1978	New York	Gerry Cosby Sporting Goods Store, 2 Penn Plaza (Protesting Cuban boxers at Madison Square Garden)
10	Oct. 21, 1978	New York	El Diario-La Prensa, 181 Hudson St.
11	Dec. 29, 1978	New York	Cuban Mission to the U.N.
12	Dec. 29, 1978	New York	Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center (Protesting concert of Cuban orchestra)
13	March 25, 1979	New York	TWA terminal, Kennedy Airport
14	March 25, 1979	West New York, N.J.	Office of Cuban Affairs, 4912 Park Ave.
15	March 25, 1979	Union City, N.J.	Almacen el Español
16	Oct. 27, 1979	New York	Cuban Mission to the U.N., 315 Lexington Ave.
17	Nov. 25, 1979	Union City, N.J.	Murder of Eulalio José Negrin
18	Dec. 7, 1979	New York	Cuban Mission to the U.N.
19	Dec. 11, 1979	New York	Soviet Mission to the U.N., 136 East 67th St.
20	Jan. 13, 1980	New York	Aeroflot ticket office, 545 Fifth Ave.

history and political beliefs from the Hudson County Jail in Jersey City, where he was transferred recently to answer a separate weapons charge.

The Aim Is Overthrow

"I was young, very romantic," he said. "I fought for Castro in Cuba. Then some experience made me reach the conclusion he was no good. My brother spent 14 years in jail there.

"Our aim is to overthrow Castro by any means, including violence. We have a board of advisers that we keep secret — doctors, engineers, economists, philosophers, professors from university, and these are the people who give us ideas.

"They think it's a bunch of kids in Union City doing this," he added indignantly.

"These 75 Cubans were picked by Castro," Mr. Ross went on, referring to participants in the dialogue. "These people went to Cuba and said it was about time to be friends, and at the same time these people are the informers to the F.B.I. about our movement.

"I don't approve of bombings, but I sympathize deep in my heart. It's hard to

get the attention of the American people."

He maintained that the Cuban community also had sympathized with bombing such buildings as the Russian and Cuban Missions. "Get the Cubans alone, and they will say 'Let the Russians blow. They should have blown the whole building,'" he said.

Mr. Ross spoke derisively of the late Mr. Negrin and others arranging trips to Havana to reunite Cuban families. He said they were taking advantage of the suffering of the people, charging exorbitant travel rates and putting American cash into Mr. Castro's pocket. He also criticized El Diario for supporting the dialogue.

"Our newspaper is uncompromisingly anti-Castro," countered Mr. Garcia, the executive editor, "but we saw no reason to oppose the reunifications of family. How can you oppose someone wanting to see a mother or father they haven't seen in 20 years from a humanitarian point of view? Look at the numbers — 100,000 have gone back. I'm sure virtually all of them are anti-Castro, but there are family ties that call them. That these few jokers set themselves up as arbiters of family ties and family love is absurd. Who elected them?"

"It's not that I'm a hero. I'm a fat, aging 46-year-old executive editor with a wife and a couple kids. But by God, I'm enough of an American down in my guts that I get monumentally angry when the principles I've dedicated my life to are defiled by jokers like this.

Extortion Angle Pursued

"People say I'm either being foolish or brave. I can't take the time to look for a bomb. I don't know what one looks like. When I go out of the building with other people, though, I go out first. It's my responsibility. I take the brunt of what happens for something I might have done," Mr. Garcia said.

What are the prospects of catching the Omega 7 bombers? The F.B.I. says it is "much closer," and the F.B.I.'s New Jersey unit has been directed to put together a racketeering case against the suspected terrorists. Catching them in their extortion of Cuban businessmen might prove easier than placing them at a bombing, officials believe.

Anti-Castro Units Trace Roots To Invasion Attempts of 1960's

Ten years ago, when the terrorists' numbers were greater, their core consisted of frustrated Bay of Pigs veterans — Cuban exiles who had been trained by the Central Intelligence Agency and who were still eager to fight long after the C.I.A. had ceased financing and organizing raids on Cuba and using the veterans for other espionage activities.

The first such group called itself Alpha 66, after the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and declared that 1966 would be the beginning of the reclaiming of Cuba. They persistently staged their own raids on Cuba and Cuban vessels.

Until a few years ago, the anti-Castro outbursts had centered in Florida's Dade County (which includes Miami), where bombs exploded with regularity and groups such as El Condor, the Bay of Pigs Veteran Association-Assault Brigade 2506 and the Pedro Luis Boitel Commandos claimed responsibility. Hotels, airline offices and police stations were among the buildings hit. The worst year was 1975, according to the

Dade County police, with 25 to 30 bombings.

In June 1976, an umbrella organization appeared, called CORU — the Commandos of the United Revolutionary Organizations. In October, it bombed a Cuban jetliner off Barbados, killing all 73 persons aboard.

One group linked to other violent crimes, including assassination attempts, was Colonel Cero (Spanish for "zero"). As recently as April 1979, that group claimed credit for the murder in Puerto Rico of Carlos Muniz Varela, who, like Eulalio José Negrin, was a member of the Committee of 75 that had entered into "the Dialogue" with President Castro in September 1978. The dialogue led to Cuba's agreement to release 3,600 political prisoners and to the visit to Cuba last year of more than 100,000 exiles for the first time in nearly two decades.

Now, according to the Dade County police antiterrorist squad, anti-Castro political violence in Dade County has virtually stopped.