

Outside help seen in flight

By Ray Brennan

C. Oran Mensik, 61, a Chicago swindler, undoubtedly had help from the outside in escaping from a federal prison camp in Pennsylvania, investigators said Saturday.

They added that Mensik has probably fled from the United States to a foreign country where he might be safe indefinitely.

Mensik, a key figure in the \$28-million failure of the City Savings Assn. in Chicago, walked away Sunday from the Camp Allenwood penitentiary installation, near Allenwood, Pa.

Charles Siragusa, executive director of the Illinois Legislative Investigating Commission, said Mensik presumably had accomplices for the escape.

Although federal prisoners are forbidden to have money, Mensik had cash to pay a taxicab driver \$5.10 — and to give a meager 20-cent tip — after his escape, it was pointed out.

Also, Mensik apparently had been supplied with civilian clothing, using it to replace his prison uniform shortly after his escape.

Questioning scheduled

Ironically, Mensik's prison walk-away took place only a week before Siragusa was scheduled to question him in Camp Allenwood about the Chicago financial scandal.

A story of the escape came from LeRay Grammling, a cabdriver in Williamsport, Pa., who told of driving the fugitive to an airport.

"I picked Mensik up at a motel and restaurant near Camp Allenwood on Monday," the driver said. "He was dressed in what seemed to be working clothes, not a prison uniform."

"I took him to the airport at Williamsport. He was carrying a briefcase and wearing a topcoat and cap. He told me he was going to Pittsburgh to see the World Series, and I had no reason to be suspicious of him."

Mensik did, in fact, take an airplane flight to Pittsburgh, but his trail ended there, investigators said.

Criticizes handling

In Chicago, Siragusa criticized the handling of Mensik by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.

"It is ludicrous for Mensik — with his past record as a fugitive — to have been placed in a minimum-security prison with no adequate security guards and no wall around it," he said.

"Also, Mensik reportedly has millions of dollars hidden away in Swiss banks or deposit

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Wants in France. His wealth made him a prime security risk."

Mensik was transferred about six months ago from the Lewisburg (Pa.) federal prison, an institution with much tighter security.

He was serving a five-year sentence for setting up a sham insurance corporation for funds deposited in savings and loan associations he owned in Maryland.

Another five years was added for jumping bond when he fled before starting his prison sentence. He was arrested in June, 1969, when he attempted to enter the United States.

Mensik has never been tried in the case of the defunct City Savings Assn., formerly at 1656 W. Chicago. Failure of the institution cost many people their life savings.

Siragusa had arranged to interview Mensik this week at the minimum-security Camp Allenwood in connection with public hearings to be held next month on the City Savings scandal.

"Our agents have been working on the case constantly for two months," Siragusa said. "We still hope to bring out some significant angles at the hearing. We have a wealth of information."

"We have learned that Mensik had a number of nominees he used to secrete cash with. He probably won't jack for cash while he is a fugitive."

Siragusa said Mensik, with his connections abroad and his money, would probably have little trouble obtaining a fake passport to get out of the United States and into a foreign country.

The Sun-Times learned that Mensik's wife is in Canada. His daughter is in the Chicago area, it was learned, but she is believed to be clear of any connection with the escape.

Camp Allenwood has about 300 inmates, all convicted of nonviolent crimes and many of them of advanced age or serving out the end of their terms.

A deputy superintendent said when asked if anything had been heard of Mensik since his escape:

"No, he hasn't come knocking at the door and volunteering for surrender."

An investigation into how Mensik escaped was urged by Valentine Janicki, a Sanitary District trustee.

Janicki, who described Mensik as "the greatest con artist who ever lived," said he lost \$100,000 he inherited from his father when City Savings closed its doors.