

Newspaper Says JFK Foiled '62 Plot By CIA to Sabotage Cuban Sugar

NEW YORK, March 26 (UPI) — Enterprising U.S. agents chemically sabotaged a shipment of Cuban sugar bound for Russia just before the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 but President Kennedy intervened to prevent delivery of the tainted sugar, the New York Times reported today.

White House intervention foiled the Central Intelligence Agency's "Caribbean melodrama" but incurred the wrath of the Soviet government in the process by holding in a Puerto Rican port thousands of sacks of sugar taken off a Russia-bound freighter, the Times said. The case remains in the Puerto Rican Commonwealth courts where it ended up after a bitter diplomatic exchange and legal maneuvering.

According to the Times, CIA agents tainted the sugar with a chemical agent which was nonpoisonous but which spoiled the sugar's quality and gave it a foul taste. The idea was to plant suspicion in Soviet minds about the quality and purity of Cuban sugar.

Mr. Kennedy intervened because he feared injury to Soviet consumers and was wary of setting a "dreadful precedent in chemical sabotage," the Times said. It reported the case came to light during the present controversy over South Viet-Nam forces using U.S. supplied nonlethal gas in their anti-Communist guerrilla war.

A British freighter, under lease to the Soviets, made its way into San Juan harbor on Aug. 22, 1962, after damaging a propeller on a reef. It carried the sugar and other cargo, the Times said.

A total of 14,135 of the 80,000 bags of sugar aboard were placed in a Puerto Rican customs warehouse where the U.S. agents applied the chemical substance to it, the newspaper said.

The Times said that in early September Washington ordered that the impounded sugar should not be allowed out of Puerto Rico for any reason. A man known as Terry Kane and some associates from Miami went to court to contend

that the sugar should be permanently seized by Puerto Rico in settlement of debts owed by the Cubans. The court issued such a writ, the paper said.

The action prompted a series of angry diplomatic notes from Moscow. Washington replied that the Russians should seek legal redress. The Russians went to Federal court in Puerto Rico on Oct. 14, two days before Soviet missiles were discovered in Cuba.

The court ruled that a Soviet importer, not the Cubans, owned the sugar and it could not be used as a settlement of a Cuban debt, the Times said. Puerto Rico appealed. In July, 1963, a Federal appellate court in Boston ruled the Federal courts had no jurisdiction and the case then returned to Commonwealth courts where it remains unsettled.

The Times also said that during the time the British freighter was in port in Puerto Rico a mysterious fire broke out in its hold.