

Italy Again Probes Death of Mattei

By Claire Sterling

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ROME, Nov. 14—Eight years after the officially accidental death of Enrico Mattei, head of the Italian state oil trust ENI and one of the most controversial international figures of his time, Italy's parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission is examining the archives to determine whether or not he may have been murdered.

The news of this investigation comes after weeks of speculation in the press here, following the mysterious disappearance last Sept. 17 of a reputable Sicilian journalist who was looking into details of Mattei's death for a film company. The journalist, Mauro De Mauro, is believed to have been kidnapped and probably killed by the Mafia.

There is no hard evidence that De Mauro had discovered anything sensational about Mattei's fatal plane crash before the journalist was abducted. He might have gotten into trouble at least as easily for an altogether different inquiry he was making at the time, into the Mafia's drug-running in collaboration with Cosa Nostra.

Nevertheless, he is known to have interviewed several key witnesses in the Mattei

case just before he vanished, and had told friends he was onto "something big." Since the circumstances of Mattei's death have never been explained satisfactorily, many Italians have been unable to resist putting two and two together.

Until the recent rumors, the Italian public knew only that Mattei's private jet plane, a French Morane-Saulnier, had crashed Oct. 27, 1962, within minutes of a scheduled landing at Milan's Linate Airport, killing Mattei, his traveling companion Bill McHale of Time-Life, and the pilot. An inquiry ordered by the defense ministry ended four years later in a formal verdict of accident, but the details were never published.

Now, since De Mauro's disappearance, a number of witnesses have spoken up, including Mattei's brother Italo, who has demanded that the case be reopened. Several intriguing facts stem from these:

• Although the pilot habitually kept Mattei's plane under his close personal watch, he had unaccountably been called to the telephone at the Catania airport shortly before Mattei's departure. The identity of his



ENRICO MATTEI
... death probed

caller has never been discovered, nor have those of three men who entered the plane during his brief absence—two dressed in maintenance overalls and the third in carabinieri uniform.

• An attempt had been made to sabotage Mattei's plane nine months earlier, by taping a screwdriver inside the engine.

• Mattei, according to his brother and closest colleagues in ENI, had been receiving threatening letters for of his life. He had told his brother just before going to Sicily the last time that he meant to go "even if they intend to kill me." Enemies Mattei had made in international politics, diplomacy, finance and petroleum, the "they" might have meant almost anybody. But

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MATTEI, From A23

those familiar with the case say it referred to French "ultras" in the Algerian OAS, (Organization de L'Armee Secrete) who had sentenced Mattei to death by kangaroo court in the summer of 1961, and had even published the verdict in their clandestine bulletin. to do with a ferocious struggle over concessions in the immense oilfields discovered in the Algerian Sahara in 1956. While French companies were obliged eventually to let the big seven oil companies in on this, they refused to include ENI. Accordingly, Mattei threw in his lot with the Algerian rebels in the FLN, becoming their principle supplier of arms and money, on the theory that an "Algerian Algeria" would amply repay him in oil rights.

Stood by Rebels

Eventually, this strategy alarmed the other oil companies in Algeria to the point of inviting Mattei to join them. But when they approached him in June, 1961, he was so confident of an FLYN victory that he turned them down.

Directly afterward, France protested Mattei's "anti-French activities" in an official demarche to the Italian government. A month later Mattei received formal notice from the OAS that he and his whole family had been condemned to death.

The screwdriver planted in his plane engine was found six months later. It was at once reported in the Italian newspaper he financed, *Il Giorno*, as an OAS attempt on his life. By the time his plane did crash, nine months after that, Mattei had completed negotiations with FLN leader Ben Bella for huge oil concessions, and was about to sign the agreement.

Much of this story, backed by documentary evidence, has been confirmed recently by French espionage agent

Thuraud de Vosjoli, who was the late President de Gaulle's top secret agent in the United States for 12 years. In an interview with the weekly *L'Europeo*, M. de Vosjoli claimed that the famous OAS "barbouzes" in the clandestine French so-called parallel police had dozens of spies working inside ENI, and even getting

The fatal act of sabotage, daily weather reports from airports used by Mattei.

The fatal act of sabotage, he added, was done by an expert Corsican aircraft mechanic named Laurent, who had been sent by the parallel police some weeks before to work in the Catania airport for just that purpose.

Mafia's Role a Mystery

Whether or not all this is true, it is not clear where the Mafia comes in. The theory is—though there are no known facts to confirm it—that the Mafia was persuaded to lend the OAS a hand in exchange for favors rendered, presumably having to do with protection for its drug and other contraband ships in the Western Mediterranean.

But there seems little doubt that the Mafia engineered the kidnaping of De Mauro, who must have come to know too much about something. Considering the extraordinary resurgence of Mafia violence in Sicily this autumn, and the consequent improbability of any witness breaking the ancient Mafia law of omerta—silence—it seems most unlikely now that anybody else is going to find out what De Mauro knew.