

MH: Interview with Luis Posada Carriles

IMMIGRATION I will fight to 'lead a normal life,' Posada says Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles said he wants U.S. asylum so he can spend his days painting, but refused to say he would give up anti-Castro violence. BY ALFONSO CHARDY AND OSCAR CORRAL

ocorral@herald.com

Posted on Sat, Jun. 04, 2005

EL PASO, Texas - Luis Posada Carriles, the anti-Castro militant whose appearance in South Florida created an international stir and embarrassed U.S. security agencies, said Friday he will fight to stay in the United States and devote his time to painting landscapes. In his first interview with a U.S. publication since his detention last month in Southwest Miami-Dade, Posada refused to say whether he would give up violence in his anti-Castro crusade. One of his lawyers prevented him from answering that question, as well as others on sensitive subjects raised by two Herald reporters who interviewed Posada in a heavily guarded courtroom at the El Paso detention center, within sight of the Mexican border. A naturalized Venezuelan citizen, Posada is wanted by Venezuela in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people. He was acquitted twice of that crime in Venezuela and escaped from prison in 1985 while awaiting a prosecutor's appeal. HAVANA BOMBINGS Cuba accuses Posada of orchestrating a string of bombings in Havana in 1997, one of which killed an Italian tourist. Six people were injured in the explosions. Posada, 77, wore a bright red jump suit and blue canvas slip-on shoes during Friday's interview. He looked healthy and said he felt well. He refused to be photographed. "In the United States, I want to lead a normal life," he said when asked how he intends to support himself if granted asylum. "I will paint and work for my fatherland. That's what I'm going to do. "I'm doing paintings and I am selling them very well. That gives me enough to live on. I have no major aspirations.

Once you reach my age, it's different." Posada has been painting landscapes since he was in custody in Venezuela. He said he has not been able to paint since arriving in El Paso and instead spends his time reading, praying, napping and chatting on the phone with family, friends and lawyers.

ACTIONS IN MIAMI One question following Posada's detention is whether he was trying to sneak out of the country when he was detained on May 17. Even his chief benefactor, Miami developer Santiago Alvarez, has said that Posada was making a last stop to pick up personal belongings at a friend's house and was on his way out of the country when agents picked him up. Posada categorically denied he was trying to flee. "No, I was not planning to leave the country," he said. Posada said he was alone with a friend when "quite a few" agents surrounded him outside the friend's house. "Are you Luis Posada? We want to talk to you," Posada recalled the agents saying. "They were very polite." Posada said his friend was not detained and that agents did not say where he was being taken until he landed in El Paso. When he was asked to give details about what precisely he was doing or whose house he was in when he was picked up, Posada's attorney interrupted him, saying his client would not answer. Posada said he did not feel betrayed by the U.S. government for detaining him for immigrating illegally. "In no way," he stressed. Posada expressed surprise -- and satisfaction -- that the U.S. government last week rejected Venezuela's demand that he be jailed for the purpose of extradition. The State Department said that a Venezuelan request for his arrest was incomplete. "I didn't know," he said. "Holy Mother of God! That's good news that even my lawyers haven't given me."

SKIPPED INTERVIEW The last time Posada spoke with the media was at a muggy West Miami-Dade warehouse near Hialeah last month, when he skipped a scheduled asylum interview he had requested after slipping into the United States in late March. On Friday he would not explain why he missed the interview but said he talked to the media to "clarify" allegations against him by

the Cuban government. It's perceived that his news conference and an earlier interview with The Herald caused his detention. "If I didn't go in the morning, in the afternoon they would have come looking for me," Posada said, alluding to dozens of agents who showed up earlier that day at the asylum office in downtown Miami. Posada has one basic explanation for the bad things being said about him: It's all Fidel Castro's doing. "What's going on is that I'm being blamed for everything that happens," he claimed. "All those things are the fallacies that Fidel Castro has invented about me." Posada declined to talk Friday about the Venezuelan and Cuban bombing cases. But in a May 11 interview with The Herald, Posada denied any role in the 1976 airliner attack and would only say of the 1997 bombings: "Let's leave it to history." One of the newest allegations is that Posada once was connected to organized crime through a notorious mob figure, Frank "Lefty" Rosenthal. The alleged link was mentioned in recently declassified FBI documents. "I had no relation to him," Posada said of Rosenthal. He would not elaborate. Posada said he is eagerly awaiting a June 13 immigration hearing. The government is expected to outline allegations he entered the country illegally. "Many things will be decided there," Posada said, adding that he is optimistic about the outcome of his detention. "I won't be here for long."

© 2005 Herald.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.miami.com>