

Disputes Kennedy conspiracy

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Ex-mob boss admits Castro plot

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Reputed Mafia boss Santo Trafficante testified Thursday he took part in a CIA plot to murder Fidel Castro but knew of no conspiracy to assassinate John F. Kennedy.

Trafficante, described as a former Mafia chief in Tampa, Fla., told the House assassinations committee he never told anyone that Kennedy would be "hit."

The gray-haired, 63-year-old Trafficante recalled a 1963 conversation with Jose Aleman, a Cuban exile, but said he did not tell Aleman that Kennedy would not live to be reelected.

Aleman's version of that conversation, which took place about six months before Kennedy was shot to death in Dallas, had Trafficante saying he expected Kennedy to be "hit."

But, expressing fear for his life, Aleman altered his interpretation of the conversation on Wednesday and told the

national

committee he no longer interprets the term "hit" to mean Kennedy was marked for murder.

"I never made the statement that Kennedy was going to get hit," Trafficante testified. "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, chairman of the committee.

"Absolutely not," Trafficante insisted. "No way."

Trafficante also testified he never heard any mobster threaten to kill Kennedy, although there was anger

about the Kennedy administration crack-down on organized crime.

Trafficante's testimony came as the assassinations committee wrapped up its public inquiry into the murder of John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. In its final day of hearings, the panel investigated theories that organized crime was involved in the Kennedy murder.

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, which called for poisoning the Cuban leader, was patriotic, he said, noting 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, tanks — I'm telling you they talked about everything."

Trafficante told the panel 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.