

Cuban Attaché at U.N. Shot Dead On Roadway in Queens by a Sniper

NYT

SEP 12 1980

1089

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

An attaché with the Cuban mission to the United Nations was shot and killed from ambush last night as he drove his car along a busy thoroughfare in Queens.

Callers to news organizations later claimed responsibility on behalf of Omega 7, an anti-Castro terrorist organization, and one caller said that the Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, Raul Roa, would "be next."

The victim, Felix Garcia Rodriguez, who was in his 30's and lived at the Cuban Mission at 38th Street and Lexington Avenue, was slain with a single bullet that struck the left side of his head at 6:30 P.M. as he drove west on service road of Queens Boulevard at 58th Street in Woodside, the police said.

Mr. Garcia slumped over the wheel of his brown, 1979 Pontiac Grand Safari station wagon, which swerved into a Texaco service station and slammed into a blue Volkswagen that was pulling out of the station. One person was reported injured in the collision.

A witness who had been riding directly behind the victim on a moped told the police that he had seen no cars pass the attaché's car and no passengers in his vehicle, which carried diplomatic plates.

The police said the victim probably was shot through the open window of his car, by a sniper possibly firing from the elevated ground of New Calvary Cemetery, just off Queens Boulevard at 58th Street. The police said three .45-caliber bullets were fired: the fatal shot, a second that struck the car and a third that fell spent on the boulevard.

Minutes after the shooting, an anonymous caller with a Hispanic accent told the Associated Press of the assassination in a quavering voice. "He's a Communist," said the caller. "The next will be Raul Roa," he added, and took the time to spell Mr. Roa's name.

Another caller told United Press International: "Omega 7 commandos are responsible for the execution of a Cuban delegate to the U.N." The caller added, "We intend to continue to eliminate all these traitors from the face of the earth and we are going to continue on executing all these people who are responsible" for conditions in Cuba.

Mr. Garcia, who was listed as the 20th ranking diplomat at the Cuban Mission, performed administrative duties for the most part. He had been in Queens to visit

a friend and was returning to Manhattan when shot.

Chief of Detectives James T. Sullivan said at a news conference last night that the fatal shot had struck the victim's left shoulder and then entered the side of his head, apparently killing him at once.

At the Cuban Mission last night, there were no apparent indications of increased security, although the police said they would provide whatever manpower the Cuban officials requested.

Sgt. James Weadrock said outside the mission that he had instructed police patrols in the area to be on the lookout for bombs.

On March 23, a plastic explosive device was planted near the car of Mr. Roa in front of his residence at 51 East 81st Street, but the Ambassador was not injured. One of his guards found the device,

a shoebox wrapped with electrical tape, and the police bomb squad deactivated it.

Omega 7 claimed responsibility for planting that bomb and has been blamed for more than a dozen bombings in the metropolitan area since 1975, as well as for the assassination of Eulalio Jose Negrin, a refugee leader shot to death in Union City, N.J., last Nov. 25.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation said last March that the Omega 7 group was being regarded as the most dangerous terrorist organization in the United States, and that the Government had assigned the "highest priority" to seizing its members. The number of members is thought to be small, probably no more than seven, the F.B.I. said.

Though it has been 19 years since the failure of the American-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by exile forces, a small group of right-wing émigrés clings to the belief that President Fidel Castro and his Communist Government can be overthrown.

NYT

SEP 13 1980

1090

F.B.I. Says Murder of Diplomat May Mark Shift in Terror Tactics

By SELWYN RAAB

A Federal Bureau of Investigation official said yesterday that the slaying of an aide to the Cuban Mission at the United Nations might signal a change in tactics of an anti-Castro terrorist group operating here. He said that the killing might suggest a shift by the group, Omega 7, from bombing buildings to murdering individuals.

"We had indications some months ago," said the official, Kenneth B. Walton, the deputy assistant director of the F.B.I.'s New York office, "that the bombings may stop and other activities may accelerate. The other activities were to start killing people."

Mr. Walton's comments came as Federal and city investigators said they had failed to find "a strong lead" or witness to the assassination of the Cuban, who was gunned down as he drove his car early Thursday evening along a busy street in Queens.

As city police officials and the Federal Bureau of Investigation said they had made little progress in the first day of the investigation, Cuba demanded that the United States provide better protection for its diplomats. And Donald F. McHenry, the United States delegate to

the United Nations, called the murder "a stain on the United States."

Mayor Koch met yesterday with the head of the Cuban mission to the U.N., Dr. Raul Roa-Kouri, to express his "outrage" at the fatal ambush shooting of the 41-year-old attache, Félix Garcia-Rodriguez. Mr. Koch promised increased police protection for the Cuban delegation.

A \$35,000 Reward Offered

The city and the Federal Government also offered combined rewards of \$35,000 for information leading to the conviction of the killer or killers who are believed to be members of the anti-Castro terrorist organization Omega 7. In statements sent to news organizations, Omega 7 has described itself as an anti-Communist organization that wants to overthrow the Government of President of Fidel Castro.

Despite assurances from city officials of stonger security for the Cuban diplomatic corps, Radio Havana said that the United States had taken inadequate measures to stop Omega 7. Tass, the official Soviet press agency, said that the murder had occurred with "the full connivance" of United States authorities.

Although Mr. Garcia was officially listed by the Cuban Government as an attache, fellow employees, who asked to be

unidentified, said his duties were mainly that of a chauffeur and a messenger.

Although diplomats at the United Nations suspect that many members of the Cuban mission are engaged in intelligence activities, Kenneth B. Walton, an F.B.I. official, and Chief Sullivan said yesterday that they had no information that Mr. Garcia had been involved in intelligence activities. They also denied a published report that Mr. Garcia might have been linked to illegal trade in drugs.

Asked at a news conference, whether Mr. Garcia was an intelligence officer, Chief Sullivan replied, "We don't have any information that he was in intelligence. Our understanding is that he did some chauffeuring work and was often sent to airports to pick up people."

Chief Sullivan said investigators had located four "ear witnesses" but no eye witnesses to the slaying of Mr. Garcia as he drove alone in a station wagon on the 10-lane Queens Boulevard at 58th Street in Woodside about 6:25 P.M. on Thursday.

'No Strong Leads'

"At this point, we have no strong leads," Chief Sullivan said at a joint news conference with Mr. Walton. "It was warm, it was early evening and we believe there may have been people out who saw the shooting," Chief Sullivan added.

"This investigation is not a matter of following footprints in the snow," Mr. Walton said. "We need the cooperation of witnesses and hard intelligence work."

Mr. Garcia was struck in the left temple and the left side of his neck, Dr. Elliot M. Gross, the City's chief medical examiner, said last night after completing an autopsy. He was not shot at close range, Dr. Gross added.

Mr. Garcia died almost instantly, his car careering off the roadway, colliding with another vehicle that was leaving a gasoline station.

Chief Sullivan and Mr. Walton said they were convinced Omega 7 arranged the killing, mainly because the group claimed responsibility for the murder by calling news organizations before the death of Mr. Garcia was reported on radio and television.

Co-Workers Describe Victim

According to employees at the Cuban mission at Lexington Avenue and 38th Street, Mr. Garcia was divorced and childless. "He was an outgoing fellow, the life of the mission," an employee said.

Almost all of the Cuban employees at the mission are listed as attachés even though they may not perform diplomatic functions according to employees at the United Nations. The diplomatic status provides immunity for them in the event of an arrest.

Chief Sullivan said that Cuban officials were co-operating with detectives and F.B.I. agents and that investigators had been able to trace Mr. Garcia's whereabouts until about 3:30 P.M., Thursday, three hours before he was ambushed.

Detectives, Chief Sullivan said, learned that in the afternoon he had been in a gasoline station and another business in the Woodside area. Mr. Garcia, detectives believe, was returning to the Cuban mission for dinner at the time of the shooting.

The police said they had been told by Cuban representatives that Mr. Garcia often drove diplomats and employees through Queens going to and from John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia Airports. Mr. Walton said it was uncertain if Mr. Garcia had been stalked or was "a victim of opportunity."

Although detectives said they were unable to trace Mr. Garcia's movements after about 3:30 P.M., an employee at the Cuban mission said he saw Mr. Garcia there about 5 P.M. The employee, who asked for anonymity, said Mr. Garcia told him he was going to visit a friend in Queens for dinner.

The police said that the rear plate of Mr. Garcia's car were bent on both ends — in a U shape — leading detectives to believe the car, which had diplomatic plates, had been marked in this way so that the killers could identify it. Employees at the mission said the diplomatic license plates on Mr. Garcia's car should not have been bent.

Chief Sullivan said the killers were either in a parked or moving car next to Mr. Garcia's maroon 1979 Pontiac station wagon.

Miguel Alvarez, the second secretary at the mission, said mission members were:

"Angry and at the same time very, very sad. He [Mr. Garcia] was very close to the children. He used to wait for them to give them gum or cookies. We are not scared by what has happened. This has been part of our normal life here in the last couple of years, receiving threats, bombs that blow up. If we worried it would be very difficult to perform our duties."

Since February 1975, Omega 7 has taken responsibility for 20 bombings in New York City and in New Jersey, including five at the Cuban mission to the United Nations. Omega 7 is also believed to have been behind the murder in Union City, N.J., of Eulalio José Negrin, a Cuban exile who was organizing trips to Cuba.

The Investigative Force

Chief Sullivan and Mr. Walton emphasized that for the last four months, 22 F.B.I. agents and city detectives had been working full time in a joint task force in an attempt to track down Omega 7 members. They said at least 20 other agents and detectives had been assigned to the Garcia murder case.

F.B.I. officials said Omega 7 might have as few as seven members, although the organization's actual size is unknown. The F.B.I. also is uncertain what the name, Omega 7, signifies.