

Local & State News

Past Crime Seen Behind

By RON LABRECQUE
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Metro detectives back from a cross-country trip to investigate John Rosselli's killing said this week that his recent organized crime activities offer more plausible motives for his death than does his Central Intelligence Agency activity.

"We are focusing our direction now on the organized crime activity," Lt. Gary Minium, who heads the investigation task force, said.

The death of Rosselli — who was found stuffed in a barrel in

Dumfounding Bay Aug. 7 — spurred the intervention of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and more recently was given as a reason for the reopening of the John F. Kennedy assassination investigation by the House of Representatives.

ROSSELLI, during the Bay of Pigs era, helped the CIA set up attempts on the life of Fidel Castro. One theory is that JFK's death was the result of a conspiracy in retaliation for White House Cuban policy.

But Metro investigators, who have been researching Rosselli's

past fulltime since early August, said they have "narrowed the investigation down to two business interests and possibly one personal matter."

The investigators, who said they are still developing street sources — underworld informants — would not detail publicly the leads they have developed.

"We think he was trying to regain his stature in organized crime," the investigators said.

Rosselli, 70 when he died, completed a three-year prison term in 1973 for a conviction stemming

from his involvement in a card-cheating scandal at the Friars Club in Hollywood, Calif. He later moved to Plantation to live with his sister and brother-in-law.

THE INVESTIGATORS, after talking to law enforcement officials and underworld sources in California and Las Vegas, where for many years Rosselli was considered a powerful figure in organized crime activity, said they have concluded that in recent years "he was out, and there was no way he was going to get back in."

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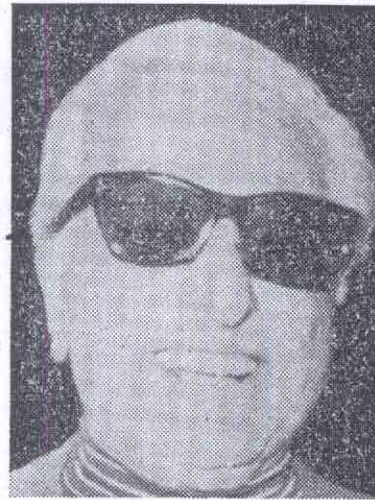
Killing

The investigators said they are still looking into Rosselli's testimony in 1971 before a Los Angeles federal grand jury, which later indicted several identified Mafia figures and a sports concession corporation for having hidden interests in a Las Vegas casino.

The casino is in the Frontier Hotel, where Rosselli had a financial interest in the gift shop when he died.

Investigators would say only that Rosselli's secret testimony be-

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John Rosselli

... not CIA activity

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fore the grand jury was "enlightening."

The records show that Rosselli appeared before the grand jury seven times during a four-month period "for many hours," an investigator said.

THREE OF the men eventually convicted in the matter are still in prison. They are Anthony Zerilli and Michael Polizzi of Detroit and Anthony Giordano of St. Louis.

Metro detective Charles Zatrepa-
lek said that when he went to talk to the lawyer for the convicted men in Los Angeles last week the attorney refused to talk.

The detectives said they have had unusual difficulty in finding sources in the case. "It's amazing; there is just a dead silence about this among people in organized crime," detective Julio Ojeda said.

"We kept getting two classic statements," Minium said about the 10 days the four-man team spent on the West Coast.

"A prominent attorney said, 'Whattaya mean, who killed him? The CIA killed him,'" Minium said.

"The other quote came from a

leib: **THE INVESTIGATORS** said they said could not determine why Rosselli met in May of this year with identified organized crime figures in California, including Jimmy "The Weasel" Fratianno. Fratianno has a \$5-million libel suit pending against Penthouse magazine, in which he was described in a 1975 article as a "hit man."

In a deposition taken for the suit two days before Rosselli's body was found, Fratianno was asked by Penthouse lawyers, who were questioning Fratianno's associates, "You know, don't you, that John Rosselli has a reputation as a gangster?"

According to a transcript, Frati-

anno replied, "It doesn't matter. I know him as a friend. I have never done business with Mr. Rosselli. I know him by seeing him at ball-games, fights I had dinner with him, that's it."

Fratianno, according to the transcript, said he didn't remember what was said at the meetings with Rosselli "because it wasn't important."

FRATIANNO, WHO is about 60, was named by the late Capt. James E. Hamilton, former head of the Los Angeles Police Department's Intelligence Division, in testimony before the California State Assembly Rackets Investigating Committee in 1959, as having " . . . long been considered by us to be the executioner for the Mafia on the West Coast. I have heard of as high as 16 deaths attributed to Fratianno."

In his deposition last month, Fratianno responded to a question about that statement by saying, "All that is a bunch of lies. What do you mean by that word 'considered'?"

Metro detectives said they "don't see the investigation slowing down."

"Every time you turn the corner you either find nothing or you find five roads which keep branching out," Minium said.