

Document Excludes Noriega From Plot

CIA Sources Quoted at Trial Say Panamanian Was Not Involved

Associated Press

MIAMI, March 4—Informants told the Central Intelligence Agency that Manuel Antonio Noriega was not involved in a bribery scheme that forms a central part of the drug indictment against him, according to a document read today at his trial.

A CIA summary, based on sources in and out of Panama, said a \$4 million bribe by Colombian drug barons to protect a drug laboratory being built in Panama was paid only to Julian Melo, secretary general of Noriega's military headquarters staff.

Melo also took \$2 million to protect a shipment of 6,000 barrels of cocaine refining chemicals passing through Panama in 1984, the report said.

The document introduced by the defense was a summary of four CIA cables written in 1984. It did not identify the sources or indicate whether they included Noriega, long a paid CIA informant.

Noriega cracked down on Melo when he learned of the bribery but was reluctant to punish him further because he did not want attention focused on a military officer's con-

tact with drug traffickers, the report said.

Prosecutor Michael Sullivan said the government agreed only that the CIA received the information, not whether it was true.

Noriega is accused of receiving some of the \$4 million and agreeing

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to protect the lab, although his troops raided it in late May 1984. Prosecutors say the raid was an accident or an attempt to extort more money from Medellin cartel leaders.

Earlier today, the government attacked Rodolfo Castellon, a defense witness and former Panamanian ambassador to Israel, whose testimony undermined a charge that Noriega flew drug traffickers to Colombia on his private jet.

Castrellon, who in May 1984

headed air force operations in Panama, identified photos that appeared to refute the contention that Noriega gave special treatment to 23 Colombians arrested at a remote drug lab. The prosecution contends that Noriega had freed the men.

But the pictures showed that they were flown to Colombia manacled and guarded in a cargo plane. Panama turned them over to Colombian police at that nation's request, Castellon testified.

On cross-examination, prosecutor Myles Malman questioned Castellon's credibility, using his U.S. political asylum application, a 1982 weapons sales investigation and his friendship with Noriega's family.

Castrellon applied for asylum because "what you really fear is prosecution for crimes you committed," Malman charged. But Castellon insisted that he did so because of persecution against Noriega's old allies in Panama.

Castrellon admitted that, in May 1982, Noriega punished him for trying to sell weapons bound for Colombia. He also said he lives in Miami and occasionally drives Noriega's wife around town.