

WHO PULLED THE TRIGGER? THE ANATOMY OF A HIT

MUSITANO'S KILLING REMAINS UNSOLVED, WRITES STEPHEN METELSKY



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Column

Who pulled the trigger that killed Pat Musitano?

Halton police are searching for the answer to that question.

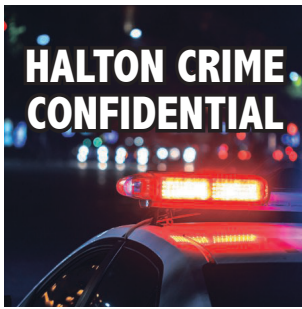
"It was certainly planned," said detective sergeant Trevor Bradley, who leads Halton's homicide unit.

An even larger question looms. Who was the person or criminal group behind Pat's murder? In the underworld, the person or group who planned the hit versus the gunman who actually pulled the trigger are rarely one and the same.

The latest trend with mafia murders involves hiring hitmen outside of their criminal organization to create an insulated border and disconnect between the shooters on the street and the person who issued the actual "hit."

The experts agree.

"In Canada these crimi-



nal groups rely on street gangs or people they can hire," said Antonio Nicaso, a professor at Queen's University, organized crime expert and author of more than 40 books on the subject. "Whoever decided to kill the two brothers (Pat and Angelo) had stronger partnerships in the underworld. They were more powerful than the Musitanos."

Nicaso believes Musitano's murder in Burlington may have been "a trap" - whether set up from within his circle of contacts or resulting from Pat meeting someone he trusted externally.

Nicaso added Musitano may have had a "false sense of security" with the public backdrop that the Burlington commercial lot at 484 Plains Rd. E. provided during the day.

"You feel you are in a safe location, so it is quite possible it was a trap from someone that knew him (Pat) or someone that he trusted," added Nicaso.

The emerging modus

operandi in other underworld murders — where a victim was relentlessly tracked down and targeted for murder — has involved the use of technology, specifically tracking a vehicle after a GPS device has been surreptitiously attached.

"It is very easy to place at the bottom of the vehicle and then you are able to track them from a computer. It is quite possible Pat was followed. It is an inexpensive (and covert) way to track down an enemy or target you want to kill," added Nicaso.

At the time of Pat's murder, he was still driving the same SUV — a black GMC Yukon Denali — as 2019 when he was shot in Mississauga and survived the attempt on his life.

The other obstacle for police is getting anyone from the underworld to cooperate with authorities. Fear and intimidation still play a prominent role - whether someone is embedded in organized crime or not.

Witnesses are difficult to come by.

"Anything related to organized crime is challenging from that aspect," said Bradley, who sounded undeterred given other avenues at the disposal of police. "We are relying on our forensics, video and informants or intelligence we can drum up around it. Those are the prospects of



Graham Paine/Metroland

Halton police set up mobile signs asking for witnesses shortly after the killing of Pat Musitano.

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solving these kind of investigations."

Yet, the oath of Omerta — or "code of silence" — remains a powerful force in the mafia.

"Informants are very pivotal to solving these cases. However, there are very few people in the Mob willing to talk or become a turncoat and that makes it more difficult to solve mafia murders," concluded Nicaso.

Why was Pat killed in Burlington? It is yet to be determined, but even though his criminal epicentre was in Hamilton,

the mafia has become transnational.

"There are no defined borders around these sorts of crimes. An issue that happens elsewhere can quickly end up in Halton," as did Pat's murder, added Bradley.

Regardless, these crimes still involve the loss of human life and the ever present risk of an innocent bystander being killed. John Mans, a retired detective sergeant, formerly in charge of Halton's intelligence division until 2017, concurred.

"The value organized

crime puts on human life is so insignificant with these criminals. There is no shortage of players willing to do the dirty work to make a name for themselves."

Halton police are looking to do just that - put a name to the shooter in this case.

Have information about this homicide?

Call the Halton Police Homicide Tip Line at 905-825-4776.

Tipsters can also provide information anonymously at Crime Stoppers: 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

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