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Macho pride may have killed Morales

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He had survived two decades of terrorist intrigue, of alliances and betrayals from the Congo to the Caribbean that brought him into the orbit, and perhaps the payroll, of at least three countries' spy services.

But when Ricardo (Monkey) Morales was fatally shot at a Key Biscayne restaurant last month, he was drunk and angry, looking for revenge because somebody called him *maricon*, Spanish slang for homosexual.

The man who killed Morales at Roger's On The Green may never be charged with the shooting. "Based on what I've got, it's probably justifiable homicide," Metro-Dade Homicide Detective Steve Roadruck said Wednesday.

Morales was going for the handgun in his ankle holster when a single .32-caliber slug fired by a onetime Cuban policeman named Orlando Torres ripped into the back of his head, according to attorney Michael von Zamft, who represents Torres.

On the faded, yellow-and-rust striped rug near the Cherries bar, Morales fell mortally wounded, Dodge City-style.

"It is an absolutely justifiable shooting under the law," von Zamft said.

Detective Roadruck has turned the results of his investigation over to prosecutor Sam Rabin, who will review the case and pass his findings on to Dade State Attorney Janet Reno.

Reno could either file charges, send the case to the grand jury, seek an inquest or refuse to prosecute. The investigation is not complete, Rabin said, because several witnesses have not been interviewed.

Roadruck and other homicide investigators have said from the beginning of their probe that Morales was shot during an everyday bar argument that turned deadly. Friends and associates insist that Morales, most recently a key in-

formant in the Miami police drug Operation Tick-Talks investigation, was shot in reprisal for past exploits.

Cherries, a bar at Roger's On The Green, was Morales' second drinking stop the night of Dec. 20. He preferred Johnnie Walker Black Label Scotch. A blood test later showed he had a 0.17 alcohol level when he was shot, according to Assistant Dade Medical Examiner Dr. Leonard Bednarzyk. A blood-alcohol level of 0.10 makes a person too drunk to drive under Florida law.

Morales, 43, arrived at Cherries while the San Diego Chargers were whipping the Cincinnati Bengals, 50-34, in a televised Monday night football game. Morales stood at the bar, drinking with Nancy Lamazares Cid, the widow of a drug trafficker, and with a man identified as Juan Fernandez.

The football game was on two television screens above the corners of the bar. Across the wood-and-glass paneled restaurant, a small band played.

According to witnesses' statements to police, Morales, drink in hand, moved across the floor to a table where Torres and Roger Novo, the restaurant's operator, were seated. Morales apparently was acquainted with Novo. He had never met Torres, von Zamft said Wednesday.

As Torres sat at the table, Morales crouched down. He rested his elbow on Torres' knee. Torres moved his leg, spilling Morales' drink.

Torres ordered a refill for Morales, who went back to the bar.

Cid, 38, the widow of drug dealer German Lamazares, gestured to Torres, inviting him to the bar.

When Torres walked to Cid, she gave him a hug. "She was patting him down, to see if he had a gun," von Zamft said. Cid found no gun.

Morales, who has been linked to the CIA, the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Israeli intelligence agency MOSSAD and the Venezuelan secret police, then attempted to embrace Torres, von Zamft said. Torres told Morales that "they weren't that good friends," the attorney said.

Morales grabbed Torres' tie and pulled it. Torres protested. Morales embraced him. "He didn't find a gun," von Zamft said.

Morales was "very loud and boisterous," according to the attorney. "He was either drunk or on his way."

For the second time, Torres and Morales separated. Torres left the bar area, telling Morales that he wanted to listen to the band.

The final confrontation involved Novo, Torres and Morales.

Morales was leaving the bar. Torres turned to Novo and said something about Morales' departure, referring to him as a "*maricon*."

Morales continued with Cid out to the parking lot, to his blood-red Cadillac. Then he returned, alone, to confront Torres. He had heard the comment.

Did you call me *maricon*? he asked Torres.

Torres said no. He looked at the TV screen above the bar. He said the comment referred to a player who had dropped the ball.

Morales turned to Novo. Did you call me *maricon*? he asked.

The restaurant operator answered no.

Morales shoved Novo, who has had open-heart surgery. "He doesn't just push," von Zamft said. "He gave him a good shot." Novo

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staggered backward.

According to von Zamft, who was present on Jan. 12 when Torres gave a sworn statement to homicide investigators, Morales moved into a crouch, reaching toward his ankle, where police later found a gun.

Torres produced a pistol and fired once. The slug smashed into the left rear of Morales' head. The time was 11:41 p.m. on Dec. 20.

Morales died two days later at Mercy Hospital.

Torres "fired either in self-defense or in defense of others," von Zamft said.

Morales was once described by his attorney, John Komorowski, as a "real-life James Bond."

Attorney Doug Williams, who questioned Morales for three weeks during a deposition in the Tick-Talks case, has recalled: "He told me about murder as cavalierly as if he were talking about a new pair of shoes."
