

Bulger, Connolly view on '82 killing detailed

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ABSTRACT

Offering a tangled look at a series of killings in the 1970s and 1980s, clouded by FBI intrigue, prosecutors are trying to convince the Miami-Dade jury that Connolly had a history of leaking sensitive information to Bulger and his sidekick, Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi, during his 22-year career with the bureau that left a trail of bodies.

FULL TEXT

MIAMI - Blame it on the Mafia, or a crew of Irish gangsters from Charlestown. That's what South Boston crime boss James "Whitey" Bulger did after one of his associates, Edward "Brian" Halloran, was gunned down, along with an innocent bystander, on a Boston street in 1982, according to secret FBI documents presented yesterday to a Florida jury.

"The Mafia should not be ruled out," then-FBI agent John J. Connolly Jr. wrote in a report filed with his superiors two days after the May 11 slaying, based on information provided by Bulger, a longtime informant. "In fact, they stood to gain the most from Halloran's death."

The documents were introduced on the second day of Connolly's trial on state murder charges that could send him to prison for life. While Bulger, one of the FBI's 10 Most Wanted who has been a fugitive since 1995, has been absent from the trial, two of his former partners are expected to take the stand and implicate Connolly in a series of slayings, including Halloran's.

Connolly, now 68 and retired from the FBI since 1990, is not charged with Halloran's slaying. But prosecutors allege that Bulger killed Halloran after Connolly warned him that Halloran had turned informant and was cooperating against him.

Offering a tangled look at a series of killings in the 1970s and 1980s, clouded by FBI intrigue, prosecutors are trying to convince the Miami-Dade jury that Connolly had a history of leaking sensitive information to Bulger and his sidekick, Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi, during his 22-year career with the bureau that left a trail of bodies.

Connolly is on trial in the slaying of Boston business consultant John B. Callahan, whose bullet-riddled body was found in the trunk of his Cadillac at Miami International Airport on Aug. 2, 1982. Connolly is accused of provoking the slaying by warning Bulger and Flemmi that the FBI planned to question Callahan, who was a "weak link" and would probably implicate them in the slayings of Halloran and a Tulsa businessman.

First, Roger Wheeler, the owner of World Jai Alai and chairman of Telex Corp., was shot between the eyes outside a Tulsa country club in May 1981. Then Halloran started talking to the FBI and asserted that Callahan, the former president of Jai Alai, Bulger, and Flemmi enlisted a hit man friend to kill Wheeler because he suspected Bulger's

gang of skimming from his company.

Halloran was killed next, allegedly because of Connolly's leak. Less than three months later, Callahan was killed as the FBI was pressuring him to cooperate.

The eight-woman, seven-man jury struggled to keep up with Boston's underworld history, and one member of the panel seemed to doze occasionally. James Marra, an agent with the Justice Department's inspector general's office who testified all day, introduced documents and tried to explain the intricacies of the agent-informant relationship.

Connolly, who was commended within the bureau for his ability to recruit informants from the Mafia and the so-called Irish mob, frowned as Marra acknowledged that he himself had handled only five to 10 informants in his own career, but never a top-echelon informant.

During cross-examination, Marra acknowledged that an FBI supervisor had recommended placing Halloran in the Federal Witness Protection program a couple of weeks before his slaying, based in part on Connolly's information, via Bulger, that his life was in danger.

After briefly putting Halloran up in a safe house, the FBI rejected his request to join the witness protection program after deciding he was not credible, according to prior proceedings.

"Now Callahan is the case we're here on, right?" asked Connolly's Miami defense lawyer, Manuel L. Casabiel, a subtle reminder to the jury that his client is charged only with Callahan's killing and not all of the other alleged crimes they were hearing about.

It is unlikely that any jurors will be caught sleeping today, when former hit man John Martorano is slated to take the stand. Martorano, who cut a deal with the government and served just 12 years in prison for killing 20 people, has previously testified that he lured Callahan to Florida and killed him.

It will not be Martorano's first time facing Connolly on the stand. His testimony helped convict Connolly of federal racketeering charges in Boston in 2002, and the agent is currently serving a 10-year prison term. But this will be the first time Martorano tells his story to a Florida jury.

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Credit: Shelley Murphy Globe Staff. PHOTOS BY LYNNE SLADKY/POOL

Illustration

Caption: John J. Connolly Jr. listened on the second day of his trial, which offered a tangled look at killings in the 1970s and 1980s. James Marra (left), an agent with the Justice Department's inspector general's office, responded to a question during testimony.

DETAILS

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