

FBI: Omega 7 active even with leaders in jail

MIAMI (UPI)—The anti-Castro terrorist group known as Omega 7 remains active even though its leadership has been decimated by federal prosecutions, a law enforcement official said yesterday.

"Every time you write an obituary on a terrorist group, somebody feels obligated to prove to you that your obituary is premature," said Kenneth Walton, the FBI agent in charge of the federal task force that investigated Omega 7.

"I won't say Omega 7 is crushed or that any terrorist organization is crushed, because you never know," he said.

Arthur Nehrbass, commander of the Metro-Dade County Organized Crime Bureau, said the group has been "severely hurt" by federal prosecutions that have

landed alleged Omega 7 leader Eduardo Arocena, a former Newark longshoreman, and other suspected group leaders in jail.

"I think their effective leadership has been neutralized," Nehrbass said.

But Nehrbass said some group members undoubtedly are still free, and Walton said they may try to regroup.

Omega 7, dedicated to the overthrow of Cuban President Fidel Castro, has claimed responsibility for more than 30 bombings and two murders since 1978.

Three alleged Omega members pleaded guilty Tuesday to conspiracy for their involvement in a string of terrorist bombings and attempted bombings attributed to the anti-Castro extremist group.

The three men were the first defendants implicated in Omega 7 to enter into cooperation agreements with federal prosecutors investigating the group.

Gerardo Necuze, 46, and Justo Rodriguez, 52, entered guilty pleas in federal court in Fort Lauderdale and agreed to testify during Arocena's trial in April.

Another defendant, Jose Ignacio Gonzalez, 41, who is in custody in New York on a perjury charge, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Manhattan before Judge Robert Carter.

Walton said his task force still is investigating several bombings thought to be linked to Omega 7, as well as the 1982 killing of Feliz Garcia, a Cuban diplomat in New York.

Arocena is scheduled to be tried in April on charges of conspiring in 1976 to assassinate Raul Roa, a Cuban diplomat at the United Nations, and 14 bombings in Manhattan and Miami. If convicted, he could face up to life plus 70 years in prison.

Believed by law enforcement authorities to be the mysterious "Omar" who issued Omega 7 communiqués, Arocena was arrested in Miami's Little Havana last July. He is being held on \$750,000 bail in the federal penitentiary in Otisville, N.Y.

He has asked for a transfer back to a Miami prison from his cell in "the hole" of the prison in Otisville. Arocena says he has suffered from "physical and mental abuse" in the prison. Prison officials have denied he was mistreated.