

Hearings on JFK Assassination

Mob Figure Testifies On Anti-Castro Plots

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By Jeremiah O'Leary

Washington Star Staff Writer

Gangland figure Santo Trafficante today told the House Assassinations Committee he decided to go along with a CIA plot to kill Fidel Castro because he thought it was "the same thing as a war and because the U.S. government wanted it done."

The 63-year-old Florida mob figure testified only after Rep. Richardson Preyer, D-N.C., informed him that federal Judge Oliver Gasch had issued an immunity order, meaning Trafficante cannot be prosecuted for his testimony before the panel.

Trafficante told the committee the first time the CIA contacted him was in Miami late in 1960 or early 1961 after he had been in detention several times in Castro's Cuba.

THE WITNESS said his first contact with the CIA came from the late John Roselli, who was later "executed" in a gangland killing and whose body was found in a barrel in the waters around Miami.

"He told me the CIA was involved in the elimination of Castro," Trafficante said, "and (asked) if I would help him. He introduced me to Mr. Maheu (former aide to Howard Hughes), and Mr. Giancana (another mob figure subsequently slain) then came into the picture. Roselli wanted me to be the interpreter because I can speak Spanish.

"The second meeting with Maheu and Giancana was a few days later where they were all staying at the Fountainbleu Hotel.

"I thought it was a good thing to kill Castro because he had established a Communist base in Cuba. Being the U.S. government wanted it done, I said I'd go along with it. It was the same thing as a war."

Trafficante said they had several meetings with an anti-Castro activist named Rafael Gener and that he took them to meet some other Cubans who were active in trying to overthrow Castro by revolution.

"I assisted them a couple times," the frail and balding 63-year-old Trafficante testified. "Then they found out they didn't need my services anymore and I just backed off." Trafficante said he was involved in the discussions of killing Castro for a month or two. He said he knew Giancana was aware of the plot and his memory is that Roselli brought Giancana into the matter.

"What did Giancana say about the CIA?" Stokes asked.

"He said he and Maheu were working for the CIA and the U.S. government wanted this thing done," Trafficante said. "He made me understand that he was an agent in the CIA. But my total involvement was to be interpreter between Maheu and Giancana and the Cuban people Gener told us to see."

TRAFFICANTE said he was taken into custody in Havana several times after Castro took control of the government in January 1959 and was confined in a sort of immigration center called Triscornia along with several other casino operators.

He said it was Fidel's brother Raul Castro who helped obtain his release from Triscornia. "But I knew sooner or later I'd have to get out of Cuba because I could see there was nothing there for me," Trafficante testified.

He said he left Cuba for Miami as if to make a short trip late in 1960 and never went back.

Trafficante, in response to questions from Chairman Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, said he never did manage to get any of his money back to the United States. Most of what he had was in Cuban pesos which were worth only 10 to the dollar but Trafficante philosophically said he didn't suffer too great a loss.