

PAGE 4

THE PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 1995

JIMMY

Not your usual suspects

HOFFA

by Kitty Caparella
Daily News Staff Writer



Jimmy Hoffa: Missing since '75

Jimmy Hoffa was shot, but not by organized-crime figures.

He is not buried under Giants Stadium in the North Jersey Meadowlands, or in a 55-gallon drum, or in any landfill.

The perpetrators were contract killers linked to Richard Nixon's White House, even though the Watergate investigation had forced the president to leave office in disgrace.

And we'll never find the body.

That is the contention of former Teamsters Union business agent Frank Sheeran, who told the Daily News he has the key to the disappearance of Teamsters boss James Riddle Hoffa on July 30, 1975, one of the most fascinating and notorious unsolved crimes in American history.

Sheeran, 74, a former Teamsters business agent in Philadelphia and Wilmington, has long been linked to the case and perhaps is the last person alive to know what really happened.

Sheeran, who served six years of an 18-year sentence on federal labor racketeering charges, last month was ordered back to prison for nine months, the result of parole violations — meeting with mobsters. He is to surrender today to authorities.

For 20 years, Sheeran wouldn't talk. Not in response to subpoenas, grand juries, politicians, the FBI and other authorities who interrogated him. Not even for a \$3 million reward offered by the Hoffa family and the union Hoffa headed for years, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

He kept mum because of a promise to his best friend, who died last year. Sheeran says he's now ready to tell all — to his biographer, John Zeitz.

"I did not kill Hoffa. I had nothing to do with it," Sheeran said. "But I never had the answer until 1988."

"With time and the death of the others, I am the only one who knows for sure," he said. "Now, I am able to answer some of the questions concerning the disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa."

Will the body ever be found?

"No way, dear," Sheeran said.

Sheeran said his story linking the Hoffa disappearance to the White House will be detailed in his autobiography.

Sheeran is negotiating a multimillion-dollar deal — with a clause not to disclose certain facts beforehand — to publish the book and do a movie. He expects it to be announced soon.

He made a promise not to talk before this to "the best friend I ever had," Pennsylvania crime boss Russell Bufalino,

The oldest living suspect in the disappearance of the legendary Teamster, **FRANK SHEERAN**, draws a line — not necessarily a straight one — from mob chief **RUSSELL BUFALINO** of Pennsylvania and the **GENOVESE FAMILY** to Hoffa successor **FRANK FITZSIMMONS** and the dirty tricks of **RICHARD NIXON**



Sheeran in '81 (left), Bufalino in '82 (top right) and Nixon in '89



FILE PHOTOS

Survivors' ranks growing thin

by Kitty Caparella
Daily News Staff Writer

At least six suspects were identified by the FBI in the Hoffa disappearance and presumed murder in 1975.

Besides Frank Sheeran, the other suspects included:

■ Anthony "Tony Pro" Provenzano, capo in the Genovese crime family and ex-business agent of Teamsters Local 560 in Union City, N.J. He died of a heart attack Dec. 12, 1988, in Lompoc (Calif.) federal prison, where he was serving 20 years for labor racketeering. Hoffa was going to meet Provenzano the day he disappeared.

■ Stephen Andretta, a Tony Pro associate, told informant Ralph Picardo that he did not participate in the Hoffa hit, but was left in Newark to provide an alibi for Tony Pro. Still alive, he won't talk about Hoffa.

■ Thomas Andretta, brother of Stephen and Tony Pro associate is still alive with nothing to say. Believed to be in the car when Hoffa was picked up.

■ Salvatore "Sal" Briguglio, a Tony Pro associate, was killed in a shower of bullets outside a restaurant in New York's Little Italy on Mar. 21, 1978. Believed to

See **SURVIVORS** Page 32



Provenzano

whom he met in an auto body shop in the 1950s.

Bufalino, who died last year at age 91, headed the upstate crime family that has long had strong ties to the trucking industry, according to law enforcement sources.

Authorities have long speculated that Bufalino ordered Hoffa murdered, on behalf of rival Teamsters linked to the mob, but Sheeran discounts that theory.

On the hot July afternoon of his disappearance, Hoffa was waiting for his foster son, Chuckie O'Brien, in the parking lot of the Machus Red Fox Restaurant in Bloomfield Township, Mich., outside Detroit.

According to published accounts of the FBI's investigation, Hoffa and O'Brien were to go to a meeting to resolve Hoffa's differences with Anthony "Tony Pro" Provenzano, a reputed capo in New York City's Genovese crime family and head of Teamsters Local 560 in North Jersey, who had had a falling out with Hoffa in federal prison in Lewisburg, Pa.

When Hoffa was picked up, eyewitnesses said, two other men were in the car with O'Brien. They were Tony Pro's men — Salvatore Briguglio and either his brother, Gabriel Briguglio, or Thomas Andretta, according to published accounts.

Investigators believe Hoffa was knocked out with the butt of a gun soon after getting into the car and later strangled on Provenzano's orders with Bufalino's permission. The disposal of Hoffa's body was left to Sheeran, who was in Detroit for a wedding at the time.

Not so, says Sheeran. This is his account:

Five days after Hoffa's disappearance, Sheeran said, he was called to meet at a New York City restaurant with Bufalino, Provenzano and Salvatore Briguglio, a Local 560 business agent — all suspects in the disappearance, according to an FBI memo at the time.

At the Aug. 4, 1975, meeting over lunch at the Vesuvius Restaurant, Sheeran said

See **HOFFA** Page 32

PAGE 32

THE PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 1995

HOFFA

Continued from Page 4

Bufalino told him Hoffa had been "taken out" — killed — and that the information came from a "high political official" via Anthony "Fat Tony" Salerno, head of the Genovese crime family.

Sheeran would not disclose who the political figure was, saying "read the book."

But earlier, as one version of

the story goes, President Nixon had cut a deal with Teamsters President Frank Fitzsimmons. The Teamsters were the only major union to support Nixon's re-election. Nixon agreed to pardon Hoffa but banned him from holding union office.

Sheeran says that Nixon's copy of Hoffa's parole papers was "altered" and claims to have an original of the parole recommendation, which doesn't include union restrictions.

At the New York lunch, Bufalino made Sheeran promise not to look for or ask questions about Hoffa, he said.

"Don't try to solve anything. There's nothing you can do about it," Bufalino told him.

"They were trying to keep me out of trouble," Sheeran added.

"I was mad," Sheeran said. Hoffa "was my friend. I didn't know who was involved. The only thing said was Russell gave me advice." The others, he added, "never

would have told me."

In 1975, Sheeran was the 53-year-old business agent of Teamsters Local 325 in Wilmington, Del., with aspirations to higher union office, and he looked to Hoffa as a mentor.

Sheeran had been a co-plaintiff in a lawsuit to free Hoffa of parole restrictions and allow him to take over the union again. Hoffa was guest speaker at an Oct. 18, 1974, testimonial in Sheeran's honor at the Latin Casino in Cherry Hill.

Hoffa gave Sheeran the gold watch he still wears today.

"Everyone has to have a rabbi. Russell was my rabbi and so was Hoffa," he said. Hoffa had promised to make Sheeran an international organizer when he returned as Teamsters president. "I didn't want a desk job," Sheeran said.

The white-haired, bear-chested Sheeran, who now walks with a cane, said he didn't learn all the details of Hoffa's death until 1988 when he was jailed at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners in Springfield, Mo., with Bufalino, Anthony Salerno and Salvatore "Tom Mix" Santorino.

"I was supposed to go in for surgery," said Sheeran, who couldn't walk because of degenerative spinal problems.

Bufalino, partially paralyzed by a stroke and suffering heart dis-

ease, Salerno, battling cancer and Santorino regularly met in their wheelchairs in the center of the prison courtyard to discuss business. Their nurses and aides sat outside of hearing distance.

"At Springfield, Russell explained to me how it was done and who did it," Sheeran said.

"They didn't know the exact names of the individuals who did it, but who they had allegiance to — people high up in government."

Investigators only ever considered two groups, he said: the Teamsters under Fitzsimmons and organized crime. But a third group, political forces within government, had "the most to lose," he added.

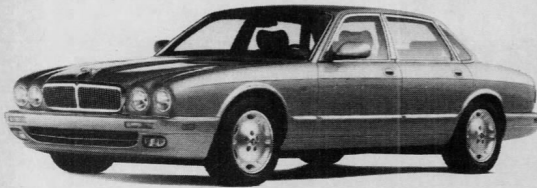
Sheeran wouldn't disclose why this "inner circle" — similar to the White House "plumbers" who did dirty tricks on behalf of Nixon — wanted Hoffa dead. But "certain elements" in the government were "ambitious and abused their power," he said. "They used me for a scapegoat."

Sheeran believes this "conspiracy of high-ranking government officials" began before Nixon stepped down, and it used Sheeran's presence in Detroit to link him to the murder.

He had told Hoffa by phone on

Continued on Next Page

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SURVIVORS

Continued from Page 4

be in the car when Hoffa was picked up.

■ Gabriel "Gabe" Briguglio, Sal's brother and an associate of Tony Pro, is still alive, but won't discuss Hoffa. Believed to be in the car when Hoffa was picked up.

Other people who figured in the case have died:

■ Russell Bufalino, boss of the upstate Pennsylvania crime family who had a history of heart problems, died in federal prison on Feb. 25, 1994.

■ Anthony "Fat Tony" Salerno, crime boss of the Genovese fam-

ily, died of a stroke in federal prison on July 27, 1992.

■ Frank Fitzsimmons, former president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, died of lung cancer on May 6, 1981.

■ Hoffa's wife, Josephine, died in 1980 of what her family calls "a broken heart." She had a malignant tumor in the sinus cavity pressing on her spinal column and a brain tumor.

■ Former President Richard M. Nixon, who released Hoffa with the prohibition of returning to Teamsters office, died April 22, 1994.

The Associated Press and "Hoffa," a book written by Arthur H. Sloane, contributed to this report.

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