

# Bartender charged with arson, 96 counts of murder in hotel fire

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Police on Thursday arrested a Dupont Plaza Hotel bartender on charges of arson and 96 counts of murder. He was the third person accused of involvement in the New Year's Eve fire at the hotel.

Jose Francisco Rivera Lopez, 40, of Carolina, Puerto Rico, was held Thursday night at the Rio Piedras State Penitentiary in San Juan when he was unable to post \$2.4 million bail set by San Juan Superior Court Judge Carlos Rivera Martinez.

He was arrested while driving through a working-class section of the capital.

The Dupont Plaza blaze, the second-worst hotel fire in U.S. history, killed 96 people and injured 140.

Rivera Lopez was indicted by a federal grand jury, whose sealed indictment was opened Thursday in U.S. District Court in San Juan.

The federal indictment alleges Rivera Lopez "did knowingly procure the setting of the blaze, but does not elaborate on the charge."

Puerto Rico and U.S. officials had previously charged hotel maintenance worker Hector Escudero Aponte, 35, and bartender's assistant Armando Jimenez Rivera, 29, both of Bayamon, Puerto Rico.

According to federal court documents, Escudero Aponte has confessed he set the blaze. Jimenez Riv-

era is charged with aiding and abetting Escudero.

U.S. Attorney Daniel Lopez Romo said Thursday he asked the federal court to deny bail to Rivera Lopez.

U.S. Magistrate Justo Arena denied bail to Escudero Aponte and Jimenez Rivera when they appeared in federal court on arson charges. Bail on each had been set at more than \$2 million in commonwealth court.

All three suspects were members of Teamsters Union Local 901, which was in the midst of bitter contract negotiations with management

of the Dupont Plaza, which is owned by a Texas corporation.

The union, which has not been implicated by authorities in the fire, had threatened a midnight strike.

The fire broke out in the first-floor ballroom minutes after more than 200 Teamster union members met and rejected a management contract proposal. It quickly spread to the second-floor casino, where 91 of the victims died.

A few days before the New Year's Eve fire, there were three small fires at the hotel, none of which caused any injuries.

Puerto Rican officials on Thursday charged another hotel employee, Luis Elias Vega Rios, with setting a fire on the ninth floor of the hotel Dec. 27. That smoky fire caused an estimated \$500 damage.

Vega Rios was released on \$1,000 personal recognizance Thursday. Neither police nor federal officials will say if Vega Rios is still under investigation for the Dec. 31 fire.

Lawyers for injured victims and relatives of the dead and injured have filed suits seeking more than \$200 million in damages from the hotel owners.

## Error

(Continued from page 1)

Eleven store on Southwest Parkway and Wellborn during an attempted robbery. Three hostages were taken and the suspects used one hostage to shield themselves from police in an attempt to escape.

Elvis Frank Tejera, 21, of Bryan, was killed as police fired several shots to stop the suspects, who were armed with a machete and shotgun.

Vance and Robert Orozco, Orta's defense attorney, said they would appeal.

If a reversal is granted from an appellate court, this court decision would be set aside and the case would be re-tried, Vance said.

"The problem with an appeal is that it will take one or two years," Vance said. "The defendants will be incarcerated in the meantime."

Judge Delaney said he had three options in the handling of the mistake. One was to do nothing and hope an appellate court would disregard the mistake in the charge. It is

very unlikely an appellate court would do so, he said.

Delaney could have declared a mistrial, but he said declaring a mistrial on his own motion could be called double jeopardy by an appellate court.

Delaney chose to write a new charge with the necessary language and send the jury out to reconsider the case under the corrected charges.

## Report

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private citizens, and Second, a retired Air Force major general, refused to testify to congressional panels, citing his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

The report said this information "was based on sources of unknown reliability" and the committee was unable to verify it.

In addition, the committee re-

ceived testimony that "private funding for the Nicaraguan resistance generally was funneled through offshore bank accounts in the Cayman Islands and Panama controlled by (Contra leader Adolpho) Calero.

"However, the committee received no direct testimony regarding the actual receipt of specific amounts of money by the Nicaraguan resistance. According to testi-

mony by the CIA task force chief who was responsible for monitoring the financial status of the Nicaraguan resistance, there was no unusual infusion of funds to the Nicaraguan resistance in 1986."

Reacting to the release of the report, David Abshire, Reagan's special counselor on the Iran-Contra problem, said: "The president has consistently urged the release by the

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence of its report on the Iran matter and the alleged diversion of funds to the anti-Sandinista forces and is pleased that this has now occurred."

The statement said: "The committee's report is an important step toward getting to the bottom of this matter, as the president has promised."

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