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Key Police Undercover Man Reveals His Secrets

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He is a convicted felon. He wants his record ignored so he can be hired as a policeman.

That's why Jim Genovese talked to this Press-Scimitar reporter about the work he was doing for law enforcement instead of against it.

He also expressed concern that the evidence he gathered in "Operation Hot Stuff," a police undercover fencing operation which resulted in 43 indictments and 29 arrests yesterday, might be withheld from the Shelby County grand jury.

Because of this and what he thought at the time had been too long a delay in any indictments being returned, Genovese said in an interview a month ago that he was worried "the whole thing might be swept under the carpet and all our work

go for nothing. I'd hate to see all those people get off."

Genovese described himself as the key undercover man in what he said was a big investigation by the "feds and cops" into the stolen car, stolen merchandise, fencing, gun and drug ring operations in the Memphis area.

The fencing operations set up by law enforcement officials and staffed by Genovese and other undercover agents was located at 3041 Getwell as Investment Sales, Inc.

After buying about \$1 million worth of stolen merchandise, automobiles and drugs during an eight-month period, Genovese faded from the Getwell location and it was closed in mid-July.

Last month Genovese told The Press-Scimitar the investigation and undercover fencing operation would lead to federal and state indictments.

Some of those indictments — 43 — were returned yesterday by the Shelby County grand jury and more are expected when the federal grand jury begins meeting Monday.

Genovese is not the stocky, blond undercover agent's real name and The Press-Scimitar agreed not to reveal his true identity.

Genovese was the name he took, he said, in his undercover work for the government with the "elite crime task force." He said he posed as the grandson of former East Coast mafia chieftan Vito Genovese.

"I actually knew the grandson," Genovese said. "We were in the Army together. The government set up credentials for me in that name and set up a cover source on the East Coast who could confirm who I was supposed to be if anyone cared to check."

Genovese said he ran the fencing operation for the police department, which provided him a white Cadillac to drive in his undercover role.

Through the aid of federal grants, he said the police department got about \$100,000 worth of special equipment to use in the operation.

"It includes all sorts of electronic devices that can be used in similar investigations in the future," Genovese said.

He estimated that about \$65,000 had been spent for his expenses and stolen goods he bought.

Genovese said he checked in constantly with Asst. U.S. Atty. Larry Parrish, who he said was the strike force liaison for the federal government.

He said Terry Lafferty, assistant attorney general, was Parrish's counterpart on the state's side of the crime probe.

Genovese estimated last month that the

indictments, when all returned by the county and federal grand juries, would charge from 90 to 100 people — about 50 per cent black and 50 per cent white.

He said narcotics involved in the investigation included "conamel," which he said is a mixture of cocaine and two other drugs and "is a big drug on the Memphis market."

Genovese said about \$13,000 worth of drugs stolen from doctors' offices was involved. "We've also got people who are big time car-ring thieves," he said. "They steal one to two cars every day — good cars — and fence them."

The undercover operation on Getwell was closed prematurely, Genovese said, because word leaked out in the police department about what was going on.

"We had to close down the operation before we moved in on the really big guys we were after," he said. "That's because

word of our existence . . . and we were a small, hand-picked unit . . . had gotten around the Memphis Police Department."

Genovese said "one of the high-up police officials" told him the Memphis Police Association "had gotten wind of our existence and was complaining because association officials said officers should be allowed to bid on the undercover jobs."

"The guys (police) who work on such units get to make their own hours and have a lot of freedom," he said. "That's why it's considered a choice assignment. Those selected have to be absolutely trustworthy."

Genovese said when word began circulating around the police department about the undercover operation, "some of the (undercover) cops got pretty nervous."

Agent Tells Of Key Role

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They were afraid something might happen to them" so the operation was shut down.

Because such undercover operations have to operate secretly and include men who are hand-picked, Genovese said the police official told him the police association's request to bid on the assignment could not be met.

Genovese, who claims to be 28, but looks older, said he grew up in the Boot-heel area of Missouri.

He said he once shared a Missouri jail cell with James Earl Ray, the confessed slayer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Would you believe I was in Memphis on the day Dr. King was killed?" Genovese asked. "Like Ray, I also was driving a white Mustang. That's a coincidence, isn't it?"

Genovese declined to elaborate further on his presence in Memphis when King was killed.

Genovese said he got into crime as a teen-ager and claimed that in one period he had actually "done some work" for the Genovese organization.

"When I first started out (in crime), I got an assignment to be a hit man, but I looked at the guy and came back and said I couldn't do it," he said. "That wasn't for me. I got worried about whether the guy had a family."

The change from crime to working for the law, Genovese said, came gradually. "Things like that don't happen overnight."

Grinning, he added, "Every now and then I still get an old hankering (for crime), but I decided, finally, to pay people back for some of the bad things I did."

"Operation Hot Stuff" failed to net any additional suspects during the night, police said.

Inspector J.R. Dolan said several search teams had been out during the night looking for persons who escaped the dragnet yesterday but so far as he knew, none had been found.

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