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Cuban Exile Group Is Tied To Terrorists

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WASHINGTON — For five years, the FBI and state and local police have been on the trail of two anti-Castro Cuban exile terrorist organizations calling themselves Omega 7 and Cero (Zero) group. Officials now have evidence that the two groups are phantom organizations representing the "war arm" of the Cuban Nationalist Movement.

The discovery of this evidence last week represents a major breakthrough for investigators working on a number of incidents of violence, officials said.

These incidents include the bombing of the Soviet ship Ivan Shepetkov in September 1976 at Port Elizabeth, N.Y., the near-fatal shooting of Chilean politician Bernardo Leighton in October 1975 in Rome and the murder of Cuban exile leader Rolando Masferrer in October 1975 in Miami.

Other incidents are the assassination of exile leader Jose Elias de la Torriente

in April 1974 in Coral Gables, Fla., the maiming of Miami radio commentator Emilio Millan and the bomb explosion last week in luggage about to be loaded on a plane at Kennedy International Airport in New York.

Cero claimed responsibility for the Millan case, the shooting of Leighton and the killings of Masferrer and de la Torriente. Omega 7 claimed to have carried out the airport bombing and two others last month, one at the New Jersey Cuban Refugee Program office in Weehauken, N.J., and the other at a Union City, N.J., pharmacy.

During the recent Washington trial of three Cuban Nationalist Movement members convicted in connection with the killing of former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier, Omega 7 stickers were pasted on walls in U.S. District Court and the Omega 7 symbol was drawn with lipstick on a women's room wall.

Now, investigators have determined that the Omega 7-Cero Group gambit

was a red herring to take some of the heat from the Cuban Nationalist Movement, which had claimed to be political but non-violent.

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

The Cuban Nationalist Movement was founded in October 1959 by Felipe Rivero, 54, of Miami, who remains the ideological head of the organization. It was Rivero whom Michael V. Townley first sought out in 1976 when he came to the United States on a mission for Chile's secret police to recruit Cuban exiles to kill Letelier.

Rivero sent Townley to the New York-New Jersey area, where the expatriate U.S. citizen 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, whose car was bombed in Washington, killing him and an associate.

In the New Jersey group were Jose D. Suarez and Virgilio Paz, both fugitives under indictment in the Letelier case. At least one of them may have been in New York last Sunday when the bomb exploded at Kennedy Airport.

Omega 7 said that incident was carried out because Trans World Airlines had been flying chartered planes to Cuba. It said the two sites bombed in New Jersey had been cooperating with the Castro government.

The Cuban Nationalist Movement has not always presented itself as a purely political organization. It claimed credit for the abortive effort in 1965 to blow up a statue of Karl Marx in London. And Rivero claimed responsibility in May 1967 for placing a bomb at Expo '67 in Montreal.