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MORE THAN 27,200 YEARS LOST

JOSEPH SALVATI

Other Massachusetts Cases with Perjury or False Accusations



Joseph Salvati (Photo: Jodi Hilton for New York Times)

On March 10, 1965, Boston-based FBI agents used a wiretap to eavesdrop on a conversation in which Vincent “Jimmy” Flemmi and Joseph “The Animal” Barboza requested permission from a New England mafia boss to kill Edward Deegan, a small-time criminal who had insulted mob members. The FBI was in the process of trying to recruit Flemmi as an informant and did nothing to prevent the murder. Deegan was killed on March 12; his body found that night in an alley in Chelsea, Massachusetts. He had been shot six times,

and at least three different weapons had been used.

In conversations with FBI agents, Barboza and Flemmi named six people who had been involved in Deegan’s murder. According to Barboza, the contract murder was ordered by [Peter Limone](#), a bookie and nightclub manager, and carried out by [Louis Greco](#). [Henry Tameleo](#), a top mafia aide, supposedly sanctioned the crime, while several other people were also involved in the complex conspiracy. Barboza and Flemmi admitted that they, too, were involved, but because of their special relationship with the FBI, they were never prosecuted. Barboza testified before a grand jury on October 25, 1967, and six men were indicted for Deegan’s murder.

All six defendants were tried at the same time. Based primarily on Barboza’s testimony, all six were convicted on July 31, 1968. Greco, Limone and Tameleo were sentenced to death. However, their sentences were reduced to life in prison in the wake of the Supreme Court’s 1972 decision in *Furman v. Georgia*, which invalidated all death sentences then pending in the United States.

In the years following the convictions, important evidence came to light indicating the innocence of Limone, Greco, Tameleo and Joseph Salvati, who was convicted of being an accessory to murder and given a life sentence. Barboza signed an affidavit on July 28, 1970, stating that these four men were not involved in the murder. On April 9, 1976, a lawyer who had worked with Barboza signed an affidavit stating that Barboza had admitted to giving false testimony about Limone’s role in the crime. These were followed by other affidavits by witnesses and lawyers who said they had lied during trial or had known that Barboza gave false testimony. In 1976, Barboza was shot and killed in San Francisco, California.

Individually, the four men filed numerous appeals, but were repeatedly denied relief. Tameleo died in prison in 1985 and Greco in 1995. In the spring of 1997, Salvati’s sentence was commuted and he was released on parole.

In the summer and fall of 2000, a special prosecutor investigating the FBI’s use of informants came across numerous documents from 1965 demonstrating that agents knew Barboza and Flemmi had committed the

State: Massachusetts**County:** Suffolk**Most Serious Crime:** Murder**Additional Convictions:** Conspiracy**Reported Crime Date:** 1965**Convicted:** 1968**Exonerated:** 2001**Sentence:** Life**Race/Ethnicity:** White**Sex:** Male**Age at the date of reported crime:** 31**Contributing Factors:** Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct**Did DNA evidence contribute to the exoneration?:** No

murder without the involvement of Greco, Limone, Tameleo or Salvati – including reports made directly to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

In December of 2000, a Massachusetts Superior Court judge held a hearing to consider releasing Limone based on information in these memos, and on January 5, 2001, Limone was released. All charges against Limone and Salvati were dropped on January 31, 2001.

In 2003, the U.S. House Committee on Government Reform condemned the FBI for failing to turn over documents that would have exonerated Limone. The District Attorney's Office that originally prosecuted the case posthumously dismissed charges against Louis Greco in 2004 and against Henry Tameleo in 2007.

U.S. District Judge Nancy Gertner ordered the federal government to pay a total of \$102 million. Salvati was awarded \$29 million, Limone was awarded \$26 million, and \$47 million was awarded to the estates of Greco and Tameleo. This award was affirmed by the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in 2009. In 2012, the Department of Justice dropped its appeal of nearly \$1 million in costs and fees awarded to the lawyers who brought the lawsuit.

- *Alexandra Gross*

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ABOUT THE REGISTRY

The National Registry of Exonerations is a project of the Newkirk Center for Science & Society at University of California Irvine, the University of Michigan Law School and Michigan State University College of Law. It was founded in 2012 in conjunction with the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University School of Law. The Registry provides detailed information about every known exoneration in the United States since 1989—cases in which a person was wrongly convicted of a crime and later cleared of all the charges based on new evidence of innocence. The Registry also maintains a more limited database of known exonerations prior to 1989.

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