

THE BOSTON GLOBE TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1988 19

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down here and give me a quarter?" Grunaro Angulo complained one day about the obligation that always soured his mood. "And I'll tell you something, I don't think they intend to pay it, if you want my honest opinion."

The hangarings against Bulger and what was left of the Winter Hill gang increased, as his elusive, independent ways occasionally proved too much for the Mafia. Angulo began spreading the word he was tiring of the Irish hoods over at the Lancaster Street garage. The brutal Zannino related this to his men after a night of drinking at his big-stakes card game in the North End, a night that was secretly tape-recorded by the FBI. "They got a bad attitude," Zannino reported.

"Why don't we go in that garage, right now? With machine guns," clamored one of the soldiers.

"We'll go tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock," Zannino said, stoking a flame that never flared beyond the North End backroom.

"We'll go bust right in the joint," Zannino concluded. "You think they're with us? We'll kill every one of these Irishmen."

For the past decade, Bulger has kept the Mafia at bay, managing what one source called a "loose association" rooted in being both ally and a potential enemy. They were the sort of ties that Howie Winter first used to keep the Italians off balance - elaborate gamesmanship that called for friendly conversations, but with everyone taking a seat with their back to the wall.

They were ties that Flemmi had on his own, as he carved out a niche in Roxbury back in the early 1960s. Together, the Bulger-Flemmi team carefully nurtured their special standing, which has served them well. The pair dealt directly with Angulo, who usually preferred go-betweens to insulate himself from non-Mafia. Said a source, "The Mafia treats them with kid gloves."

And it is a respect that Bulger trades on, his reputation rivaling that of the Mafia's own legendary enforcer. "Whitey is the most like Zannino on the scene today..." said one investigator. "But he is 100 times smarter. He's selectively brutal. That's the difference."

THE MAFIA is not the only force that Bulger has succeeded in keeping at arm's length. Even more impressive is the distance he has maintained from the law. Since Bulger left prison in 1965, he has only been in court twice, both for traffic violations. Few Boston police officers have any idea what Bulger looks like and Police Commissioner Francis M. Roache has declined to discuss him.

It is not as if some other cops have not tried. For most of 1980, the State Police pursued Bulger. Detectives wired the garage, installed bugs in pay phones and tried hiding a microphone in the car Bulger drove. Each time their efforts fluffed. They had a slew of technical difficulties but also security problems. Bulger somehow caught on to their sleuthing and either began talking gibberish or said nothing at all.

In 1984, federal drug agents took a swing. The Drug Enforcement Administration put a bug in a window of Bulger's condominium in Quincy and, when that failed, installed a microphone in his car. It was the car bug that led to the lengthy, good-bad guy Bulger monologue, as dejected federal agents retrieved the \$50,000 in equipment Bulger had found.

The setbacks have left law enforcement officials confused, suspicious and at one another's throat. Bulger, said one source, loves to pit one law enforcement agency against another, "which isn't difficult in this state." If so, Bulger has been triumphant. Few others have ever had such a divisive effect on law enforcement - a dis harmony. The Spotlight Team has learned, noted largely in the fallout from Bulger's longstanding ties to John Connolly, a member of the FBI's organized crime squad.

Mention Connolly's name today to many who track mobsters and the reply is Whitey Bulger. Mention Bulger's name, the reply is often Connolly, the street-smart agent who also grew up in South Boston and first made contact with the Irish gangster shortly after the FBI transferred him home from New York City in 1973.

Back then, said federal sources, it made sense to have someone in the Boston office keeping open lines with the emerging leader. For Bulger's part, he was hardly the first underworld figure to have a tenuous liaison with the other side. Mobsters frequently shadowed with agents in a complex game that is sometimes reducible to a single question: Who is using whom?

But as Bulger rose to the top of his game, the Bulger-Connolly tie has been questioned by others in law enforcement, including some inside the FBI. "You can never have contact with the top guy," one former official said in criticizing Connolly's continuous link with Bulger. "Because you have the top guy, he's making policy, and then he owns you."

The failures of the State Police and the DEA have created two antithetical schools of thought: that the investigators simply bungled it through inexperience; or that Whitey has been able to exploit his cachet with the FBI to plan his evasive tactics.

State Police officials felt so strongly that someone within the FBI had tipped the mobsters about the bug that, in an unprecedented case of finger-pointing, they asked the FBI to conduct an internal inquiry. The FBI cleared two agents, and the FBI leadership remains outraged at the suggestion that any of its own would engage in that kind of treachery.

James F. Ahern, special agent in charge of the FBI in Boston, was unequivocal when asked last month if Bulger has had relations with the FBI that have left him free of its scrutiny.

"That is absolutely untrue," said Ahern. "We have not had evidence that would warrant it and if we do develop anything of an evidentiary nature, we will pursue it. We specifically deny that there has been special treatment of this individual." He declined to make any further comment on the matter and instructed Connolly not to speak on the subject.

Fallout from the bugging fiasco at the Lancaster Street garage did not end in finger-pointing. More bitterness followed in the summer of 1981 when the State Police discovered a small item on early retirement, tagged onto the State budget package, that



Whitey Bulger talks to Donato Angulo inside the Lancaster Street garage in 1980.



Stephen J. Flemmi as pictured on a 1970 Boston police wanted poster in connection with a gangland slaying and car bombing.



Whitey Bulger walks a friend's poodles.

FBI agent John Connolly

would have forced those who ran the department's intelligence division to retire immediately. The item was later removed, but police officials never figured out which legislator or staff person inserted the item into the budget, or why. Many in law enforcement felt the mysterious action was a warning shot at the State Police commanders who, the year before, had authorized the Lancaster Street investigation targeting Whitey Bulger.

In the bitter aftermath, many who were planning the DEA's 1984 probe of Bulger were convinced they should not even tell the FBI, circumventing the policy that the FBI be notified of targeted figures. Despite the nearly universal feeling that no agent had or would warn Bulger specifically about electronic surveillance, the fear of a leak persisted.

But to avoid a feud, William F. Weld, then the US attorney in Massachusetts, and Robert M. Stutman, then the DEA special agent in charge, went to see James Greenleaf. The FBI, according to federal sources, was offered a role in the Bulger investigation if it wanted one. Several days later, Greenleaf declined.

Interviewed recently about the meeting on Bulger, Greenleaf was evasive. "Because of the sensitivity of the thing, I can't really comment," he said. Later, he added, "I wish I could comment, there are things that need to be said." But by the end of the brief interview he was backing off entirely from

the subject of Bulger. "I don't recall being in a meeting where that [Bulger investigation] was the topic of conversation."

At the time, the FBI's position confirmed others' worst fears about Bulger. "It really made you think, why won't the FBI do this guy?" said one high-ranking DEA official. Eventually, two FBI agents, newcomers to the Boston office, provided the DEA with some technical assistance.

Even inside the FBI there was a growing feeling by 1984 that the Connolly-Bulger liaison had gone too far, that it was a move toward producing results, and that it should be abandoned given the critical perception gaining momentum among others in law enforcement. At least one FBI agent refused to work with Connolly. And, while the DEA continued drawing up its plans, there was a move within the FBI, which ultimately failed, to force Connolly to close out the contact with the underworld leader.

"You can't have another government agency running an investigation against a guy that we know," said a federal source familiar with the effort. "It's stupid. It's dumb."

The net result is that when it comes to Whitey Bulger, the FBI has been put on the defensive. Many dubious investigators point back to the race-fixing convictions of Winter Hill mobsters, which began in 1979 and ran through 1982, as the first sign of exemption for Bulger and Flemmi. Of the co-conspirators government witnesses Anthony (Pat Tony) Culla accused of getting a cut of the profits, only Bulger

and Flemmi were not indicted.

But Jeremiah T. O'Sullivan, the chief of the US Justice Department's New England Organized Crime Strike Force, who prosecuted the case, said the two were not indicted because "we had no evidence against them outside of Culla's word. Very rarely do you indict on just the word of an informant."

"To the people who are whining and complaining, I'd suggest, make a case on them. It ain't nuclear physics. It can be done," said O'Sullivan in a challenge to the law enforcement agencies which have gone after Bulger. "What you've had is some people taking one shot, then walking away crying that there's been a leak. You've got to keep trying."

The explanation does not quiet the critics, who contend the race-fixing case was the best shot anyone has had against Bulger, a shot worth taking with the word of a government witness who proved his credibility in court. They also note that back in 1968 just the word of a government witness put away Raymond L.S. Patriarca, head of the New England Mafia, for five years.

Moreover, O'Sullivan's exhortations to try harder do not explain the existence of at least 14 volumes of FBI files on Bulger - material that one federal source noted is further proof of the FBI's longstanding relationship with Bulger. "Who else would have that many volumes?" the source asked rhetorically. "Maybe Jerry Angulo? Patriarca? But they were put away." The extensiveness of the files indicate the FBI has been following Bulger closely for years, but it has never charged him with anything.

Knowledge of the copious FBI files resulted from a Freedom of Information Act request made by the Globe last April. The Globe has yet to receive any of the requested material from the FBI, a delay that one official in Washington explained was in part due to the time it will take to sift through the voluminous material to determine what portions are disclosable.

For the critics, including those within the FBI who have heard Connolly mention Whitey's good-guy deeds in the home district, it is a dangerous situation not unlike the US government hanging on too long with helpful if unscrupulous dictators.

"It's always a tough call about when you go past that turning point where you were using the guy and then he starts using you," said a veteran investigator.

From the dispute, Bulger profits - his opposition divided, his reputation enhanced. "Other police just throw up their hands and it becomes a free ride," another said. Added a prosecutor about Bulger's apparent omniscience, "Whitey's got hooks everywhere." If Bulger lacks outright control, it is clear he is on the mind of those running the control tower.

ONE CLUE to Bulger's strategic success comes from the nine years he spent in federal prison. He studied extensively, from politics to World War II. But his approach to war was unique. "He would read one guy's book, say Marshall's book, and then he'd get the book from some German, and he would study the same battle from everybody's perspective," said a friend.

Bulger, it seems, has a knack for the quick countermove. Faced with the prospect of renewed surveillance, he has become more cautious, said sources who monitor his activities.

Less frequent are his visits to the home of his brother, Senator President Bill Bulger. Whitey has long stopped going to St. Patrick's Day gatherings at the home on East Third Street, which shares a front yard with Flemmi's mother's house. In the summer, Bulger used to enjoy the afternoon sun in front of the South Boston Liqueur Mart, the building which until recently was owned in his name. He has not been sunning himself there this year.

Bulger now goes on the road a lot, sources said, travel being his favorite form of recreation, often with his longtime companion, Theresa Stanley. Indeed, Bulger's last public encounter was an unexpected one a year ago at Logan Airport.

As always, it had a Whitey twist. Minutes before Bulger and Stanley were going to board a flight to Montreal last September, airport security examining luggage realized Bulger's carry-on bag contained a brick-sized wad of cash. The guard thumbed through the \$100 bills, totaling an estimated \$100,000. Bulger angrily ignored questions about the money and, when the guard said she was notifying State Police, he took off.

Followed by a guard, Bulger headed quickly for the door. Just as a quarterback hands off a football, he gave the package to another man, who hurried out the door and climbed into a black Chevy Blazer. The guard tried to follow, but Bulger put his foot in the revolving door so it would not budge.

The guard was stuck. The Chevy drove away. No one knew they were dealing with Whitey Bulger, not State Trooper William Johnson, who responded and found a man dressed in an expensive black pinstriped suit exchanging harsh words with a security guard. The trooper looked at Bulger's identification - James J. Bulger - but still did not make the connection.

Because there was no reason to detain him, Bulger was eventually let go. But not before the trooper spent a couple of minutes trying to figure out what happened during double talk from Bulger, the trooper finally yelled at him to shut up. Bulger, who does not consider himself an ordinary wiseguy, was genuinely affronted. In his best good-bad guy mode, he asked:

"Is that how you treat citizens?"

■ Tomorrow: A President's Image

THE GLOBE
SPOTLIGHT TEAM
EDITOR
Gerard O'Neill

REPORTERS
Christine Chisholm,
Dick Lehr, Kevin Cullen

RESEARCHER
Mary Elizabeth Knox