

Mobster admits anti-Castro role, but denies any plot to 'hit' JFK

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By Jim Adams
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WASHINGTON — Reputed Mafia boss Santo Trafficante testified yesterday that he took part in a CIA plot to murder Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, but that he knew of no conspiracy to assassinate President John F. Kennedy.

Trafficante, 63, described as a former Mafia chief in Tampa, Fla., told the House Select Committee on Assassinations that he had never told anyone that Kennedy would be "hit."

That conflicted with testimony given by Jose Aleman, a Cuban exile, who said Trafficante had used the term about Kennedy during a conversation in 1963, about six months before Kennedy was shot in Dallas.

On Wednesday, expressing fear for his life, Aleman told the committee that he had changed his mind about what Trafficante meant and that he no longer interpreted the term "hit" to mean Kennedy was marked for murder.

Trafficante testified that he did not use the word at all. "I never made the statement that Kennedy was going to get hit," he said. "I was speaking in Spanish and in Spanish there is no way to say that."

"Did you have any foreknowledge of the assassination of President Kennedy?" asked Rep. Louis Stokes (D, Colo.), chairman of the committee.

"Absolutely not," Trafficante said.

"No way."

Trafficante also testified that he never heard any mobster threaten to kill Kennedy, although there was anger about the Kennedy Administration's crackdown on organized crime.

Trafficante's testimony came as the committee ended its public in-



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Santo Trafficante listening to attorney Henry Gonzalez

quiry into the murder of Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Trafficante, who once ran gambling casinos in Havana, said he was recruited for the CIA murder attempt against Castro by John Roselli, a mobster who later was murdered. He said Roselli "told me the CIA and the U. S. government was involved in

eliminating Castro."

His participation in the plot was patriotic, he said, noting that he was worried about having a Communist nation so near Florida.

"It was like in World War II," Trafficante said. "They tell you to go to the draft board and sign up. Well, I signed up."

He said the mobsters considered "poison, planes, and tanks — I'm telling you they talked about everything."

Trafficante told the panel that he thought the idea of killing Castro was a good one at the time. "He had established a Communist base 90 miles from the United States," he said. "I go along with it because I figured it was like a war."

The first proposal considered by the plotters was for a gangland-style killing of Castro on the streets of Havana, Trafficante said. But he said the late Chicago crime boss, Sam Giancana, opposed that, saying hired killers would not take the job because they would not be able to escape.

The mobsters settled finally on having a disgruntled Cuban official administer poison pills to Castro, Trafficante said.

He said he did not know what happened to the plot, but a 1967 CIA report says that the would-be assassin "got cold feet" and returned the poison pills.

Asked about reports that Roselli told associates that Castro later hired the same mobsters to kill Kennedy in retaliation, Trafficante replied: "I have no knowledge of that."

Later, organized crime investigator Ralph Salerno told the committee that intensive FBI wiretapping of gangsters in the 1960s "gives no indication at all that the national Cosa Nostra directed or was involved in the assassination of President Kennedy."

Salerno said that this did not rule out the possibility of involvement in the assassination by an individual Mafia family.