

RAT IN A TRAP

Hood's crimes put mob takedown at risk

BY JOHN MARZULLI
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

A SEASONED rat — already marked for death by the mob — has managed to enrage prosecutors, too, after he admitted committing crimes while in the federal witness protection program.

Francesco (Frank) Fiordilino, a former Bonanno mobster, copped to illegal gambling and collecting debts for people he owed money while he was testifying for the government last year in a sensational gangland murder trial, the Daily News has learned.

Fiordilino's alleged crimes could now toss into jeopardy the conviction of Gambino capo Bartolomeo Vernace, 65, who killed two men in a Queens bar in 1981. The murders were sparked by a spilled drink.

Defense lawyers Charles Carnesi and Joseph DiBenedetto have filed papers seeking a new trial or an evidentiary hear-

EXCLUSIVE

ing to explore Fiordilino's criminal activities while protected by the feds.

Court records show the 44-year-old rat admitted his crimes to handlers in the U.S. Marshals Service and the Brooklyn U.S. attorney's office because he feared he was going to get whacked over the money he owed.

Fiordilino testified about Vernace's involvement with lucrative baccarat games run by the Gambino and Bonanno families in social clubs and coffee bars. His testimony about how he experienced a "metamorphosis" from lowly coffee boy to respected thug after committing a murder supported the government's theory that Vernace's status was enhanced after the Queens killings.

Vernace's conviction was a

huge win for the feds because he had previously beaten the rap for killing bar owners Richard Godkin and John D'Agnese in a state trial. Vernace was convicted last year in federal court for the murders on "Western Night" at the Shamrock Bar on Jamaica Ave. on April 11, 1981.

Fiordilino has talked a good game since he cut a deal to beat his own murder rap in 2008. He told a federal judge that the mob is a "farce" and a "gang made up of individuals with very low self-esteem who feed on the weak."

Federal Judge Nicholas Garaufis rewarded him for his cooperation. The killer said at the time he had no regrets about being a turncoat.

"I'm totally at peace with my decision to defect," Fiordilino said.

"I no longer have to lie, cheat or pretend anymore."

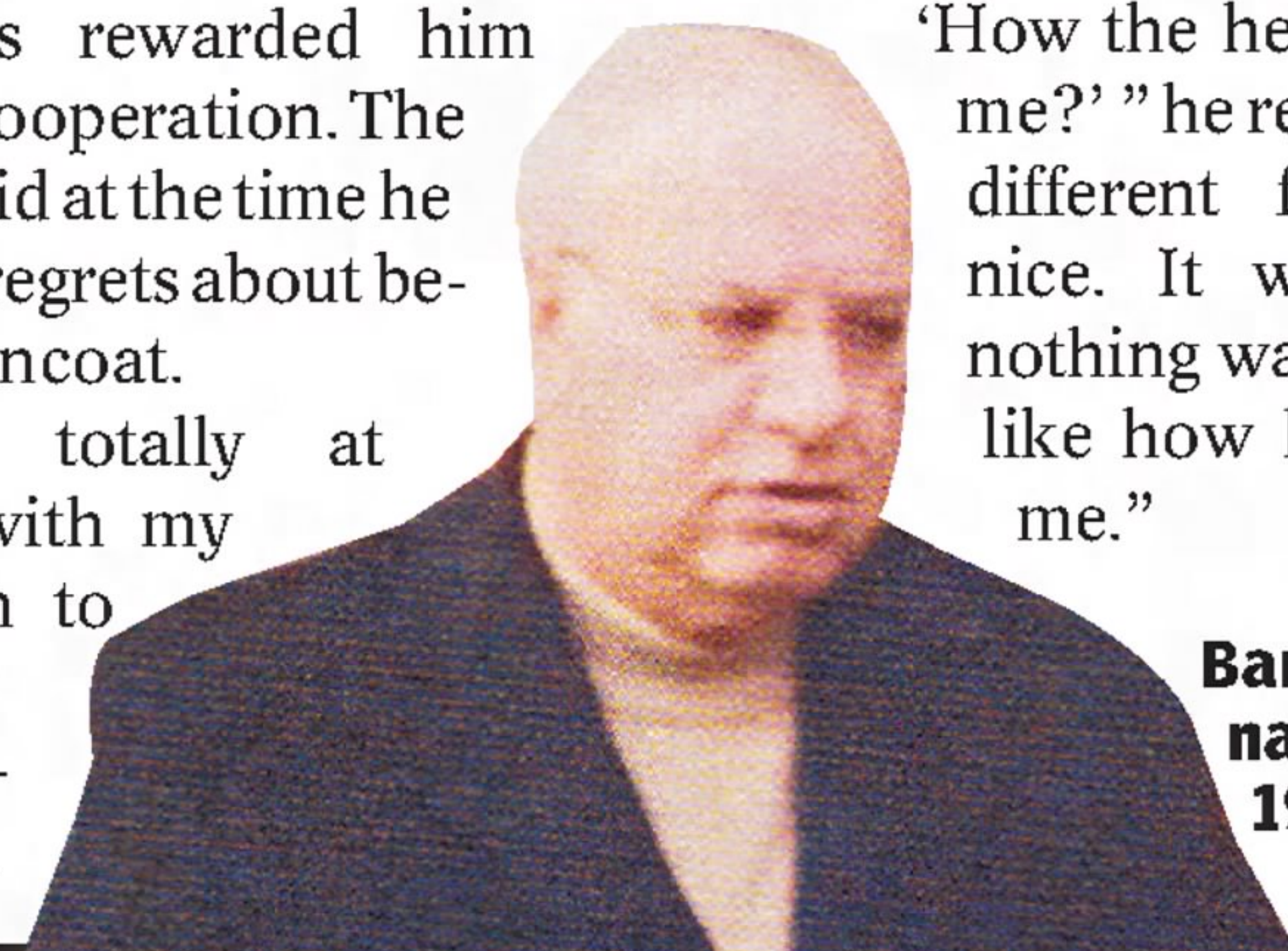
Being an informer has cost him his family.

Last year at Vernace's trial, he said he's estranged from his two brothers.

"They don't want to talk to me (because) I'm a rat," he said.

Fiordilino also described how spending time on the lam in California in 1993 was a lot like his new life.

"I would be walking down the street and a person would be like, 'Hello,' and I would be like, 'How the hell do you know me?'" he recalled. "It was a different feeling, it was nice. It was not hectic, nothing was crazy, kind of like how life is today for me."



Bartolomeo Vernace was guilty in 1981 slays over a spilled drink.