

Sam Giancana's Killer Eludes Officers

Puzzling Angles in Mafia

Chicago

Sam (Momo) Giancana was the most noted syndicate chieftain ever to be successfully "hit" in this region and, in the opinion of several investigators his may have been the most notable murder in the history of organized crime in this country.

"Sam was a big, big man," Peter F. Vaira, head of Chicago's Justice Department Organized Crime Strike Force here, said of the onetime chief of the city's mob.

"He had incredible status in this business," said one Chicago mob expert. "His reach extended around the world."

There has been renewed interest in Giancana's murder since one of his many female friends, Judith Campbell Exner of San Diego, claimed she had a sexual relationship with President Kennedy at the same time she had a relationship with Giancana in the early 1960s.

She said that singer Frank Sinatra introduced her to both Kennedy and Giancana, and that Giancana had proposed marriage to her, a proposal she refused. She said that Giancana had told her that he "had thrown his weight" behind Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election.

Giancana acquired a playboy reputation in the years after his wife died in 1954. His female friends included singer Phyllis McGuire of the McGuire sisters and singer Keely Smith, two of the few old-time friends to come to his funeral, and showgirl Carolyn Morris of Los Angeles.

Chicago area policemen have solved very few of more than a thousand mob-related murders in the last half century, and current prospects for indicting and convicting Giancana's killer do not seem overwhelming.

Now, almost seven months after Giancana was shot with seven long-rifle slugs from a .22-caliber pistol in his own basement in suburban Oak Park, a Cook county grand jury continues to summon relatives and "friends."

They don't say much.

"They won't talk because they

don't like the police. That's the way they're raised up — they're clan-ish," said one Chicago policeman. "Furthermore, they seem afraid of retaliation if they do give out information. It's enough to make a loyal daughter or son-in-law swallow the natural desire for justice or revenge."

What investigating officials, local and federal, agree on is the belief that Giancana's murder was due to his bad relations with other mobsters. They do not believe that his murder was caused by the prospect of his being subpoenaed by the Senate Intelligence Committee to testify about his involvement in a 1961 CIA plot to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

"There's no evidence that it was," said Kenneth L. Gillis, deputy state's attorney for Cook county who is supervising the grand jury investigating the murder.

Officials point out that John Rosselli, a Chicago, Los Angeles and Florida underworld figure and Giancana's partner in the unfulfilled CIA plot, did testify extensively before the Senate committee and that no one tried to kill him.

Evidence that Giancana's murder was related to testimony on the CIA plot has not emerged to date, investigators say. "We haven't got any rumbles of that," said one.

Giancana seems to have been killed by someone he knew. He may well have been cooking a snack of sausage and greens for his "friend" at the moment the "friend" shot him in the back of the neck. If people friendly to the CIA had wanted Giancana out of the way, they would have had to convince a close Giancana associate to do the job, police sources speculate.

In the six months before his death, Giancana had been required to testify four times before a federal grand jury investigating mob investment in Mexico and other foreign countries. Giancana said very little, according to Vaira, who added that the Justice Department was on the verge of seeking an indictment for perjury against Giancana for his performances before the grand jury.

"Sam wasn't talking and they (his mob cronies) knew it," Vaira



SAM (MOMO) GIANCANA
He had 'incredible status'

said. "If he had been talking, they wouldn't have let him testify more than once. He would have been nailed right away."

Similarly, Vaira feels that no one who knew Giancana had any fear that he would talk much to the Senate committee. "Sam would have waltzed them as well as he did us," he said. "I think Sam was murdered because he was a vicious bastard, coupled with a demand for

Chief's Death

money (a greater part of the Chicago crime take)," Vaira said.

Giancana has often been described as an offensive and ruthless man who had made many enemies in Chicago crime circles before he was shoved out in 1966. He lived in Mexico until 1974 when he was forced back to the United States by Mexican authorities. Police say that efforts to muscle back into the Chicago rackets were not appreciated by his fellow racketeers.

Because the Justice Department did not believe that a federal crime such as interference with a congressional committee witness or with a federal grand jury witness had been committed, the FBI was not asked to make a full-scale investigation of the Giancana murder.

The FBI has been cooperating with the Oak Park Police Department which has responsibility for investigating the murder. The Oak Park police say that the FBI is cooperating fully with them on the investigation.

There are police investigators, both in Chicago and Oak Park, who theorize that Giancana was killed because of a feeling that he had talked or would talk, not to a Senate committee but rather to the federal grand jury. Giancana was shot once in the back of the neck, five times in the throat and under the chin, and once at the right corner of his mouth. Such a placement of shots was interpreted by some policemen as a sign that revenge had been taken in the belief that Giancana had talked to the feds.

Oak Park Police Chief James J. Scannell and Detective Chief Donald Corkill, who were in charge of the investigation for the department, believe that Giancana's murder was a "mob hit."

Why do they think the mob killed him?

"We can only assume that he had talked before a grand jury or was going to," Scannell answered. "He was 68 years of age. He was sick. He was recovering from major surgery. He refused to talk to a federal grand jury ten years ago and spent a year in jail at a federal tier down at Cook County Jail. At

68, being ill, we know he didn't want to go back . . . Our conclusions are that he would make statements rather than go back to Cook County Jail."

To Scannell and other investigators of the Giancana killing, there are several unusual aspects of the murder:

Although federal authority say there was no federal surveillance of Giancana in the months before his death, there was surveillance by the organized crime section of the Chicago Police. In fact, one officer heard noises like "beer cans popping in the back yard" that night near the house. A Chicago police detail may well have been near Giancana's house at the exact moment he was shot.

One Chicago policeman said there were two cars at Giancana's that night — that of Charles (Chuck) English, Giancana's close associate, and that of Jerome and Francine DePalma, Giancana's daughter and lawyer son-in-law.

One police officer said that English had unusual access to Giancana, and had been at his house almost every afternoon for a couple of hours since Giancana came back from Mexico in 1974. Yet English did not attend Giancana's funeral.

The murder weapon, a foot-long, high standard Duromatic .22-caliber automatic pistol with a silencer and 42 holes drilled into the barrel for less noise was found two months later in weeds in nearby River Forest. This is one of the few times in decades of mob killing in Chicago that a murder weapon has been recovered. The gun was originally purchased under a bogus name in a Miami gun shop in 1965.

San Diego Police Lieutenant Ed Stevens has said that a similar weapon was used to kill San Deigo businesswoman Tamara Rand in her home on Nov. 9. "Is the outfit now using 22s to eradicate their victims?" Scannell asked.

Oak Park officers wonder why a small caliber weapon such as a .22 pistol was used and, even more strongly, why the seven cartridge casings were left at the scene. "The mob doesn't leave physical evidence at the scene of a hit," Scannell said.

Giancana's 81-year-old caretaker, Sam Di Persio, who found Giancana's body, said he was upstairs with his wife at the time of the shooting watching Johnny Carson on television but didn't hear anything through the noise of the air conditioning. The DiPersios and other Giancana acquaintances have appeared before the grand jury. Several of those called have taken Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination.