

Reputed mobster defends his honor

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

[VINCENT FERRARA], as part of a plea agreement in January, is protected from any federal grand jury sitting in Massachusetts scrutinizing any previous involvement in the Patriarca crime family, and from prosecution for his possible involvement in the 1989 murder of William Grasso, a New Haven mob figure, or the attempted murder of Francis (Cadillac Frank) Salemme. Ferrara also received assurances that the state will not prosecute him for any role he may have had in the 1985 murder of [Vincent James Limoli Jr.].

Under the plea, which still needs the approval of US District Court Judge Mark L. Wolf, Ferrara, 42, faces 22 years in prison. Codefendant Robert (Bobby Russo) Carrozza, faces 19 years; Dennis D. (Champagne) Lepore, 45, of Wakefield will receive 14 years; Joseph (J.R.) Russo, 60, will get 16 years; and Carmen Tortora, 44, of Brockton, will get 13 years. Like Ferrara, the other men are protected from grand jury scrutiny, and Russo and Carrozza also received guarantees they will not be prosecuted for any role in Grasso's murder or the attempted murder of Salemme.

One of the counts under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations act, or RICO, to which Ferrara pleaded guilty was that the murder was committed in furtherance of a racketeering enterprise. It is that admission the government now plans to use in an attempt to lengthen the time [Patriarca] may spend in jail.

FULL TEXT

Reputed mobsters are not ones to trumpet their deeds in public, but when their reputations in the underworld are at risk they sometimes make unusual efforts to protect them.

So it was yesterday when Vincent (The Animal) Ferrara reached out from the Essex County jail in Middleton to telephone The Boston Globe and say he never testified against Raymond J. (Junior) Patriarca and was not about to start now.

The alleged member of the Patriarca Mafia family, normally reticent and publicity-shy, called from the jail where he is being held pending sentencing. He complained that an article in Saturday's Globe -- which reported that the US attorney was planning to use Ferrara's sworn admission that he ordered the killing of Vincent James Limoli Jr. -- was putting him in an awkward position.

"The average person reading the article could get the inference that I could be an informant, a stool pigeon, and it is exactly the opposite. The only thing I ever said to them was 'guilty,' " said Ferrara.

"I worked my whole life to keep an impeccable reputation; it may be different than your standards, but I want to be able to hold my head up," he said.

Ferrara, as part of a plea agreement in January, is protected from any federal grand jury sitting in Massachusetts scrutinizing any previous involvement in the Patriarca crime family, and from prosecution for his possible involvement in the 1989 murder of William Grasso, a New Haven mob figure, or the attempted murder of Francis (Cadillac Frank) Salemme. Ferrara also received assurances that the state will not prosecute him for any role he may have had in the 1985 murder of Limoli.

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Wakefield will receive 14 years; Joseph (J.R.) Russo, 60, will get 16 years; and Carmen Tortora, 44, of Brockton, will get 13 years. Like Ferrara, the other men are protected from grand jury scrutiny, and Russo and Carrozza also received guarantees they will not be prosecuted for any role in Grasso's murder or the attempted murder of Salemme.

None of the men will be eligible for parole.

Ferrara expressed particular concern about a caption beneath his photograph accompanying the story, which read: "Testimony is seen as key."

"Something like that could put me in harm's way if I get sent to someplace like Lewisburg," he said, referring to a federal prison in Pennsylvania.

While the government has said it will use Ferrara's sworn admission at Patriarca's sentencing hearing, it has never said he will testify as a witness.

"I never talked to the FBI, the prosecutors or assistant prosecutors," Ferrara said. "The only word I ever uttered was 'guilty.' I made no statement and gave no testimony."

But one of the counts under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations act, or RICO, to which Ferrara pleaded guilty was that the murder was committed in furtherance of a racketeering enterprise. It is that admission the government now plans to use in an attempt to lengthen the time Patriarca may spend in jail.

Although Ferrara admitted in court that he ordered the murder of Limoli, he said in the brief telephone call that he "had nothing to do with it."

He also said that the government's effort to tie Walter Jordan, reputedly a former associate of the Patriarca family, to the Limoli murder were ridiculous. "That stuff about Walter Jordan is all nonsense," he said.

Ferrara said he entered into the plea agreement to spare his family the agony of a long trial. The agreement, he said, gives him a chance to see his grandchildren.

"I'm giving the government 19 sweet years of my life; I have \$1.2 million in forfeiture and five years of supervised release; this is no sweet deal," he said.

While Ferrara's plea agreement calls for him to spend 22 years in jail, he could be released a few years early for good behavior.

The article in Saturday's Globe dealt with the US attorney's efforts to show that Patriarca's "relevant conduct" as the alleged head of the New England Mafia was such that he knew of or should have foreseen the murder of Limoli, the 1986 murder of Boston hotelier Theodore Berns, and Salvatore Michael Caruana's efforts to ship 77 tons of marijuana into New England between 1979 and 1981.

If the government is successful in its efforts to prove Patriarca was aware of Limoli's murder and other crimes, his sentence could jump from about 8 years in prison to 30 years.

The government's use of informants is well known and received much publicity recently in the ongoing trial in New York of alleged Gambino Mafia family boss John Gotti. For two weeks, his admitted underboss, Salvatore (Sammy Bull) Gravano, testified about murders and other criminal activity in the Gambino family.

Illustration

PHOTO; CAPTION:VINCENT FERRARA Says he's no stool pigeon

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