

JFK team won't ignore story that Castro knew of threat

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House assassinations committee, in a cautiously worded statement, said yesterday it has been told there may be some support for a report that Fidel Castro knew in advance of an assassination threat against President John F. Kennedy.

Castro has called the report "absurd."

Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, the committee's chairman, refused to go beyond an ambiguous statement that said an unspecified source had informed the panel that the story might have substance.

Stokes and committee chief counsel G. Robert Blakey stressed that the committee itself was not vouching for the truthfulness of the report, only passing on the opinion of the unnamed source.

Blakey's statement said the story was written by Comer Clark in the tabloid National Enquirer. The story said the Cuban consulate in Mexico City told Castro that Lee Harvey Oswald had threatened Kennedy's life.

Blakey said the committee investigated the writer's reputation for truthfulness and "frankly, it was not good." But Blakey said the committee did not ignore the story because of the information that it was supported by reliable government sources.

The committee's prepared statement said it "has been informed that the substance of the [story] is supported by highly confidential, but reliable, sources available to the U.S. government."

The committee issued the statement as it released an interview with the Cuban president in which Castro vehemently denied the report.

"This is absurd," the committee quoted Castro as saying in the interview. "It has been invented from beginning to end.

"It would have been our moral duty to inform the United States," Castro said.

Castro, two former Cuban consuls in Mexico City and a consulate secretary all denied in statements or testimony to the committee

that Oswald made the threat when he tried to get a visa for entry into Cuba.

Former Consul Alfredo Mirabal Diaz said the story is "completely absurd. It is completely false. It is a lie." And former Consul Eusebio Azcue Lopez said Oswald was angry and discourteous but made no assassination threat.

Earlier yesterday, Azcue said he believes a man who identified himself as Lee Harvey Oswald and angrily demanded a visa for Cuba in 1963 was not the same man named later as John F. Kennedy's assassin.

But Azcue, now retired, told the committee he could be convinced he was wrong by scientific evidence. Committee sources said such evidence was forthcoming.

Azcue, testifying through a translator, told the committee the Oswald who came to his consulate in Mexico City was a "cold, hard" man, thinner than Kennedy's accused assassin.

He said the man demanded an

immediate visa for entry to Cuba and became unpleasant when told it would require prior approval from Havana.

Azcue's recollections have caused speculation that a second man might have posed as Oswald in an elaborate conspiracy scheme.

"Fifteen years have gone by, so it is very difficult for me to guarantee it in a categorical sense," Azcue said, "but my belief is that this gentleman was not, is not, the person who went to the consulate.

But sources say a handwriting expert will testify that the signature on the visa application was written by the same Oswald named by the Warren Commission as Kennedy's lone assassin. Azcue was asked if such testimony would change his mind.

"Under such circumstances I would have to accept that I was seeing visions," the former consul replied.

The assassinations committee conceded it has "largely been frustrated" in efforts to follow Oswald's activities during the trip.

This and other discrepancies arose in the testimony of the Cuban official, who, along with three other Cuban officials, appeared under heavy security guard to testify yesterday.

Blakely told the committee the Soviet Union "declined to be of assistance" in the probe.

The Cubans made available to the investigators by President Fidel Castro were Azcue; Alfredo Mirabal Diaz, who succeeded Azcue before the Dallas assassination took place; Ricardo Escartin, counsellor of the Cuban interests section in Washington; and Capt. Felipe Villa of the Cuban Interior Ministry.

"He (Oswald) thought I'd be able to solve his problems," Azcue testified but I had to check with Havana. He insisted on the need to proceed urgently to Cuba. I told him on his second visit that if he already had a Soviet visa I could give him a transit visa without consulting my government. I believe he left our consulate to try to get a Soviet visa.

Asked what happened when Oswald came to the Cuban consulate the third time, Azcue replied, "He was very troubled because I told him no."

"He had a face which reflected unhappiness. He was not friendly or pleasant. On each visit he got very worked up and said in English, accused us of being discourteous, but reaucrats. Then I became upset and told him to leave, somewhat violently. He mumbled and slammed the door. That was the last time I saw him."

Mirabal said, "I noticed that Oswald submitted a Communist Party USA card. I've been a Communist for many years and we don't use cards. We identify ourselves by our actions and our ideas." Mirabal testified that his memory of Oswald is of "a small man with narrow shoulders, short hair, no mustache and who appeared hard and tough, upset or unhappy."

"I think he was sent to our consulate in Mexico City to be a provocation. He insisted on the urgency of his application for a visa as if he was being persecuted. The second time he came is what started the argument with Azcue. He accused us all of not being true revolutionaries."



—United Press International
Cuban leader Fidel Castro says he would have had a "moral duty" to report knowledge of an assassination attempt on the life of President Kennedy.