

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The information underworld

Police reliance on criminal informants is a dangerous game for both

By Dick Lehr



BULGER James J. Jr.

James J. (Whitey) Bulger

They've been seen chatting in a car near Castle Island in South Boston. They've been spotted together in a Swampscott restaurant, the federal agent and the gangland leader.

"Isn't he a great guy?" the FBI agent has remarked to others about James J. (Whitey) Bulger, considered among the most powerful and feared mobsters in the region today.

The disclosure last month that Bulger, reputed to be a killer by the 1986 President's Commission on Organized Crime, has for years enjoyed a special relationship with the Boston office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation helped explain the hot friction between the bureau and other law-enforcement agencies when it comes to Bulger. Instead of forming a united front, investigators tracking Bulger are mistrustful, with many contending that Whitey has beguiled the bureau.

But the disclosure also raises nettlesome questions about the complex contacts the good guys undertake with the bad guys in a never-ending, nether-world tap dance in which each side seeks to disarm, outwit and exploit the other.

Alliances can be dangerous

The associations come in many forms. Cops count on bartenders, pawn shop owners and others who mingle with lawbreakers to pass along information they might have overheard. Or investigators may keep open lines with the operator of an after-
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