

SF Chronicle JAN 2 1973

An Indefatigable Informer Slain

Norfolk, Va.

A 26-year-old police informant who once said she would turn in her own mother has been found brutally murdered.

Linda Dianne Russ was an eighth-grade dropout, twice married by the time she was 16, who began informing because she said she hated to see people get away with things.

During a three-year period, police said, she supplied information or testimony that resulted in at least 60 persons being convicted on charges ranging from possession of marijuana to murder.

She disappeared from her home August 24 after arranging to meet a man she

said claimed to be a syndicate killer, police said. The disappearance came shortly before she was to testify in the trials of men accused of operating a burglary ring in the area.

DITCH

Last Thursday Mrs. Russ' skeleton was found in a ditch in Chesapeake. Police said it was difficult to tell whether the informant was beaten to death or strangled.

The following day, the body of a teen-age co-defendant who turned state witness in the burglary trials was found shot to death and discarded on an old garbage dump not five miles from where Mrs. Russ' skeleton was discovered. Frank E. Willey, 19, disappeared December 18,

the day before he was to testify in the case.

One detective said that Norfolk "is a lot cleaner in the Ocean View area because of Dianne's work."

HUSBAND

Her second husband, Harry Russ, said she became involved in informing when she heard a man repeatedly boast about the number of burglaries and robberies he had committed without being caught.

"It bothered her that some guy could do this," Russ said.

Police warned her that too many people knew who she was. A story about her appeared in a national magazine. But she wouldn't quit.

One detective who was close to her said Mrs. Russ gave him a sketch book of her drawings and a sheaf of poems. He said she "flirted with death" in her poems.

"It was a game with her," he added. "I believe she knew she was going to get hurt." During the weeks before her disappearance she started carrying a concealed weapon for the first time.

TAVERN

Her husband said that the night before she disappeared they went to a tavern where she was to meet a man police hoped could be convinced to testify against confederates.

Russ said that while Mrs. Russ and the man talked, another man in a nearby booth told her he was a syndicate killer in Portsmouth for a "hit." The next night she got a telephone call from the stranger, who asked her to meet him, Russ said.

She left the house and was never again seen alive.

A detective said she once told him, "If it were my own mother I caught in the wrong, she'd go too. I mean that. She'd go too."

Associated Press