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JAILHOUSE SNITCHES; TRADING LIES FOR FREEDOM

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When veteran jailhouse **informant** Leslie Vernon White picked up a telephone last fall and showed authorities how easily he could fake the confession of another inmate, he cracked open a window on a secret world.

At any given time, Los Angeles County jails hold between 50 and 100 **informants** -- many of them career criminals like White -- who have engaged in relentless campaigns to implicate their fellow prisoners in crimes and thus earn the ultimate favor from authorities: early release from custody.

Often vicious and corrupt, the process is known in the jargon of the jail as "booking." The term derives from the phrase, "Book 'em, Danno," from the old television series "Hawaii Five-O."

'I Want to Go Home'

"Now me and every other K-9 (**informant**) I've talked to have the same policy," explained Steve Vulpis, a one-time prisoner at Los Angeles County Jail, now in state prison. "The guy's guilty. Who gives a damn? I want to go home."

In an effort to assess the impact of jailhouse **informants** on the criminal justice system, The Times spent three months studying their world -- interviewing **informants**, prosecutors, defense attorneys, police officers and legal scholars, and reviewing official records in dozens of criminal cases involving alleged inmate confessions.

Among the cases reviewed, the study turned up three in which suspects were wrongly charged by the district attorney's office or wrongly detained in jail because of fabricated confessions.

In many other cases, it was impossible to determine if reported jailhouse confessions were real or had been faked.

As veteran **informant** Mark Scott Cleveland explained, truth doesn't matter. "A way you can get around maybe not being able to get a confession right away is create one," he said.

Variety of Techniques

To gather the information that will make a confession appear plausible, **informants** have used a variety of techniques, ranging from the artful to the crude.

Some **informants**, for example, have carefully maintained files of newspaper and magazine articles on sensational criminal cases, or have stolen legal documents from the cells of other inmates.

They have conned fellow prisoners, even those who have insisted on their innocence, into giving up key details of the cases against them. Some have pretended to be jailhouse lawyers offering free advice. Others merely have asked why someone is in jail, then transformed the most sincere protestations of innocence into admissions of guilt.

Informants have purchased information from other **informants** for money, candy or cigarettes. Some **informants** have testified that they received inside information from police.

In pursuit of information, **informants** sometimes have worked together. They call it "getting in the car" -- a graphic metaphor for a ride home from jail.

The Times obtained letters passed between **informants** that illustrate this collegial process.

Referring to one inmate whom they were trying to implicate in a murder, an **informant** wrote: "He will not be moved. The loutent (lieutenant) said so. He will stay right here for us to finish bookin' him. Also, we must keep our stories together (sic). We are in the car."

But inside the **informant** tank -- the segregated cellblocks where most **informants** spend their time when they are not in court -- rivalries sometimes intrude. Not surprisingly, **informants** who are willing to lie about murder confessions are willing to betray their fellow **informants**.

In one such case, Leslie White begged **informant** Anthony Cornejo to share information about a murder confession.

Three Might Be Too Many

Two **informants** were already lined up to testify and White apparently feared that three would be too many. So he asked Cornejo's help in discrediting the testimony of the other **informant**.

"Is this OK?" White wrote Cornejo. "Tony, I need this case."

White had good reason to believe that he could trade his testimony for a favor. A convicted kidnaper and robber, he repeatedly had been released from jail for reporting murder confessions.

While reduced sentences are the most dramatic rewards **informants** have received, they also have earned a host of lesser favors.

These have ranged from increased access to creature comforts in jail to opportunities to participate in excursions out of jail on undercover operations with the police.

The favors also have included cash payments of \$5 or \$10 from individual police officers and \$1,000 or more from official witness protection funds.

"The motivation to lie is too great," White said.

Sorting Out the Truth

Authorities have long faced the problem of sorting out genuine confessions from those that have been fabricated.

In the last decade in Los Angeles County, **informants** have testified in cases against more than 200 defendants -- mainly accused murderers, according to reviews by the district attorney's office and defense attorneys. In scores of other cases, defense attorneys said, the threat that **informants** would testify has prompted defendants to plead guilty in return for lesser sentences.

In some high-publicity cases, such as the 1985 murder of a Los Angeles police detective who was gunned down while picking up his 6-year-old son at school, as many as 25 **informants** have come forward to offer information, including purported confessions, to authorities.

Traditionally, authorities have relied on a two-pronged test to decide whether an **informant** is telling the truth: Did the **informant** offer facts that should have been known only by the criminal? And were the **informant** and the accused ever together in jail?

But when White made his phone calls last October, he destroyed the assumptions that supported that test.

Uses Telephone

Equipped with only a telephone and the last name of an inmate he did not know, White impersonated police officers and prosecutors and squeezed enough information from law enforcement officials to fabricate a plausible confession. Then he created a phony record showing that he and the accused had been together in jail.

Proximity and a few facts were all that were necessary for longtime **informant** Daniel Armenta when he "booked" a fellow inmate for murder in a jailhouse killing.

Armenta was used as a witness in the case despite the highly improbable way he obtained the supposed confession.

According to court records, the man he "booked," Raul Andujo, was chained to a chair in an interview room at East Los Angeles Municipal Court. The door opened and a sheriff's deputy ushered in Armenta -- a heroin addict from Andujo's neighborhood.

Andujo said he took one look at Armenta and called for help.

"Get this inmate out of here," the sheriff's deputy recalled Andujo as saying. "He's a snitch. I don't want him near me."

Both in Court

Andujo's plea went unheeded and nearly a year later, Armenta and Andujo were in the same room again. This time it was a courtroom downtown.

Armenta testified that, on that day in East Los Angeles, Andujo had confessed to him that he was guilty of the murder.

On the strength of Armenta's testimony, Andujo was ordered to stand trial and was jailed on high bail for more than a year. Ultimately, he was acquitted.

Armenta was soon at work again. This time he said he was on a jail bus when another inmate -- a stranger -- confessed to a murder. That case is pending.

The **informant** tank is full of stories like Armenta's.

Here are five others that The Times has investigated in detail.

The Snitch Professor

*In secretly recorded telephone conversations, a gifted **informant** teaches a triple murderer tricks of the trade.*

Longtime jailhouse **informant** Sidney Storch was on the phone, giving a triple murderer a friendly lecture on the art of informing.

A check forger who has been in and out of jail much of his life, Storch explained how the killer could trade confessions of other inmates for official favors. Storch pointed out that confessions need not be real.

"Go for the jugular," Storch advised. "You're going to have to be b--- s----ing a little bit, but you may as well get used to that situation."

Storch, then 41, went on to suggest how the killer, Robert Harris Ormsbee, 23, might fake the confession of a jailed police officer accused of several yacht thefts and two killings.

'Somebody Needed Killing'

"Listen to what I'm going to tell you," Storch told his pupil. "All it would really take to book this guy is: 'I was involved with the yachts. My partners and I got so deep off into this, that somebody needed killing and we did.'"

Regarded by some peers as an **informant** *extraordinaire*, Storch himself was being "booked" as he offered Ormsbee advice in the fall of 1987.

With Ormsbee's cooperation, the telephone conversations were secretly tape-recorded on behalf of the accused police officer, William Leasure, whom Ormsbee had befriended. The tape was made during conference calls by a third party outside the jail.

When the calls were made, Storch recently had been released from County Jail. He explained that because he had never been jailed near Leasure, he was not in a position to testify that Leasure had confessed. But Ormsbee was. Storch volunteered to help.

"I'll have a car in about a week," Storch told Ormsbee. "And then once I get the car, I can go down to the library."

Newspaper Articles

The visit to the library, Ormsbee explained in an interview, would allow Storch to read newspaper stories on Leasure's legal problems, and pass the information to Ormsbee. Then, Ormsbee said, he could "go to court and say, 'Well, Leasure told me (the story) personally.' "

In addition to the library technique, Storch was acquainted with Leslie White's method of impersonating law enforcement authorities to obtain information on cases over the telephone, several **informants** said. In one incident last July, authorities suspect that Storch and White used that ploy in an attempt to obtain the names of witnesses in a murder case in which they were seeking to testify. White has admitted his role in the incident.

Through his attorney, Storch declined The Times' request to discuss his conversations with Ormsbee.

Now serving a 75-year-to-life sentence for the 1984 "Mini-Manson Family" killings, Ormsbee said that Storch repeatedly suggested that the way to win official favors was to tell authorities that other inmates had confessed their crimes, even when they had not.

Citing as an example an **informant** who he said had had a 30-year sentence cut to six months, Storch suggested, "If you look at it proportionally, they might cut 75 years down to 25."

Underscores Message

In a letter mailed to Ormsbee from another unit of the jail, shortly before Storch's release in 1987, Storch underscored his message. Referring to inmates housed near Ormsbee who were accused of serious crimes, Storch wrote: "You're sitting on a smoking row -- used properly, you could cut your time way down."

Ormsbee said: "I took that to mean with Leasure looking at death, (and accused killers and former police officers Richard) Ford and (Robert) Von Villas looking at death, that I was with some pretty heavy cases, and I could get my own . . . (time) knocked off, if I decided to testify on all of them, or one of them."

In the letter, Storch added: "Make sure you call me. I'll do your research."

Ormsbee said he believed that Storch meant: "If I picked out my victim, I can call him and say . . . 'Look Storch, I'm going to do Ford, you know, why don't you give me the proper information on him?'"

It is likely that Storch would have taken credit with authorities for whatever information Ormsbee had provided, Ormsbee said. "He's just a real slime ball," he added.

Others have expressed similar views, more delicately.

'Highly Manipulative'

"The defendant is a highly manipulative, super-sophisticated, criminally oriented con artist," Los Angeles County Deputy Probation Officer Joan Zeise wrote of Storch in connection with a 1985 forgery case. "He is very cooperative, conversant and charming, which enables him to be highly successful in his chosen vocation of forgery."

Storch's criminal record dates back at least to 1967, when he received a suspended sentence for stealing a car in New York. Since he arrived in California six years ago, he has been convicted of at least three felonies -- mainly involving incidents in which he tried to cash forged checks.

Despite those convictions, Storch has spent only seven months in state prison, according to the California Department of Corrections. He has been in and out of Los Angeles County Jail at least nine times in the last six years, according to jail records. The longest single period he served was 13 months.

According to Ormsbee, Storch attributes his ability to get out of jail to his skill at delivering confessions.

"What do you get out of all this?," Ormsbee said he once asked Storch.

"He says, 'Well, I get out of going to prison mostly. . . .' He says, 'I can go out there, write checks . . . and I never have to worry about doing more than a year.' "

'Confession' Statements

On at least a dozen occasions, Storch told authorities that he was present when another inmate confessed to a crime. Others familiar with Storch said they believe he has given "confession" statements to police in more than 20 cases. Storch has taken the witness stand in at least a half-dozen criminal trials or preliminary hearings.

According to Storch's testimony and statements to police, defendants who made incriminating statements to him include: Bobby Joe Maxwell, convicted in 1984 of two of the "Skid Row Stabber" killings; Tracey Carter, accused of the 1987 robbery and murder of a minister who had stopped to use a pay telephone in South-Central Los Angeles, and Stewart Woodman, charged with engineering the "Ninja"-style killing of Woodman's parents in the garage of their fashionable Brentwood condominium.

Said inmate Daniel Roach: "It seems that half the world just confesses to Sidney Storch."

Booked Before He Knew It

*An accused murderer finds himself in a cell next to the **informant** tank. Before he arrives, the **informants** know all about him. Before he leaves, three of them say he has confessed.*

Inside the jail in the old Hall of Justice, the **informants** were abuzz.

Among the "snitches" housed together on the 14th floor, the word was out: A frail transsexual known as Terry Craig was on his way over.

Craig, who was being moved to the administrative segregation unit because he had been in a fight in the transsexual tank, was facing the most serious of charges -- murder.

Veteran **informant** Sidney Storch took up a whispered chant. "His name's Terry Craig, his name's Terry Craig." Then he told his fellow inmates, "We can all go home on this if we play it right."

Planning to Lie

Daniel Roach, a 25-year-old car thief housed on the row that day last August, knew what was about to happen. His colleagues were planning to lie to authorities and tell them that Craig had confessed his role in the killing.

"Half the K-9 (**informant**) row, they know everything about Terry Craig, and he isn't even on the row yet!" Roach said in an interview. "They're talking about who's going to book him and who's got the better story."

A convicted prostitute, Craig was charged with murder after he had an argument with another inmate in the transsexual tank. The other inmate, Eduardo de la Vega, was a longtime acquaintance with whom Craig had once lived.

De la Vega told authorities that four years earlier he had watched Craig kill another transsexual in a downtown hotel.

Relying almost exclusively on De la Vega's statement, authorities charged Craig with murder. But their case was weak. De la Vega admitted on the witness stand that he had 54 aliases and had been convicted of perjury.

The **informants** went to work as soon as Craig was moved to their tier.

Tells Intentions

One of them, Harold Hall, a murder suspect, immediately voiced his intentions, according to Roach.

"The way he put it was, 'I'm going to book this (homosexual),' " Roach recalled.

Another **informant**, Michael Panie, had the same idea, Roach said.

Panie approached Leslie White to purchase incriminating information, Roach said. He said he overheard them strike a deal.

"I just want a carton of cigarettes out of it," Roach quoted White as saying.

White confirmed Roach's account, although Panie denied it.

Later, Roach said, Panie told him he had obtained Craig's confession: "I got handwritten proof now."

Roach said he asked Panie what he meant. "He goes, 'Terry Craig gave me a note that was handwritten, proof, a confession to his murder.' "

Could 'All Go Home'

Panie then smiled, according to Roach, and confided that the note actually had been forged by Storch, the **informant** who had passed the word to others on the tier that they could "all go home" on Craig's case.

In an interview, Panie acknowledged that the note he presented to authorities was handed to him by Storch, but said he did not know whether Storch had faked it. Panie, who is in custody out of state, said Storch "tried to weasel his way into" the Craig case, but was "shut out" by authorities.

The day that Panie told detectives of Craig's confessional note, Storch was making a statement of his own. In addition to receiving the note, Storch asserted, he had overheard Craig make incriminating statements, according to the district attorney's office.

From the beginning, Roach said, he was convinced that none of it was true. "Nobody had conversations with Terry Craig. Terry Craig (whose real name is Jonathan Reyes and whose native language is Spanish) was a very quiet person, speaks English not very well."

In the end, Deputy Dist. Atty. Patricia Shrader decided against using any of the **informants** at Craig's preliminary hearing.

Duplicate Testimony

Shrader said she concluded that the note that Panie had provided was not written by Craig, and that Storch did little more than duplicate Panie's testimony.

Of the other **informant** -- Hall -- Shrader said: "He couldn't tell us anything, I'm sure, that would outweigh anything he might want on his (own murder) case. . . . He's obviously going to want something. I don't see him out of the blue, just volunteering. . . ."

As it turned out, the district attorney's office did not need the services of Storch, Hall and Panie to get past a preliminary hearing. On the strength of De la Vega's testimony, Craig is now awaiting trial for murder.

Rewarding a Liar

*An **informant** can lie about a murder, admit that he has lied, and still be the state's star witness -- and he can get a reward.*

There was a big problem with Israel Issacs' claim that he had witnessed a murder outside an Echo Park bar: Issacs was in jail at the time. He couldn't possibly have seen the killing.

But prosecutors at the district attorney's office did not view this as an insurmountable problem.

They used Issacs as their star witness anyway.

The upshot was that Jose Calderin, a 30-year-old truck driver, whose only criminal record was for possession of marijuana, spent 10 weeks in jail as a murder suspect before the charges were dropped in the interests of justice.

The problem with Issacs' story in the murder case was detected by his own attorney, Edward Gritz.

Represented Both

Gritz noticed because, as it happened, he also represented the accused killer, Calderin.

While reviewing police reports about Calderin's case, Gritz discovered that Issacs was the only witness against Calderin. So he went to see Issacs in jail.

"I say to him, 'Are you sure you saw Jose shoot this guy in the head?' " Gritz recalled. "According to my records, you were in the County Jail when this shooting took place. . . .

"He says, 'No, no, I wasn't in the County Jail then.'

"Then he began to think and think and think," Gritz said. "Then he says, 'Thank you. You're right. But let me tell you what actually happened.' "

And without missing a beat, Issacs told him that Calderin had confessed to him in jail, Gritz recalled.

He Tries Again

Gritz said he pointed out that this could not be true either, since Calderin wasn't jailed until Issacs had identified him as the killer.

So Issacs tried again.

"To tell you the truth," Gritz recalled him saying, "I made a phone call to a friend's house and Jose picked up the phone and told me, 'Guess who I just killed?' "

Issacs was an **informant** who badly wanted to get out of jail.

His cellmate at the time, another **informant** named George Freeman, recalled in an interview that Issacs, 31, was wildly in love with a 17-year-old girl, and was literally pulling his hair out and saving it in an envelope, crying over the girl and saying, "I really got to get out of here."

Although Issacs also told prosecutors that he had changed his story, they put him on the witness stand as the only person who could link Calderin to the killing.

Listened on Extension

At a preliminary hearing in 1984, Issacs testified that he had heard Calderin confess to a mutual friend while listening in on an extension phone at the friend's house.

Even though the friend was dead, Issacs refused to name him. He said the friend's family might be in danger from a group of Colombians and Cubans who were dealing in cocaine and murder. He implied that Calderin was part of this group.

On the basis of Issacs' testimony, a judge ordered Calderin to stand trial.

But the same day, prosecutor Mark Merrick concluded that Issacs, his star witness, was a liar, and that no reasonable juror would believe him. Merrick recorded the observations in an internal report on the case's progress.

Nonetheless, he decided to press on with the prosecution.

In an interview, Merrick said he had reason to be suspicious of Calderin because Calderin had been present at another restaurant when another murder had taken place. Merrick conceded, however, that, in Calderin, "I didn't know if I had a hit man or somebody who went out to dinner at the wrong time."

Never Found Witnesses

Investigators continued to search for witnesses other than Issacs who could link Calderin to the killing. They were never found.

Finally, five months after the preliminary hearing, on the eve of Calderin's scheduled trial, Merrick moved to dismiss the case.

"I had no intention of ever trying this case," Merrick said in a recent interview. "Not with just him (Issacs)."

Merrick also said he had delayed dismissing the case for another reason. He had hoped that Calderin would trade the authorities information about the group of Colombian and Cuban drug dealers and murderers that Issacs had mentioned.

Issacs, meanwhile, was rewarded by authorities with early release from jail.

A con man, drug dealer and convicted murderer, Issacs had been arrested on forgery charges. He had faced a maximum sentence of four years and four months -- which in practice would have translated to a little more than two years. But he was released after less than one year, when another prosecutor, Jeffrey Jonas, told a judge that Issacs had provided information in an investigation into more than 50 unsolved murders involving Colombians and Cubans.

Kept a Promise

Jonas said in an interview that he cut the deal on Issacs' behalf to keep a promise he had made to a sheriff's sergeant, who had been using Issacs as an **informant** in the jail. Issacs had provided information on a number of cases, including an alleged confession in the McMartin Pre-School molestation case.

Jonas said his own assessment of Issacs' credibility "on a scale of zero to 10 was zero."

But he said he expected that Issacs, who had been placed on probation, would violate its terms and could then be sent to prison.

Issacs proved Jonas partially right. He promptly violated the terms of his probation by disappearing. He was never caught.

Authorities did hear from him once, when he telephoned a district attorney's investigator to report that he had just earned \$32,000 selling cocaine. "I'm too smart for you guys," the investigator recalled Issacs saying. "I'm doing a lot of business out here on the streets."

As for Calderin, less than a year after his release, he was with four women in another restaurant, when a stranger made passes and obscene remarks. In the midst of a fight, Calderin pulled a handgun and shot the stranger and the stranger's friend. The stranger died. Calderin pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter and was sentenced to eight years in prison.

The Man Who Would Be Snitch

*Officials repeatedly reject a petty criminal's requests to get into the **informant** tank -- until he makes them an offer they can't refuse.*

Richard Slawinski had a modest ambition. He wanted to be officially certified as an **informant**.

In and out of jail for stealing checks from family and friends, Slawinski repeatedly requested **informant** status from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. But it was repeatedly denied.

Slawinski said he needed a "snitch jacket" for his own protection. "I've got a lot of enemies. I've worked on the street," he said in an interview. But the Sheriff's Department said the information he had provided was of so little significance that he was in no danger.

A week after he was turned down for the fourth time, Slawinski found the means to an end. It was late 1987 when jailers moved Arthur Toscano into his cell.

Small-Time Criminal

At first, Toscano appeared to be just another small-time criminal, in jail for violating probation for being under the influence of PCP.

But the picture changed when Toscano received a visit from a sheriff's homicide detective. The detective had gotten Toscano's name from a murder suspect who claimed that Toscano was his alibi.

Within days of the detective's visit, Slawinski was on the phone to the same detective, explaining that he had solved the case.

After the visit, he said, Toscano returned to the cell and confessed the murder to another of their five cellmates.

Detectives interviewed the other cellmates, who denied hearing the confession, said Deputy Dist. Atty. Elden Sims. Based solely on Slawinski's account, Sims filed a murder charge against Toscano. In evaluating Slawinski's truthfulness, the prosecutor said he relied heavily on the judgment of the detective, David Kushner, whom Sims said he had known for years. Kushner did not return telephone calls from The Times.

Ordered to Stand Trial

Toscano, who had not been a suspect in the murder until Slawinski said he confessed, was ordered to stand trial and was held on high bail.

His trial had already begun nearly a year later, in October, 1988, when Sims concluded that Slawinski was a liar and decided to dismiss the case.

The prosecutor said he was persuaded by an unusually painstaking defense investigation, which, among other things, pinned down the time of the murder to a period for which Toscano had a convincing alibi. He was at work in a warehouse where employees were required to punch in and out on a time clock.

"But for Mr. Toscano's proof of his whereabouts," said Stephen Webber, a court-appointed defense attorney, "he likely would be a convicted murderer today solely because of a false **informant**."

Prosecutor Sims, however, said he was more impressed with something else the defense investigation turned up -- Slawinski's repeated efforts to become an **informant**.

He Wasn't Aware

Sims said he had not known that Slawinski was desperately trying to become an official snitch. He said he did not believe the detective had known either. Had Sims known, he said, he would not have charged Toscano only on Slawinski's say-so.

"It gave him a motive to fabricate," Sims said. The prosecutor said he believed Slawinski because the **informant** had provided information that theoretically could only have been known by the murderer, an eyewitness, or the police -- that the victim had been shot about six times in the head with a small caliber gun during a marijuana sale.

But when Sims confronted Slawinski with the evidence the defense had uncovered, he said Slawinski became uncomfortable and changed his story about the way in which he obtained the confession.

'It Bothers Me'

Disgusted, Sims said: "I don't believe he's telling the truth. I don't know how he got the information he got. . . . It bothers me . . . because he had unique information in regard to the killing."

But by then, Slawinski had what he wanted: He had been granted official snitch status, had been placed in protective custody, had obtained another supposed murder confession -- this one on a jail bus on the eve of his own trial -- and twice had been let out of jail.

In an interview, Slawinski said he told the truth whenever he informed. But he said that perhaps as many as half of all jailhouse **informants** do not. "A lot of K-9s, the . . . (expletive) they do is unreal," he said.

A Battle Of **Informants**

*Kevin Dykes walks into the **informant** tank as a witness to murder and walks out as the accused murderer. Three **informants** say he has confessed. Four others say the first three are lying.*

A few days after Kevin Dykes told Compton police he had seen a friend stabbed to death, detectives arrested the alleged killers.

Days after that, Dykes was picked up on a street corner for possessing rock cocaine.

Because he could not immediately post \$250 for a bail bond, he was jailed.

Because he had provided information on the murder case, he was placed in the **informants'** tank.

Because of that, he may never get out.

Before he could make bail, three veteran jailhouse **informants** "booked" Dykes for the murder he said he had only witnessed.

Helped Stab Victim

The **informants** said Dykes told them he was a major drug dealer who had ordered two employees to commit the murder, and helped them stab the victim to death.

Although neighbors and friends testified that Dykes had never had any money, much less hired help, he was convicted of the 1986 murder and of two attempted murders -- also stabbings -- that he claimed to have witnessed.

He was sentenced to 24 years to life in prison.

Dykes, in testimony and in his statement to police, admitted that he was not blameless in the brutal death of his friend, who was stabbed 81 times. His testimony showed that he had a gun and could have intervened. But he said he was too afraid of the killers.

To prove Dykes guilty of murder, the prosecution had to show that he intended to kill his friend -- not merely that he had failed to stop the killers, legal experts said.

The prosecutor, Deputy Dist. Atty. Elliot Alhadeff, wrote in a memo to his superiors, that "the entire case against Dykes in the murder . . . rested on his confession to the **informants**."

His Intent Was Clear

However, he said in an interview that Dykes' intent to kill was clear from Dykes' statements to police and in court. Dykes admitted that he told the killers he would serve as their lookout; helped them dump his friend's body, and suggested that they clean up the bloody driveway.

Because the **informants'** testimony was important, if not critical to the prosecution, Dykes' defense attorney attacked it by calling **informants** of his own. They testified that the prosecution's **informants** were liars.

The trial took on the character of a Byzantine battle. Where the truth lay was anyone's guess.

First up for the prosecution was veteran jailhouse **informant** Willie Battle, a robber and burglar known by 20 other names.

Battle testified that Dykes told him he was a drug dealer who personally stabbed his friend 40 to 50 times. Battle also said Dykes told him that he had "henchmen" who helped.

Experienced Witness

Battle was an experienced witness who had reported confessions of at least nine other inmates and testified against five.

Next came prosecution witness Jesse Williams, a burglar and veteran **informant** who testified that Dykes ordered "bodyguards" to kill his friend, then helped with the stabbing.

Then the prosecution called Leslie White.

Dykes met White after he was transferred from the **informant** tank to a jail section used for inmates who need protection from people in the **informant** tank.

White testified that Dykes bragged that he was a big drug dealer who would pay inmates -- including White -- to lie by saying that the first set of **informants** had admitted they were lying.

But White said the truth was that Dykes admitted having confessed to Williams and Battle -- and then confessed to him, too.

Another **Informant**

To discredit Williams and Battle, the defense produced **informant** Edward Moran, who testified that Dykes had been framed. Moran said he knew because he had been in on the plot.

He said that when Dykes entered the **informant** tank:

Dykes told other inmates that he was there because he had witnessed the stabbing. Then Williams remarked that Dykes represented "an easy way for . . . us to go home."

Battle agreed to join in the plot. Moran said he did, too. Moran said he made a false statement to police that had been written out for him by Williams.

The district attorney's office then tried to discredit Moran. Veteran **informant** James Jackson, a con man, said he had heard Moran swear after a run-in with jailers that he intended to "destroy (the case against Dykes) in any way he could."

The next move fell to the defense. To discredit White, Dyke's lawyer called three inmates who testified that White told them he had made up the information on Dykes.

'Well, I'm Going Home'

One of these inmates, **informant** Howard Stewart, testified: "I told him (White), 'What you're doing is totally illegal.' He stated to me, 'Well, I'm going home.' "

Dykes' lawyer, Steven Hauser, said he is trying to reopen the case. He recently obtained a sworn statement from White that may help.

White now says that both Battle and Williams "admitted to me that they "booked" Kevin Dykes for a crime that he did not commit."

As for himself, he said, "I am unfortunately and regretfully unable to provide all the facts to (the) court without a grant of immunity. . . . I do not want to be prosecuted for perjury."

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Booking -- Telling authorities about incriminating statements made by other inmates. This term applies whether the statements were real or not.

Freeway time -- Time in which inmates are allowed to roam the corridor along the tier of cells in which they are housed.

Getting In the Car -- Engaging in a communal effort to book someone. When one **informant** gets a piece of incriminating information, he will sometimes share or sell it to other **informants**, who can then claim that the suspect confessed to them too. The word "car" reflects the **informants'** hope that they will be rewarded with a ride home from jail.

Informant Tank -- Tiers of cells where **informants** are ordinarily housed. When **informants** get into trouble in the tank, they are sometimes transferred to other protective custody units, where they encounter other "keep aways" -- including accused murderers whose cases have engendered lots of publicity. **Informants** also run into general population inmates on jail buses and in holding cells during trips to court.

Juice Man -- An individual **informant's** chief contact in law enforcement. Often a police officer, but sometimes a prosecutor, a **informant's** juice man helps him disseminate his information to the detectives or prosecutors handling a specific case. The juice man also dispenses favors that can range from giving the **informant** a few dollars to helping arrange the **informant's** early release from jail.

K-9 -- Los Angeles County jail designation for **informants**. The K stands for keep away, meaning **informants** are to be kept away from certain other inmates. The numerical designation is one of several, such as membership in a prison gang, or a propensity for violent behavior, that describes the reason for the keep away status.

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