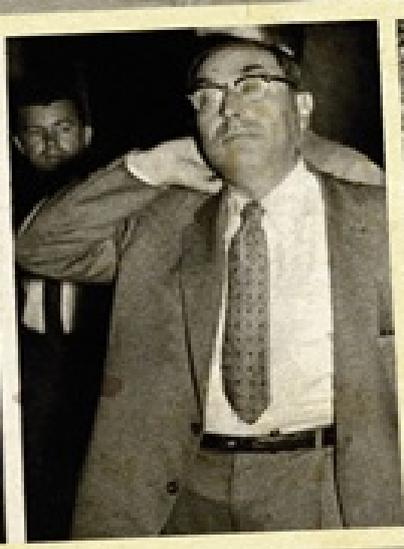


J. EDGAR HOOVER, THE KENNEDY BROTHERS,  
AND THE MEETING THAT UNMASKED THE MOB

# MAFIA SUMMIT



GIL REAVILL

# MAFIA SUMMIT

J. Edgar Hoover, the Kennedy Brothers, and  
the Meeting That Unmasked the Mob

---

GIL REAVILL

THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS  St. MARTIN'S PRESS, NEW YORK

The author and publisher have provided this e-book to you for your personal use only. You may not make this e-book publicly available in any way. **Copyright infringement is against the law. If you believe the copy of this e-book you are reading infringes on the author's copyright, please notify the publisher at: [us.macmillanusa.com/piracy](http://us.macmillanusa.com/piracy).**

*In memory of my father, Acton Reavill,  
who set me on my path in life as a young child, taking me to Al Capone's  
hideout in northern Wisconsin, and to Little Bohemia lodge, where he  
showed me the bullet holes from John Dillinger's shoot-out with the Feds*

# CONTENTS

**TITLE PAGE**

**COPYRIGHT NOTICE**

**DEDICATION**

**EPIGRAPH**

**PROLOGUE:** *McFall Road, Apalachin, New York*

## **PART I: ALBERT AND VITO**

1. *Murder on Fifteenth Street*
2. *The Rise of Joe Barbara*
3. *Albert Anastasia's Waterfront*
4. *Vito Comes Home*
5. *Genovese Hits Costello*
6. *Anastasia Gets His*
7. *Genovese Calls a Confab*
8. *The Mob Meets*
9. *Croswell Makes His Move*
10. *The Big Roundup*

## **PART II: BOBBY AND J. EDGAR**

11. *The Rackets Committee Convenes*
12. *Hoover Denies the Mafia*
13. *The Mystery of Apalachin*
14. *The Watchdogs*
15. *The Feds Take Down Vito*
16. *The Brother Within*
17. *General Kennedy Goes After the Mob*
18. *Bobby Goes Too Far*
19. *November 14, 1957*

**EPILOGUE:** *Apalachin in the American Imagination*

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**APPENDIX**

**ENDNOTES**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**INDEX**

**PHOTOGRAPHS  
ALSO BY GIL REAVILL  
ABOUT THE AUTHOR  
COPYRIGHT**

*What a field day for the heat ...*

—STEPHEN STILLS

“FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH”

# PROLOGUE

## *McFall Road, Apalachin, New York*

OUT OF ALL THE CARS parked alongside McFall Road in the tiny New York hamlet of Apalachin, the Chrysler Crown Imperial limousine stood out. Not just an automobile, but a statement of wealth and prestige, expressed in an ornate chrome grill and a set of sweeping tail fins. A fat, shiny, outlandish vehicle, a perfect signifier for 1950s America.

Midday on a foggy, rainy Thursday, November 14, 1957. Through his field glasses from fifty yards away, Sergeant Edgar Croswell of the New York State Police surveilled not only the big Imperial, but also a dozen similar late-model land boats around it, as well as the hilltop estate where they were parked.

Sergeant Croswell always had a sharp eye for cars. When his youngest son Bob was a child, Croswell taught him to recognize automobiles as a kind of parlor trick—a six-year-old able to nail the difference between a Ford Custom, say, and a Galaxie, rattling off the make, model, and year like a savant.

Back in the 1920s, Walter Chrysler founded the Imperial line to compete with GM's Cadillac and Ford's Lincoln. Though it never quite measured up, selling only a single car for every ten Cadillacs, the model had its adherents. In later days, the Imperial found itself banned from demolition derbies, its X-frame construction so solid that it was virtually unbeatable.

The forty-four-year-old Croswell drove a Buick himself, but the Imperial sparked his interest. The current-year's model, brand spanking new. The big sedan took its place among a whole fleet of Caddies and Continentals and Lincoln Premieres, parked in the spacious driveway lot in front of a four-bay garage, left alongside the road or pulled into a field next to a rustic fieldstone ranch house.

With Croswell that day were his state police partner, Trooper Vincent R. Vasisko, and a pair of revenue agents from Treasury's Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Unit, Art Ruston and Ken Brown.

Croswell turned to his cohorts and ticked off the state plates visible from his post.

"New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, New York, Ohio, Illinois," he said. Some of the license plates, he noticed, had special low numbers, usually indicating owners of influence.

"Those aren't salesmen cars," Vasisko said.

"No," Croswell said. "Let's get the numbers down as fast as we can."

The lawmen moved forward, taking plate numbers. Lots of cars, but no people. The driveway, yards, and fields around the compound appeared curiously devoid of life.

Where was everybody?

The fieldstone house on McFall Road—really a collection of buildings, a compound of sorts, with a main residence, a summer pavilion, a garage, and outbuildings—belonged to Joseph Barbara Sr., who presented himself to the world as an upstanding citizen, the area distributor for the lucrative Canada Dry line of beverage products.

But Joseph Barbara defined the old police term “hinky.” Croswell knew Barbara had been buying up sugar—massive amounts, really, 30,000 pounds a month for the past year. That much sugar meant illegal stills.

Counterintuitive as it was, moonshining had not ended with Prohibition. By avoiding excise taxes, illicit alcohol production could prove enormously lucrative, not as golden as it had been during the Volstead Act, but even so a steady earner.

Unsure exactly what was going on at the McFall Road estate, but thinking it might have something to do with moonshining, Croswell called in the revenuers.

Sergeant Croswell served as a senior investigator with the BCI, the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, which was the State Police equivalent of a detective bureau. Over a decade previous, during World War II, upon his first encounter with Joe Barbara, Croswell opened a mental file on the man, the informal kind of data-set all lawmen keep continually up-to-date, on the hinkiness of whatever kind that crops up within their territory.

Every once in a while, at least a couple times a month, Croswell would drive up to Barbara’s impressive Apalachin compound, ten miles west of Binghamton. His personally motivated ten-year surveillance campaign, wholly unmandated by his superiors in the State Police, had come to this: a single cruiser parked at the property line of the Barbara estate, near a driveway parked thick with expensive limousines that, by all rights of logic and cop intuition, should not have been anywhere near backwoods Southern Tier New York.

The squadron of big cars, bespeaking power and privilege, ranged against the single unmarked police car with its force of four. Croswell started to feel a little lonely up there on top of the hill. He made an executive decision, got on his radio, and put the word out to his fellow state police.

Black-and-whites began pulling out of barracks in Binghamton and the neighboring towns of Waverly and Horseheads, cutting off the approaches to Apalachin. In all, seventeen additional troopers answered the call, men Croswell had worked with often before, their names readily familiar to him: Lieutenant Kenneth Weidenborner, Sergeant Joseph Benenati, Trooper Joseph D. Smith, Trooper Richard C. Geer, Trooper Howard Teneyck.

The state police threw a net around the Barbara estate, cutting off not only McFall Road but also East River Road to the north, McFadden Road to the west, Pennsylvania Avenue to the east, and Rhodes Road to the south. Whoever or whatever was there at Barbara’s—moonshiners, or something more sinister—was boxed in, with cops blocking any and all possible exit ways from the area.

Croswell hoped he was right in alerting the troops. All he had to go on was a homeowner’s extensive arrest record, a strangely out-of-place collection of big cars, and a few other indications that some sort of illicit gathering was going down on McFall Road.

A fish truck emerged from the Barbara place and rattled up the road. The quartet of lawmen let it pass. The driver, local merchant Bartolo Guccia, had just taken an order for three pounds of porgies and a pound of mackerel at the kitchen of the big stone house. Guccia, a sallow little man with an old-world Italian accent, proceeded past the cops, but then pulled up and came back. He waved jauntily at Croswell and Vasisko and returned to the Barbara compound.

Almost at the same moment, a crew of a dozen men in sharp suits (“fourteen-karat hoodlums,” Croswell mentally tagged them, “like a collection of George Rafts”) rounded the corner of the screened-in summer pavilion on the Barbara estate. As though they were cartoon characters, the men stopped comically short upon seeing the statues taking down plate numbers along the road.

Cops and quarry eyed each other, the same thought occurring to both groups: who were these guys?

Through the binoculars, Croswell noted the heavy gold watches on almost every man’s wrist. He could pick out their diamond jewelry, rings, stickpins, and studs, sparkling in the washed-out light of the autumn noon.

Guccia reached the compound garage. Croswell heard words being exchanged but could not make out what was being said.

“Roadblock,” was what the fishmonger said to the mob boys. “State police! They’re stopping everybody!”

The gangsters scattered.

Croswell watched the rout through his binoculars. “They’re running,” he told Vasisko. But his partner could see that for himself.

Figures poured out of the house, climbing into the cars or fleeing on foot across the fields, heading toward the surrounding woods. The sergeant tracked them, keeping his eyes glued to his field glasses, swiveling from the grounds to the forests and back to the property.

“This is going to be a bad day for a whole lot of people,” Croswell murmured, utilizing his usual dry-as-dust understatement to characterize what would prove to be a turning point in the long and tortured history of American law enforcement’s battle against organized crime.

\* \* \*

What State Police Sergeant Edgar Croswell had stumbled into, with a curious combination of accident and brilliant, cop-savvy intent, would come to be known as the nation’s most notorious Mafia gathering ever, the Apalachin summit. Assembled at Joseph Barbara’s country house was virtually the entire leadership spectrum of an American racketeering underworld that raked in billions of dollars per year.

These were bosses, underbosses, and made men, powerful figures in organized crime. Almost every one of them carried arrest records heinous enough to make any lawman sit up and take notice. Stated a prosecutor who assembled legal cases against those involved: “Never before had there been such a collection of jailbirds, murderers free on technicalities and big wheels in gambling and dope rackets.”

This book relates the story of the Apalachin summit, why the mobsters gathered, and what took place in the brief time before their meeting was interrupted by police. It

also chronicles the bloody mob wars that led up to the gathering, as well as the bitter law enforcement turf battles that followed it.

The account has been told before only in snatches, within other contexts, always incompletely, and at times erroneously. This new telling uses fresh material obtained from the principals involved, as well as documents from official sources and government files.

Only a single warning shot was fired at Apalachin, no blood spilled, no gunfights as the mobsters fought their way out past the roadblock. The legal charges stemming from the summit were likewise anticlimactic. Sixty gangsters were detained out of the hundred-plus attending the meeting. The Federal conspiracy convictions of twenty of the participants were reversed upon appeal.

So as a bust, Apalachin was something of a bust. A few perjury raps, some contempt of court jailings—on the face of it, that's the sum total of what came out of the roundup. A wet firecracker.

But the judicial win-loss record is deceiving. The resulting exposure dosed the Mafia with its least favorite poison: publicity. "I don't know what is going to happen in the courts," Ed Crosswell said after the sweep. "But the New York State Police action threw the mobsters up in the air, where everyone could take a shot at them."

In Apalachin's aftermath relentless government action bore down on the mob, and there were no fewer than a dozen separate probes looking into the affair, police investigations, legislative hearings, grand juries. For years after the November 1957 gathering, subpoenas rained down like confetti, and mobsters could do little more than trudge from hearing to hearing, repeating their sad Fifth Amendment catechisms.

And there's this: Apalachin also triggered the interest of the one man the underworld would come to recognize as its chief nemesis, Robert Francis Kennedy.

To judge just how much of a disaster the summit was for its participants, hear the words of a man who lost everything because of it. "I should have broken both my legs," said mob boss Vito Genovese, something of an expert on broken legs, "before I accepted that invitation [to Apalachin]."

The summit's importance far exceeds its zeroed-out body count and fizzle in the courts. The gathering and its repercussions not only changed organized crime, but transformed law enforcement. Unlike the murderous mob wars that led up to Apalachin, the subsequent governmental infighting was bloodless. But it was no less fierce. Two giants, representing two competing visions of America, clashed and wrestled and hammered at each other like a couple of Norse gods.

Robert Kennedy, brother of a senator who would be president, afterward attorney general in that brother's administration, faced off with J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the sclerotic administrator of the nation's premier law enforcement arm, long-ensconced, hugely powerful and, before Bobby came along, virtually unchallengeable. The FBI and the Justice Department itself were altered irrevocably by their battles.

So there were two Edgars involved here, Hoover and Crosswell, and they approached their jobs in very different ways, differences that were instructive on a larger scale. They both interacted with Bobby Kennedy, too, and the dissimilarities in their dealings with him held deeper meaning also.

Kennedy saw the danger of the mob the way Crosswell did, not only in terms of

crime but in terms of corruption, the bad infiltrating and polluting the good, with organized crime a virus entering the bloodstream of labor unions, police, and political parties. RFK warned that an “invisible government” threatened to take over our own, buying off public officials.

The problem was epidemic and not limited to this or that city. Organized crime corrupted mayors, police chiefs, legislators, judges. In the immortal words of Richard Nixon: “Sure there are dishonest men in local government. But there are dishonest men in national government, too.” The mob suborned scores of them.

The consequences of Apalachin were felt not only institutionally, but in individual lives. New York City crime lord Vito Genovese summoned his underworld associates from all over the country to come together at Joe Barbara’s stone ranch house. In the harsh light of his post-Apalachin notoriety, Genovese found himself targeted by a government drug sting, convicted of trafficking in heroin, and sent to federal prison, where he would remain until his death.

Also as a result of the summit, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, the nation’s celebrated top crime fighter, revealed himself to be a self-inflated charlatan. The bust-up of the Mafia gathering exposed the inordinately sensitive Hoover to public ridicule. For all the puff pieces in newspapers over the years, for all the fawning newsreel hagiography and laudatory movies about mythic “G-men,” it became clear that Hoover had simply fallen down on the job.

Until Apalachin, the FBI director had spent his entire professional life dismissing the very existence of the Mafia, terming it, in one of his milder imprecations, “baloney.” In the wake of the summit, Hoover embarked upon a crash catch-up program of illegal electronic surveillance on the underworld that thoroughly trashed civil liberties but helped frustrate the Mafia’s stubborn cult of secrecy.

Hoover, Robert Kennedy, and the mob. Apalachin began the beguine that led to an extended three-partnered dance.

“Summit,” the word, comes from the Latin *summum*, meaning “the highest point.” In 1950, at the beginning of the Cold War, Winston Churchill coined the contemporary sense of summit as “a meeting among leaders.” It’s a fitting description for a gathering of mob bosses trying to sort out tangled allegiances and bloody consequences, not of a cold war but a very hot one.

It’s fitting in a couple of other ways, too, since Apalachin represented a summit, a high point for the mob, whose reach and influence would never again attain pre-1957 heights. In a sense, it also marked a high point for J. Edgar Hoover, who would see his power gradually wane from that junction forward until his death in 1972.

Hoover first encountered the word “Apalachin” only after the event, on the morning of November 15, 1957. 65 HOODLUMS SEIZED IN A RAID AND RUN OUT OF UPSTATE NEW YORK VILLAGE, read the headline in *The New York Times*.

The summit revealed an intelligence failure of the first magnitude. Not to put too fine a point on it, Hoover had been caught with his pants down. The director, who liked to portray his beloved Bureau (and himself) as hugely competent, proved clueless in the wake of the biggest mob gathering in history.

The definitive reference guide on the FBI passes this judgment: “Dating from the Apalachin incident, the FBI had become enmeshed in controversy as questions were increasingly raised both about FBI director Hoover’s adamant denial that the Mafia

existed and the FBI's seeming failure to recognize organized crime as a national problem."

Here's Rudolph Guiliani, ex-New York City mayor, former racketbuster:

By and large, no one had really ripped off the veil and seen that this was not just a couple of isolated hoods, but a vast national organization. Apalachin gave the first demonstrative, solid evidence that this was a very large criminal conspiracy. Before Apalachin, there was a debate as to whether the Mafia actually existed. There was no sense of this national operation that had been put together and that had really been operating since 1931. What they got until 1957 was almost—not quite, but almost—immunity from Federal investigation and prosecution.

Or, as Mafia expert Thomas Repetto put it, more succinctly: "Apalachin forced the federal government to move."

\* \* \*

Though proof of actual criminal activity at the summit remained elusive, the incident led to new legislative initiatives that would eventually (after a process of a quarter century) snap the spine of the mob in America. Organized crime persists. But law enforcement pressure that began as a result of Apalachin dismantled the classic national leadership structure that had guided the Mafia throughout its high-water years during the middle of the twentieth century.

As a backdrop, the Apalachin summit presents the well-cushioned, brightly enameled America of the 1950s, a period with a deceptively simple reputation, a time of "I Like Ike" and Sputnik, gleaming on the surface with the polish of a Chrysler Imperial limousine, but which upon closer inspection reveals darker rumblings beneath the surface of the national psyche.

Bit players in the Apalachin saga include a lineup of fifties-worthy figures, not only Joltin' Joe DiMaggio but also the cop who busted jazz great Charlie Parker, the judge who executed the Rosenbergs, and the gangster who sold singer Billie Holiday her dope.

The multiple meanings of the summit reverberate even now, over a half century later, lessons about the arrogance of government and the hubris of gangsters. But at the core of Apalachin there is a bedrock-basic story, one of the oldest known, a hero's tale: the always heartening, always startling phenomenon of a good man in the right place at the right time doing the right thing.

Somehow, this essential truth has faded. In the months immediately after the gathering, amid a welter of government investigations into the event, journalists emphasized the *omerta*-spawned inscrutability of the mob. APALACHIN STILL AN UNRESOLVED MYSTERY, headlined the *New York Times* on December 22, 1957. And again, more than a year later, on April 5, 1959: APALACHIN STORY IS STILL A DEEP MYSTERY.

Writers rushed in to offer solutions to the "mystery" of Apalachin. A survey of the literature reveals an array of alternative (and quite simply wrong) theories. A book on

the alliance between the Sicilian and American Mafias states definitively the Italians were responsible for informing the New York State Police about the gathering. A history of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics claims that the FBN agents knew about the meet all along and were thus responsible for Croswell's action.

Another account, purporting to be the direct testament of Charles Luciano, confidently maintains that the great mob chieftain, exiled in Italy, sabotaged the summit. Hank Messick's *Lansky*, predictably, quotes "underworld sources" as saying criminal mastermind Meyer Lansky informed Croswell of the meeting. No shred of documentary evidence is presented to back up any of these theories.

It seems inevitable. Write a mob book, reveal that it was your particular subject who engineered the bust-up of the Apalachin summit. It was an inside job. The cops were tipped. The mob, itself a wide-ranging conspiracy, naturally attracts conspiracy theorists. Demonology requires snaky, diabolical cleverness on the part of the foe. Somehow, some way, the mob itself just *had* to be involved in the disruption of the summit.

Direct testimony of the principals involved indicates none of this is so. No one in law enforcement had any kind of advance notice. People on both sides of the badge, those behind it and those confronted by it, were equally surprised that day.

If evidence doesn't suffice, logic does. Say the conspiracy theorists are right. Grant that the police knew beforehand what was going on at Joe Barbara's place, that the gathering included such marquee names as Genovese, Gambino, Profaci, Magaddino, and Bonanno, as well as others at the top of the organized crime hierarchy, scores of mobsters in all.

Given that advance knowledge, would Sergeant Ed Croswell have trundled up McFall Road in a solitary car with a single fellow trooper and a pair of revenue agents?

Anyone who believes that has little knowledge of police tactics, which tend toward overkill in the extreme. Tipped off, the authorities would never have sent a warrantless, ad hoc gang of four under the command of a single sergeant. They would have mobilized a whole army and gone in, as the phrase has it, like gangbusters.

"I don't even like to hear it called a 'raid,'" Croswell said in the aftermath. "There were no plans to raid Joe Barbara's big stone ranch house. We didn't start out with a raiding party."

Yet the idea of a preplanned operation off an informant's tip somehow persists. In his comprehensive and mostly excellent *Mafia Encyclopedia*, Carl Sifakis writes, "It becomes almost impossible to reject insider foul play." Sifakis states that a cabal of Meyer Lansky, Frank Costello, and Carlo Gambino "tipped off the authorities about the meeting." How, exactly, would the trio of mobsters have accomplished this? Especially since Gambino himself was picked up at the summit?

Likewise, Paul Lunde's *Organized Crime*: "It is difficult to believe that the fiasco of Apalachin was not orchestrated by Luciano." Or Jay Maeder of the *New York Daily News*: "Some observers wondered if perhaps some anonymous prankster had picked up a phone and dropped a dime on Vito Genovese."

All this brings to mind Virginia Mayo's sneer to Jimmy Cagney in the classic gangster movie *White Heat*: "It's always 'somebody tipped them,' it's never 'the cops are smart.'"

It takes a little picking apart, but this is one historical “mystery” that turns out to be fairly transparent. We know what happened at Apalachin. Over the years, the story has been meted out in bits and pieces by the people involved. More evidence has been scattered willy-nilly across the historical record, waiting only upon being collected and smoothed into a comprehensive narrative.

The simple truth is actually a much more compelling story, a more arresting tale, one might say, than any insider tip-off. An exhaustive search of police archives, contemporary first-person testimony, as well as the voluminous reports of more than a dozen government investigative agencies summon up a clear picture, and the truth of the Apalachin summit is revealed.

A solitary lawman, acting at times in concert with cohorts, certainly, but doggedly following through on his own singular initiative with energy, intelligence, and courage, struck the most damaging blow to organized crime in America’s history. He made for an unlikely hero. It was *High Noon* on the Susquehanna.

Ed Croswell was right. November 14, 1957 was a bad day for a whole lot of people. But the events leading up to it were a great deal worse. If there was no bloodletting at Apalachin, slayings and mayhem preceded the meet-up like a rolling, miasmatic fog, a corpse-strewn run of violence that led, in a blood trail, to Joseph Barbara’s stone house.

Ignorant armies clashed by night. Gangsters targeted their enemies, died themselves in execution-style killings, made war on each other for advantage in dominance and succession. The mobsters fought over gambling profits from the huge new tourist casinos in Cuba. They got themselves tangled in the million-dollar-a-day trade in smuggled heroin.

In fact, Cuba and heroin stitch themselves deep into the fabric of organized crime in the fifties, intertwined threads in the weave. With so much money coming in, it was impossible for the dogs not to snarl over it and tear out the occasional throat. Then, after the killings, it was time to kiss and make up. Perhaps at a comfortable stone manor house in the countryside of rural New York.

Two mobsters figure prominently in the run-up to the summit, a pair of crime lords who circled each other for years, looking for weaknesses, gauging opportunities. Albert Anastasia and Vito Genovese, both based in New York City, battled for supremacy in the dog-eat-dog underworld of the Mafia. The summit at Joe Barbara’s grew out of their war. The story of Apalachin begins, as so many mob stories do, with the spilling of blood.

**PART I**  
*Albert and Vito*

# 1

## *Murder on Fifteenth Street*

CARLO TRESKA IS A NAME not much remembered today, but in the first half of the last century he was widely known, a leading light of the American left, when in response to the Great Depression the nation turned to progressive, even radical, ideologies. One writer recalled Tresca as a “labor spellbinder,” citing his ability to whip up a crowd of workers with fiery oratory.

In January 1943, Tresca found himself in the middle of a fight to determine the future of his beloved homeland, Italy. The Allied invasion of Sicily—the initial thrust in the battle to break the Axis in half—remained six months in the future. But it was already clear to anyone with a modicum of awareness that the days were numbered for Benito Mussolini’s fascist ruling order. Tresca adamantly demanded that the still-aborning postwar Italian government be free of both former fascists and eager-to-dominate communists.

Tresca habitually found himself in the middle of public political fights. A thin-faced firebrand born in the Abruzzo in 1879, he wore a Trotsky-like beard and, after moving to America in 1904, helped organize strikes for the Wobblies, the International Workers of the World. Tresca’s personal politics matured like a rogue Chianti, beginning with nationalism, proceeding through socialism, finally to arrive at a vinegary style of anarchism. His newspaper, *Il Martello* (the Hammer), had carried on the battle against Mussolini since 1920. The Spanish Civil War and the Russo-German nonaggression pact had soured him on Stalin and the communists.

While agitating against Mussolini and the fascists as well as against Stalin and the communists, Tresca also fought the mob. He vehemently opposed organized crime’s infiltration of trade unions. Since the days of the Black Hand, the original Italian crime syndicate, Tresca had battled the mob in his adopted home of America.

Tresca’s enemies were legion. In 1931, Mussolini put the rabble-rouser on his “death list.” The man had been repeatedly beaten, threatened, and targeted for assassination. The first try was in 1909 by a razor-wielding assailant in Pittsburgh, who missed Tresca’s throat but slashed through his cheek and jaw.

Tresca didn’t quit. An odd alliance occurred in WWII Italy. In the prewar years Mussolini had mounted an impressive assault on the entrenched Mafia, in Sicily and elsewhere in Italy, shattering its century-old hold in many parts of the country, hounding its soldiers into exile.

Yet, in the early 1940s, one of the powerful figures in Il Duce’s orbit was an Italian-American mafioso named Vito Genovese. And it was this man—the same

fedora-wearing figure Ed Croswell would spot inside a Chrysler Imperial limo at Apalachin—whom Carlo Tresca decided deserved special attention.

Born near Naples in 1897, Vito Genovese emigrated with his family in 1913 to the Lower East Side. There he formed a friendship that would shape his life, meeting one Salvatore Lucania, who as Lucky Luciano would come to be known as the premier organizer of organized crime in America. The same age, Lucky and Vito represented the classic mob combination of brains and brawn, respectively.

As a young turk in the twenties' and thirties' mob, Genovese cut a violent swath across New York City and its environs. His rap sheet reads like a true gangster résumé: homicide, disorderly person, burglary, homicide, carrying a dangerous weapon, homicide. These were only the crimes that came to police notice—there were others, infamous and bloody. The judicial dispositions of the arrests were equally interesting: discharged, dismissed, discharged, discharged, dismissed, discharged.

In 1936, in flight from the heat over one of these murders, Genovese decamped for the homeland, settling in Nola, near Naples. He prospered. He helped lay the groundwork for the Marseilles-Cuba-Montreal “triangle trade” in heroin smuggling. He cultivated contacts in Fascist leadership circles in Italy. His legitimate bona fides developed to the degree that he became part owner of several factories, power plants, and a castle in Campania.

None of this sat well with Carlo Tresca. He had a run-in with Genovese in 1935, when the mobster wanted to open a fascist-friendly club for Italian seamen in New York City. Tresca, an avowed antifascist, put the kibosh on the plan. Later, when he heard of Genovese's activities in Italy, Tresca reasoned that the only way the gangster could be accepted by higher-ups was through ignorance of his past. He fired off a series of letters to the government, detailing Vito's unsavory background in America.

Vito Genovese was not a man to be trifled with, especially not by a left-leaning anarchist journalist with multiple political axes to grind. According to an anonymous informant, Genovese had the following conversation with Il Duce at a 1942 Christmas party in Rome.

“Carlo Tresca is an archenemy of mine,” Mussolini said to Genovese.

“Mine, too,” Genovese said, agreeing with the dictator that Tresca had bothered too many powerful people for too long.

“If there is anything you can do to rid us of him,” Mussolini said, “I would do anything in the world for you.”

Some two weeks after this exchange, on the evening of Monday, January 11, 1943, Tresca worked late at the *Il Martello* office on the third floor of a six-story commercial building at 96 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, on the southwest corner of Fifteenth Street. He had finished a busy day, huddling with associates, discussing plans to disrupt a meeting of the Office of War Information the following Thursday, seeing writer John Dos Passos for lunch, meeting with a job seeker, an engraver, staffers at the newspaper.

At around nine p.m., a lawyer named Giuseppe Calabi arrived at the *Il Martello* offices. He and Tresca had a committee meeting planned, but the other members didn't show up, so the editor suggested the two men go for a meal at a nearby bar. They left the building via a Fifteenth Street exit and turned toward Fifth Avenue.

Wartime gas rationing and blackout rules meant the cross street was very dark. As

Tresca and Calabi headed east, a gunman stepped out of the shadows behind them and fired—a single shot, then three more in quick succession.

Two bullets hit Tresca, either of which would have been fatal, one tearing through his left lung and one penetrating the right side of his face to lodge in his spine. He dropped to the pavement, his legs cocked awkwardly, feet splaying to the curb. Witnesses—two workers from the nearby Norwegian consulate—reported a black Ford sedan pulling away down Fifteenth after the shooting.

Carlo Tresca, activist, anarchist, friend to the workingman, was pronounced dead on arrival at St. Vincent’s Hospital, four blocks from the murder scene.

That should have been that. A man with many enemies gunned down on the street, an anarchist killed amid the kind of lawless chaos he himself advocated. The list of likely suspects was long.

But the murder of Carlo Tresca would become a tiny ringing bell, vibrating, dinging, pealing, setting off sympathetic tremors, triggering expanding circles of effect that passed through the echelons of American law enforcement until it arrived, years later, within the patient, long-remembered reach of Sergeant Edgar Crowell.

\* \* \*

“La Marese,” they called them—the Mafia soldiers and bosses from Castellammare del Golfo, Sicily. If Italy is the boot kicking the Sicilian football, then Castellammare is the northwest tip of the ball.

A rough declension played itself out among Italians in the mob in America, dividing them into two camps. There were the Castellammarese, from the insular, secretive commune in Sicily, and then there were immigrants with backgrounds in and around Naples, the provinces of Calabria and Campania.

It wasn’t black and white, and there were exceptions hailing from all over Italy, but generally the division held true. The styles could be said to be different, too. La Marese and Neapolitan, the heart and the head, the fiery emotional and the coolly rational. Again, nothing set in stone, just a vague stereotype, both true and untrue in the way of all stereotypes.

The opposing clans banged and bloodied each other in the fabled Castellammarese War at the dawn of the 1930s, a revenge-fest that left sixty gangsters dead.

In the heat of battle, factions proved fluid and situational. Mobsters regularly killed their allies and made alliances with their enemies. Younger, more assimilated gangsters used the war to further their ambitions, displacing the older, more traditional “Mustache Petes” of the first immigrant generation. When the smoke of the Castellammarese War cleared, clearly the mobster who benefited most was the Sicilian organizational genius, Charles “Lucky” Luciano.

Luciano ushered the Mafia into a new era. The mob evolved from an ethnic-based society preying on immigrant enclaves into a well-oiled syndicate reaping illicit profits from nearly every sector of the American economy. Luciano forged a pan-ethnic alliance with Jewish gangster Meyer Lansky. Borders were crossed, divisions were abandoned, and organized crime went national.

Another casualty of the Castellammarese War in-fighting was the old “honored society” tradition that forbade any involvement in narcotics and prostitution. The

gangland battles foreshadowed the end of Prohibition in 1933 and, like any forward-thinking corporate boss, Luciano realized new revenue streams had to be developed. Dope and sex fit the bill.

By the fifties, the division of the mob along geographical lines had increasingly faded, but still held on as an inherited vestige. The Sicilians Joe Bonanno, Joe Profaci, Steven Magaddino, and Frank Garafalo lined up as La Marese, while Vito Genovese, Frank Costello, and Albert Anastasia had roots in Naples and Calabria.

Also numbering among La Marese in 1943 was a deadly thirty-three-year-old cigar-chomping killer named Carmine Galante. Born in Italian Harlem of Castellammarese parents, Galante—known all his adult life as “Lilo,” slang for cigar—acted as close ally and underboss to Joe Bonanno. Galante was also, as it happened, certifiably unhinged.

Prison psychologists at Sing Sing once got hold of Carmine Galante, ran him through a battery of personality tests, and diagnosed their prisoner—big surprise to those who knew him—as a psychopath. “He had a mental age of 14-and-a-half and an IQ of 90,” read the assessment, diagnosing the subject as a “neuropathic, psychopathic personality, emotionally dull, and indifferent.”

Whenever he was out of prison and on the bricks, Lilo proved himself eminently useful to his superiors as a torpedo, racking up more than eighty contract killings. He was vengeful and spiteful in the extreme. Even after his old mob enemy Frank Costello died, his tomb wasn’t safe from Galante, who dynamited the crypt.

When, in 1943, as a courtesy to Mussolini—but also for his own purposes—Vito Genovese was looking for a killer to take out the troublemaking journalist Carlo Tresca, naturally Lilo’s name came up.

At eight o’clock on the night Tresca was murdered, Galante, just released after an eight-year stretch in prison for the armed robbery of a brewery, visited his parole officer, Sidney Gross, in the state offices at 80 Centre Street in Manhattan. When Galante left Gross, he picked up a tail, Fred Berson, another parole officer, who followed Lilo to ascertain if the ex-convict was violating his parole by associating with known criminals. Galante crossed Centre, proceeded down Worth Street, but instead of entering the subway climbed into a black sedan. Berson noted the license plate, IC 9272.

Straight from the parole office to murder. An hour and a half later, Galante was the shooter who stepped out of the Fifteenth Street darkness to nail Carlo Tresca with bullets to the head and chest. He was the one who had lain in wait for the anarchist outside the offices of *Il Martello*. With him were his La Marese allies, Frank Garafalo and Joseph Di Palermo, along with a wheelman named Sebastiano Domingo.

When Tresca and his lawyer friend Calabi stepped into the street and headed off toward their ill-fated supper, Galante was there in the shadows.

“Which one?” Galante hissed to Garafalo. “Which one do I do?”

“Kill the son of a bitch with the whiskers,” Garafalo told him, and Lilo did.

It could only be called bad luck to have a parole officer tail when heading off to commit murder. Galante was perplexed when, the next night, upon coming out of a candy store at 246 Elizabeth Street with Di Palermo, he was picked up by police. Sure, he had just shot some poor sucker, but hadn’t he gotten away clean?

Not quite. A couple hours after the killing, a patrolman named Saul Greenberg