

Born Again at the Justice Department

THE ALIAS PROGRAM. By
Fred Graham. Little, Brown.
239 pp. \$8.95

By **SCOTT ARMSTRONG**

IT IS A COMMON fantasy.

Serious trouble brews, perhaps at home, perhaps at the office when they find the million dollars missing. You must run away.

You cross the country. You change identities—a new life, a new name, a new occupation, new habits. You are careful, avoiding any contact with old friends. You keep a low profile, living conservatively but comfortably.

Would it work? Could you avoid detection?

Most such schemes lack the necessary ingredients of a new identity—a Social Security card and number, a driver's license, a college record, a work history, a military record, a list of provable residences—all to match that new alias.

What you need is for the government to collaborate in constructing your new life, to provide documents and a foolproof personal history. Then it would work.

Or would it?

Gerald Zelmanowitz thought it would work. For him, it had to work, because in January of 1970, once Gerald Zelmanowitz testified in open court in Newark, New Jersey, against such thugs as Angelo "Gyp" DeCarlo and Daniel "Red" Cecere and dropped the name of capo Anthony "Fat Tony" Salerno, there was no turning back. There was only the constant fear of climbing behind the wheel of his car and "of the bomb crashing up from underneath, always tearing out his

SCOTT ARMSTRONG is a Washington Post staff writer currently collaborating with Bob Woodward on a book about government decision-making.

testicles and blasting away his buttocks."

The government was his only hope of safety. The Nixon Administration had developed a program, as part of the the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970, designed to protect witnesses who have testified against organized crime figures. Under the auspices of that program, Gerald Zelmanowitz vanished from Newark to resurface two months later in San Francisco as Paul Maris. His family—wife, daughter, son-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law—were all reborn with him, each with government-certified bonafides.

Life was not easy for them at first. The government was slow to meet its commitments for subsistence payments of \$36 a day.

But Zelmanowitz had been no common crook. Once the mastermind of illegal international arbitrage, Gerald Zelmanowitz decided truly to become Paul Maris, the dynamic young business executive: aggressive but honest; dedicated to civic duty, but intensely private.

So late in 1970, Maris began using the resources of Zelmanowitz's creative mind to build one of the country's fastest growing fashion houses. For Maris and the Paul Maris Company, success followed success. But in the spring of 1973, his corporate financial backers, nervous at his rate of expansion, attempted to replace him. Maris decided to take the battle to court.

It was a gutsy move for a man who didn't, really exist. But Zelmanowitz had become Maris—and Maris's bluff was not easily called. Besides, the government of the United States of America had undertaken to hide his former life. Maris was sure that they would stand behind his story.

He was wrong.

The government was unable to hide Maris's real identity indefinitely. The Justice Department had never made a total commitment to the alias program, fearing from the start that their

(Continued on page E5)

The Alias Program

(Continued from page E1)

desire to protect the witnesses might compromise the rights of citizens to be protected from former criminals. Moreover, modern life had grown too complex for even the federal government to create an undetectable new identity, with all the documents and verification required. And the government's own bureaucratic problems

made its promises impossible to keep.

Maris watched helplessly as the threads to his prior existence unraveled his new identity, until finally he had to take things into his own hands and fight back.

Telling this story, Fred Graham, a CBS journalist and former newspaper reporter long familiar with the criminal justice system, documents the rollercoaster ride of Zelmanowitz-Maris. Alternately flashing back and foreshadowing to propel the reader over the track, Graham describes the government's incompetence and its betrayal of the witnesses: a mixture of rogues, bystanders, villains, families, and bad

guys gone good—each crippled by the belief that somewhere a gang of ruthless thugs waited for him to come up for air so they could lop off his head.

If this was all that Graham delivered for \$8.95, it would be worth the price for such an entertaining and coherent narrative. But Graham offers more. He speaks clearly and knowledgeably of the shabby underworld of cops, robbers, accountants, business executives, private detectives, prosecutors, killers, and, of course, the ubiquitous Internal Revenue Service agents.

Graham's book does not play on the standard Mafia legends. Organized crime is seen as disorganized, uncoor-

dinated, human, fallible; white-collar criminals and petty con-men stumble through various failures and successes depending on their abilities and fortunes.

Parallel to this glamorless underworld milieu, Graham delivers a realistic account of equally unorganized federal law enforcement with overlapping, competing, backbiting jurisdictions, bureaucratic coverups, and cynical and sinister revenges. Graham introduces no omniscient, gold-shielded heroes and no black hats; rather, he paints compassionate yet stinging portraits of real-life people. People like you and me. □