

Giancana, Linked to CIA Plot, Slain



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Giancana in Chicago in 1974.

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CHICAGO, June 20—Sam Giancana, the powerful head of Chicago's crime syndicate who was recently linked to an alleged Central Intelligence Agency plot to kill Fidel Castro, was shot to death Thursday night in the basement kitchen of his suburban Chicago home.

Giancana, 65, was about to be contacted by the Senate committee on intelligence operations as part of its investigation of CIA complicity in assassination plots, according to chief committee counsel F.A.O. (Fritz) Schwartz Jr.

Asked about Giancana's murder, CIA director William E. Colby said, "We had nothing to do with it."

Giancana was shot seven times with a .22-caliber pistol—once in the back of the head, once in the corner of his mouth and five times below his chin—according to deputy Cook County coroner Kyran Phelan. Police said Giancana apparently knew his killer, and law enforcement officials offered conflicting theories to explain the murder.

He was found in a pool of blood after 11 p.m. by his 82-year-old caretaker,

Joseph DiPersio, who lived in the 1½-story bungalow with Giancana. Police found a late-night snack of sausages and spinach cooking on the stove in the kitchen.

DiPersio said he had been upstairs in his room with his wife, Ann, and had heard no shots. Before retiring for the night, the caretaker called to Giancana to see if he wanted anything. When he failed to respond, DiPersio said, he went to the basement and found the body.

Giancana lived in a tightly secured house in Oak Park, a western suburb of Chicago. Oak Park Police Chief Wilbur Reichert said the murder "seems like a professional hit, but the small caliber of the gun bothers us." Gangland slayings are customarily done with larger caliber weapons. The murder weapon was not recovered, but Reichert said seven .22-caliber shell casings were found on the floor.

Peter F. Vaira, head of the federal strike force in Chicago, said that the murder "may well have been a personal grudge thing." The strike force has been carefully monitoring Giancana's activities.

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Other investigators were reluctant to blame the murder on a personal dispute, however, because of Giancana's recent link to the alleged CIA assassination plot and because of internal feuding in the Chicago syndicate.

In Lewiston, Idaho, Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), chairman of the committee investigating the CIA, said the panel will consider protecting its witnesses, adding, "We have other witnesses who keep the same company as Giancana."

Chicago authorities agreed that Giancana knew his murderer, who was let into his home, Cook County State's Attorney Bernard Carey said the house had "double steel doors and various intruder detection devices."

The FBI is assisting in the investigation of the murder, according to the assistant Chicago special agent in charge, James Power. "We have more than a passing interest," he said.

According to informed sources, Giancana and his reputed right-hand man on the West Coast, Johnny Roselli, were recruited in 1960 by the CIA in a scheme to assassinate Fidel Castro.

Roselli later claimed to have been involved in six attempts on Castro's life. Giancana, who had gambling and other interests in pre-Castro Cuba, apparently lent enough of his support, a source said, to have won the CIA's thanks in the form of some spying in Las Vegas on Giancana's behalf.

The FBI, in the course of maintaining a check on Giancana, discovered in 1961 that the CIA had arranged sur-

veillance of comedian Dan Rowan because of his friendship with singer Phyllis McGuire, Giancana's former girlfriend. One aspect of the surveillance, according to an informed source, involved a burglary of Rowan's Las Vegas apartment.

According to the source, while the FBI was investigating the incident, the CIA asked the bureau to "back off." The FBI complied, the source said.

"They probably wouldn't today, but they did in those days because they accepted the CIA as a respectable government agency and had no doubt that this was a national security operation," the source said.

Although Senate intelligence committee counsel Schwartz said yesterday that "we were just at the stage where we were going to contact [Giancana]," the ranking minority member of the committee, Sen. John Tower (R-Tex.) told reporters that Giancana would not have been "a particularly valuable witness." Tower said there were "better sources of information."

The New York Times reported on Thursday that Giancana had directed a CIA attempt in 1961 to poison Castro, his younger brother, Raul, and Che Guevara.

Giancana had been living in Mexico until he was deported for unexplained reasons in 1974. He was in Houston's Methodist Hospital from May 25 until June 17 and had previously been in the hospital from May 12 to 21, according to a spokesman.

A nurse for Dr. Michael DeBakey, the noted heart surgeon and president of Baylor College of Medicine, con-

firmed that DeBakey had performed a gall bladder operation on Giancana. Washington Post special correspondent Tom Curtis reported that a knowledgeable source said federal agents in Houston had maintained "very extensive surveillance" on Giancana during his stay.

At the time of Giancana's death, federal investigators in Chicago were considering a perjury indictment against him for false testimony before a federal grand jury seeking to trace the flow of underworld funds, according to Justice Department attorney Valva.

The federal investigation was trying to pinpoint the mob's foreign investments—both legitimate and illegal—like those during the 1950s in Cuban gambling casinos.

Giancana was no stranger to violence. In the 1950s he led a Young Turk faction of Chicago mobsters in an effort that eventually seized control of the Chicago syndicate from Al Capone's forces.

Giancana began his career in crime in the 1920s as one of the fastest wheelmen ever to drive a getaway car, according to mob legend. Police on Chicago's West Side knew him as a thief, burglar and terrorist when he went driving Capone and other mobsters around.

Before he was old enough to vote, Giancana had been arrested three times as a murder suspect. One case was dismissed when the state's chief witness was murdered.

During World War II, Giancana, who had just been released from prison, was rejected for Army service as a

psychopath. Years later, he said, "Who wouldn't pretend he was nuts to stay out of the Army? The draft board asked me what I did for a living and I told them I was a thief. They thought I was crazy, but I wasn't. I was telling them the truth."

There is no record indicating Giancana ever had a legitimate job. He served two prison terms for burglary and moonshining. He was questioned in connection with several murders and reputedly authorized hundreds of slayings in his role as mob chief-tain. A spokesman for the Chicago Crime Commission described him as the city's most powerful mobster since Capone.

Giancana is credited with moving the Chicago syndicate into many legitimate businesses and cutting the extent of hoodlum warfare.

Though under constant FBI and local police surveillance, he apparently kept secret much of what he knew about the mob. But one FBI source speculated, "It is possible he either told too much [recently] or was planning to, and the boys' decided to have him done away with."

Giancana served a year in the Cook County Jail in 1965 and 1966 when, under a grant of immunity, he refused to testify before a federal grand jury. He had also been granted immunity in the current federal investigation in Chicago with assurances that he would be asked about mob activities that occurred before 1970.

Staff writer George Lardner Jr. contributed to this article.