

Charges dropped against FBI agent accused of helping mobster

Prosecutors based case on testimony of gangster's girlfriend, which fell apart, forcing judge to end case

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NEW YORK — It was like a classic episode of "Perry Mason," with a cast consisting of a crooked FBI agent, a mouthy mob moll and a reporter with a secret tape. The case ended Thursday with an unscripted twist: The FBI guy walked on four murder counts after the gangster's lying girlfriend couldn't keep her story straight.

Former FBI agent Lindley DeVecchio was cheered by his ex-colleagues before triumphantly exiting a Brooklyn courtroom, finally free after 13 years as the target of law enforcement for his long and bizarre relationship with mob killer/mob in-

former Gregory Scarpa Sr.

In a stunning and implausible finish to what authorities described as one of the worst cases of law enforcement corruption in U.S. history, DeVecchio was cleared of feeding Scarpa confidential information that the Colombo family hit man used to kill four fellow mobsters — either rivals or potential rats.

"After almost two years, this nightmare is over," said DeVecchio, referring to the time since his indictment. "I'll never forgive the Brooklyn DA's office for irresponsibly pursuing this case. My question is, 'Where do I go to get back my reputation?'"

Prosecutors bent on bagging

DeVecchio gambled by building their case on the shaky testimony of Linda Schiro, a mob mistress since she met Scarpa at age 16. Their hopes imploded when two reporters surfaced with decade-old interviews — captured on tape — that left her credibility full of more holes than any murdered Mafiosi.

"We all knew he was innocent," said Jim Kossler, one of several ex-FBI agents who remained firmly in DeVecchio's corner throughout. "This never should have happened. Never."

Allegations about leaks from DeVecchio to the ruthless mobster known as "The Grim Reaper" began after Scarpa's 1994 death in a Minnesota prison. A Department of Justice internal investigation found no reason to prosecute DeVecchio, who retired to Florida in 1996.

But in March 2006, Brooklyn prosecutors announced DeVecchio's indictment on four murder counts, alleging the FBI agent had cooperated with the Colombo capo between 1987 and 1992. The case became a court-

house sensation, with its volatile mix of corruption, sex and mob violence.

It wasn't until Schiro began testifying this week that the case reached its unexpected conclusion. The key prosecution witness was the lone direct link between DeVecchio and the murders.

Once she finished her first day of testimony, veteran reporter Tom Robbins came forward with tapes made in 1997 when he and fellow journalist Jerry Capeci had interviewed Schiro for a never-published book. The tapes contradicted her sworn testimony against DeVecchio.

Her account "was so disturb-

ingly different, we couldn't sit on it," Robbins said outside court after Thursday's dismissal.

Despite its abrupt ending, the trial was rife with headline-making stories. A current FBI agent recounted an episode that later surfaced in an episode of "The Sopranos": DeVecchio allegedly celebrating a mob-war murder.

"We're going to win this thing," DeVecchio reportedly blurted upon word that Scarpa's faction was successful with the hit.

Schiro, in addition to implicating DeVecchio, supplied some of the trial's more salacious and strange testimony.

She recounted an arrangement in which Scarpa signed off on her affair with a younger man, and detailed a scenario in which Scarpa reportedly assisted the FBI in finding the bodies of slain civil-rights workers James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman.

In 1964, she said, Scarpa shoved a gun into the mouth of a Mississippi Klansman — a threat that convinced the man to reveal where the trio's bodies were buried.

Her problems came with the facts of the case. There were discrepancies in her story even before the tapes surfaced.



Lindley DeVecchio (left), a former FBI agent charged with feeding confidential information to a homicidal mob informant, speaks with defense attorney Mark Bederow on Thursday after learning charges against him were dropped due to lack of evidence. (AP PHOTO)