

July 20, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: File

FROM: Dan E. Moldea

SUBJECT: Who is Vinnie Ravo? After 42 years, a possible new cast member emerges in the mystery of the disposal of Jimmy Hoffa

Two years ago, I published a story on the 40th anniversary of the July 30, 1975, disappearance of ex-Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa. Based upon the best existing evidence, I reported that Phillip “Brother” Moscato, an associate of the Vito Genovese crime family, had suggested to me during a 2007 tape-recorded interview that he and Salvatore Briguglio, Hoffa’s alleged killer, had buried Hoffa’s body at Moscato’s landfill in Jersey City, New Jersey.¹

Notably, as early as November 1975, the FBI had suspected Moscato’s scrapyard as the site for Hoffa’s remains and had conducted a cursory search of the 47-acre property. Nothing was found. The following month, when Briguglio and Moscato, among others, were subpoenaed to testify before a federal grand jury in Detroit that was investigating Hoffa’s murder, both men invoked their Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination.²

The informant who provided this inside information to federal investigators was a convicted killer, Ralph Picardo, a one-time friend and associate of both Briguglio and Moscato. A few days after Hoffa disappeared, Picardo received a prison visit from Stephen Andretta, one of Briguglio’s alleged co-conspirators in the Hoffa killing. All of these men—Andretta, Briguglio, Moscato, and Picardo, along with brothers Thomas Andretta and Gabriel Briguglio—were close associates of Anthony Provenzano, a capo in the Genovese crime family who had orchestrated Teamsters corruption in northern New Jersey for many years. At one time, Picardo was the personal driver for Provenzano, who had also served time with Hoffa at Lewisburg Penitentiary—where the two men once had a fistfight in front of other inmates.

With the hope of making peace, Hoffa reportedly had an appointment to meet with Provenzano on the afternoon he vanished at the Machus Red Fox restaurant in Bloomfield

¹ On July 30, 2015, I published my story—“The Disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa: 40 Years Later”—in *Gang Land News*. See: <http://www.moldea.com/Hoffa-40.html>.

² Moscato told me that I am the only journalist he had ever spoken to about the Hoffa case.

Township, just north of Detroit. Another Mafia figure, Anthony Giacalone, Provenzano's brother-in-law, was also slated to attend the meeting. Reportedly, Giacalone and Provenzano did not show up and had well-established alibis.

During the now-famous prison visit, Andretta reportedly gave Picardo some of the details about the crime, including a partial cast of characters of those who were allegedly involved, like Briguglio. In addition, Picardo told the FBI that after the murder in a Detroit suburb, Hoffa's body was stuffed into a 55-gallon drum and shipped via a Gateway Transportation truck back to New Jersey.

In my story two years ago, I published a portion of my 2007 interview with Moscato:

I told Moscato that the first time I had heard his name was in early December 1975 after the Briguglio and Andretta brothers, along with McMaster and Barr, had appeared before a federal grand jury in Detroit.

Saying he had also been subpoenaed by that grand jury, Moscato told me he had known Salvatore Briguglio and Steve Andretta "since we were kids," adding, "Sally, as far as I was concerned, was one of the greatest guys. We hung out together. We had a little business together. Super guy."

Contrary to what had been previously reported, Moscato insisted that FBI agents were not looking for the remains of Faugno, a loan shark whom Sally Bugs was said to have murdered, during their search. "No, they were looking for Hoffa," Moscato insisted.

"What was the story with that?" I asked.

"Well, they said that me and Sally Briguglio buried Hoffa in my dump."

"They thought you were part of this?" I laughed.

"Yeah. Well, I was close with all them guys. And there was a rat by the name of Ralphie Picardo . . ."

"Ralph Picardo. He was in Trenton State Penitentiary."

Moscato laughed, "You've been doing your homework, huh?" He then continued, "Ralphie, I knew for years. I helped him out in business, in the trucking business. I helped him. [Armand] Faugno helped him. Sally [Briguglio] helped him to get him started in his trucking business. He was around us a lot. And after he shot this guy, he wanted to get out of jail. So he goes and tells the FBI that he knows where Hoffa's buried. That he was with me and Sally when we buried Hoffa in my dump."

"Picardo said that he was with you and Sally?"

"Yeah. So he took them [the FBI] down there. They dug the dump up for three months."

"I thought they were looking for Faugno," I said.

"No," Moscato replied.

"In a fifty-five-gallon drum? They were looking for Hoffa himself?"

Moscato continued: "*That was Hoffa in the fifty-five-gallon drum. [Picardo] said a pick-up truck brought . . . the truck in and Hoffa was in it, and we buried him.*"

"I never heard that story that you were part of it. I never heard that one before."

"That's what it was all about."

Moscato declared during one of our recorded interviews that Picardo "basically had it right."

Another federal informant, Donovan Wells, told me during my 2009 interview with him that he was with three of the suspected co-conspirators on the night before Hoffa disappeared. While having dinner in Detroit with long-time Hoffa rival, Rolland McMaster, and McMaster's brother-in-law, Stanton Barr, who was the head of the steel division of Gateway Transportation, Provenzano came to their table and asked to speak privately with McMaster at the bar. When they returned to the table a few minutes later, Provenzano pointed to McMaster and Barr and asked, "Do you guys know where you're going to be tomorrow?"

McMaster responded, "Yeah, we're all straight on that."

On the afternoon of Hoffa's disappearance, McMaster and Barr were with executives of Gateway in Gary, Indiana. However, two of McMaster's top henchmen, Larry McHenry and Jim Shaw, had no alibis for that afternoon. Notably, Shaw was a driver for Gateway.³

Wells told me that he believes that McMaster's farm in Wixom, Michigan, was the scene of Hoffa's murder. Wells thought that Hoffa was buried there, too. Wells was the informant who provided information in 2006 to the FBI, which had arranged an excavation at McMaster's farm in a failed search for Hoffa's body. While exiting, according to the *New York Times*, FBI special agent Judith Chilen "added that she was convinced that his body had been buried on the farm and that there was 'no indication that it has been moved.'"

During one of my 2013 interviews with Moscato, I asked him whether he thought that Hoffa had been both murdered and buried on McMaster's farm near Detroit. He did not comment on a possible site for the murder. However, with regard to the burial of Hoffa's body, Moscato referred me to our 2007 interview, saying, "I think I've already told you what happened."

During his alleged conversation with Picardo, Andretta did not specifically pinpoint Moscato's dump as the site for Hoffa's body. When the FBI asked for his best guess, Picardo identified the property, saying that he was aware of at least one murder victim whom Briguglio had buried there.⁴

For years, persistent rumors have alleged that, after the Provenzano team heard that Picardo had been flipped and was talking to the FBI, they decided to move Hoffa's body from Moscato's dump to another location.

³ I am the only journalist who has interviewed McMaster, Barr, McHenry, and Shaw.

⁴ I am the only journalist who has interviewed Salvatore Briguglio and Stephen Andretta, as well as their brothers Gabriel Briguglio and Thomas Andretta, who were also suspects in the case. Sal Briguglio was murdered in March 1978.

Moscato died in February 2014 without telling me everything he knew.

Six months later, I began pursuing a related avenue of investigation. In July 2015, after the publication of my story about the 40th anniversary of Hoffa's murder, I interviewed a new source close to Moscato who suggested that a one-time trusted friend of Moscato's was also involved in the disposal of Hoffa's body.

The name I received was Vincent Anthony Ravo, aka Vinnie Ravo, another Genovese crime family associate, who had lived in Passaic, New Jersey. Born on June 10, 1935, Ravo had died in prison on March 26, 2006. During his career, Ravo had been arrested for assault, drug trafficking, kidnapping, larceny, possession of stolen property, weapons charges, and murder. Despite his criminal record, Ravo owned and had partial and/or hidden ownerships in several licensed bars and restaurants in northern New Jersey.

The New Jersey State Commission of Investigation conducted hearings in February 1992 of the Mafia's influence on the state's bars and restaurants. Vinnie Ravo was a principal target of the commission's probe. In part, the commission stated in its final report:

The Commission found that **Vincent Ravo**, an associate of the **Genovese/Gigante organized crime family**, has had interests in several licensed establishments in northern New Jersey, in violation of state ABC regulations. An investigation in 1986 by the State Police ABC Enforcement Bureau alleged that beginning in 1982 **Ravo** had an undisclosed interest in **The Bench in Carlstadt**. **Ravo** is also believed to have had an ownership or management interest in two other premises, Satin Dolls in Lodi and The Emergency Room/Kathy's Kafe in Garfield. All three establishments operated under various names during the period covered by the Commission's investigation, during which its staff found many examples of misleading financial transactions, incidents of undisclosed interest and other violations of ABC regulations.

It was during this part of the investigation that the name of **New York Giants linebacker Lawrence Taylor** surfaced because of an apparent interest he once had in the **1st and 10**, a successor name to **The Bench**, and because of his open friendship with **Ravo**. **Taylor** also is an owner of **LT's Sports Bar and Restaurant** on Route 17 in Rutherford. Although the Commission did not find that **Ravo** had an interest in **LT's**, one of **Ravo's** girlfriends, whom the ABC once accused of embezzlement, is the bookkeeper there.

Ravo's organized crime associates have included **John DiGilio**, one of the most vicious and feared members of organized crime in New Jersey who was murdered in 1988, **Frank Scaraggi**, who died of natural causes, and **Philip "Brother" Moscato**. (Emphasis added)

The Bench, which was near Giants Stadium, was a popular hangout for members of the Giants' football team. Repeated attempts to contact Lawrence Taylor, the legendary Hall of Fame linebacker for the Giants, were unsuccessful. A woman who answered a landline number listed in his name said that Taylor did not speak to reporters and hung up.

Ravo's widow, Constance, refused to comment about Lawrence Taylor and The Bench, hanging up before her late-husband's name was even mentioned.