

Informer's Affair Duped Slay Suspects

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A federal prosecutor disclosed yesterday that Rita Mae Scheer of Silver Spring was arrested for the murder of her husband after she was set up by investigators to have an affair with an informer.

The informer, named Kenneth W. Holroyd, had known Mrs. Scheer previously. He was released on bond from the D.C. Jail to live with Mrs. Scheer and to inquire about the murder of her husband,

former truck driver W. Morris Scheer, the prosecution said.

With the knowledge of police and prosecutors, Holroyd even asked Mrs. Scheer to arrange the murder of a witness in his own criminal case in an effort to discover how Mrs. Scheer had arranged the murder of her husband, prosecutor James E. Sharp said.

Details of the highly unusual police work were made public for the first time yesterday at the opening of the murder-for-hire trial of Mrs. Scheer and Calvin Cooksey.

Mrs. Scheer's husband, known as "Mo" Scheer, was shot in the head last Dec. 18 after he stepped from his car on Eastern Avenue in the District.

Mrs. Scheer was sitting in the car at the time, and told police that she heard shots and saw her husband fall. She said she could not see who shot her husband because it was dark at the time. Scheer died immediately after a bullet went through his skull.

Five months later, in mid-May, Mrs. Scheer, 41, and

Cooksey were arrested and charged with the murder. Sharp said yesterday that Cooksey was the triggerman and that Mrs. Scheer paid \$5,000 to have her husband killed.

Mrs. Scheer received \$34,000 in insurance as a result of her husband's death, Sharp said.

A third woman, Margaret F. Hyson, was also arrested and charged with the murder. According to the prosecution, Mrs. Hyson was the intermediary.

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ary between Mrs. Scheer and Cooksey. Her trial has been delayed until later this year, and Sharp revealed yesterday that she will testify for the government against Mrs. Scheer and Cooksey.

Until Holroyd appeared in mid-February, however, police were thwarted in their investigation of the Scheer case.

Holroyd, 36, had been arrested on murder charges in 1971 and was awaiting trial in D.C. Jail when his attorney came forward and said he would provide information to police and federal prosecutors.

Exactly what information he provided was not made public, but Holroyd himself testified yesterday that he had known Mrs. Scheer as early as 1968.

At that time, Holroyd said, Mrs. Hyson introduced him to Mrs. Scheer, who said "she was looking for someone to kill her husband.

Holroyd said he never carried out the murder, although over a period of time Mrs. Scheer provided him with cash, clothing and jewelry. At one point, she even financed a trip to Florida for him, he said.

"Her and I got to know each other over a period of time," he told the jury of nine women and three men. In his opening statement, Sharp described their relationship as "intimate."

In 1971, Holroyd and three other men were arrested for the shooting murder of Thomas Alonzo William. Holroyd sat in the D.C. jail awaiting trial in that case for several months.

During that time, he said yesterday, Mrs. Scheer visited him on several occasions. At one point last summer, she in-

formed him at the jail that "she had found someone to kill her husband," Holroyd testified.

In February, Holroyd's attorney brought him to Harold L. Sullivan, chief of the major crimes unit for the U.S. attorney's office here, and Holroyd offered to help in the investigation of the Scheer case.

On Feb. 23, he was released on \$5,000 bond in his murder case and immediately began to live with Mrs. Scheer at the Silver Spring apartment, 815 Thayer Ave., where she had lived with her husband.

Mrs. Scheer readily acknowledged to him that she had arranged the murder of her husband, but refused to say who had carried out the murder, Holroyd testified.

"I was told that an elderly man from New York, that she called Uncle Frank, a Sicilian, made arrangements," Holroyd testified. Prosecutors say there never was a such a person.

Holroyd said that when he

pressed for further details, Mrs. Scheer told him not to ask about the triggerman.

The relationship between the two continued. Holroyd testified that Mrs. Scheer even bought him a Mercedes-Benz 280-SL while he was living with her.

Finally, in April, police and prosecutors developed a plan to "flush out" the man Mrs. Scheer had hired to kill her husband, according to Sharp.

Holroyd was to tell Mrs. Scheer that he wanted to arrange the killing of a man who would be the principal prosecution witness at his own upcoming murder trial.

On May 12, Holroyd said, he told Mrs. Scheer he wanted the witness murdered, while the two were sitting in the Mercedes-Benz on the Mall. The conversation was tape-recorded on devices installed in the car by the investigators.

The next day, he said, he gave Mrs. Scheer a map with which the witness could be found. Sharp said yesterday

that Mrs. Scheer went to Mrs. Hyson's home to continue the arrangements. Within a few hours, the two women and Cooksey were arrested.

During his opening argument yesterday, Sharp also contended that Mrs. Scheer and Mrs. Hyson had become friends when they worked together as prostitutes.

In a brief opening statement, Mrs. Scheer's attorney, John Perazich of the Public Defender Service, said the evidence will show the people responsible for the murder "are not Cooksey and Mrs. Scheer." He said at another point, out of the presence of the jury, that Holroyd was "involved in the actual planning of and arranging for this killing."

On May 31, Holroyd, who had been charged with first-degree murder in his own case, was allowed to plead guilty to the far less serious offense of manslaughter, a charge with a maximum sentence of 15 years. He has not yet been sentenced.