

Death of a Gangster



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IT WAS A grisly end for John Roselli, the dapper, debonair mobster about town, who had been a familiar figure in the glittering nightspots of Hollywood, Las Vegas and Havana.

We first encountered Johnny Roselli more than five years ago. We were investigating his role in the Central Intelligence Agency's plot to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

In the strictest of confidence, Roselli himself confirmed that he had directed six assassination attempts against Castro. So when he vanished last month his associates came to us for help. We were suspicious, of course, that his disappearance was linked to the Castro caper. But our investigation has now produced evidence to the contrary.

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WE HAVE LEARNED, for example, that Roselli was not the amiable, retired old duffer he pretended to be. He began in the big time as a bookkeeper for Chicago's notorious Al Capone and became a specialist in white-collar crimes. It's a profession, apparently, that he never gave up.

Competent sources say that, between rounds on the Florida golf courses, Roselli was involved in stolen securities and financial swindles. His operations reportedly were resented by Santo Trafficante, who has been identified in Senate testimony as the Mafia chief in Florida.

Roselli came to Florida from Las Vegas, where he allegedly represented

the Chicago mob. Our sources say that he handled millions in illegal gambling money, which he forwarded to the Chicago underworld. There are reports that Chicago crime lord Tony Accardo felt he had been short-changed by Roselli.

Still earlier, Roselli spent time in the slammer; first, for extortion and, later, for a card swindle. The thought of going back to prison, friends say, horrified him.

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TO AVOID PRISON, Roselli began to talk to the government as early as 1970. He gave information, according to our sources, which resulted in a grand jury confrontation for Tony Accardo. The surly mobster took the Fifth. But Accardo grumbled to associates that he would pay back Roselli some day.

Roselli was also blamed for passing information to the government, which led to the conviction of Detroit mobster Anthony Zerilli.

Perhaps the last straw was Roselli's testimony in the Castro case. He identified two mobsters, the late Sam Giancana and Santo Trafficante, as being involved in the assassination attempts.

Our sources believe that the Mafia bosses finally became fed up with Roselli. Who were the vicious killers? The only clue is a smudge spot on the window of Roselli's car. One of his assailants probably had used a greasy hair pomade.