

The True Story of Al Capone



Investigator Pat Roche . . .
"Don't believe what Capone says
about getting out of the racket."

As Told to **BRUCE CATTON**
By **PAT ROCHE**

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How he organized his gang,
the size of his army,
his spy system and his
business, how he lives,
works, and plays, and
how he will probably be
murdered by his own men
are revealed here by a
Chicago ace detective



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NO ONE can understand the Chicago gang situation unless he realizes the tremendous, almost unbelievable extent of the gang organizations.

The South Side gang headed by Al Capone, being the largest and the most notorious, will do for an illustration. I'll describe it, as it revealed itself to me through years of investigation, and then you can see how it is that the gangs of Chicago have had such enormous power.

Until comparatively recently, Capone had his headquarters in a South Side hotel. Later on the hotel changed hands, and the new management promptly kicked him out; but for a long time that was Capone's headquarters.

Capone had 52 rooms in this hotel. He had his own suite, with a steel door which communicated into a sort of anteroom where several trusted gunmen were on duty night and day. You had to pass through this anteroom to get to Capone's suite, and the anteroom was never unguarded.

Fifty-two rooms in the hotel, housing Capone and his chief lieutenants and bodyguards. The rooms were always full—Capone probably had half a hundred men, at all times, in his immediate entourage.

These men were his shock troops, his gunmen, his killers. They were on regular weekly salaries, ranging anywhere from \$75 to \$200 a week, plus expenses.

Rather a sizeable payroll, right there. But that's only a starter.

Throughout Cook County Capone had at least 1000 more men on the payroll; men who worked in his breweries, men who ran his various disorderly houses, men who drove his booze trucks, men who did his collecting, and so on. These men were also on the weekly payroll, with salaries that would average from \$50 to \$80 a week.

SIT down and figure all of that up and you'll get some idea of Al Capone's weekly budget for employees. From \$50,000 to \$75,000 is a fair estimate.

Then add to that the uncounted thousands that go out in the form of protection money, campaign contributions and the like, and you'll begin to realize the enormous sums that pass through the hands of a typical Chicago gang each week.

Like all proper armies, every Chicago gang has a good espionage system. The way a man like Capone keeps in touch with what's going on is almost incredible. Here's a sample:

A couple of years or so ago there was a man in Chicago named Newmark. He used to hold the job I have now—investigator for the state's attorney—but he was out of office at that time, and he was looking for a way to chisel in on some of the Chicago graft. So he got hold of a chap named Ralph Sheldon, who was on Capone's payroll as a collector in the beer and slot machine racket, and suggested that the two of them band together to oust Capone and take his place. Newmark let on that he had high political connections which would make the whole job easy once they got Capone out of the way.

Sheldon listened to it and figured it might be a good idea. But before he had a chance to do anything about it, one of Capone's spies got wind of it.

Sheldon was promptly told, "You go out and 'get' this Newmark—or you'll go yourself."

So Sheldon took a couple of his friends and tried to carry out the job, but he couldn't work it; and a few days later he came back to gang headquarters to explain.

He was then given a couple of Capone gunmen and the three promised so much money apiece for doing the job.

This time they succeeded. Newmark got the top of his head blown off with a shotgun, and the three men, headed by Sheldon, reported back to headquarters.

CAPONE, according to an informant of mine, was so delighted that he seized the gunman who had actually done the shooting and kissed him. But he still had Sheldon down in his black books. He wouldn't pay Sheldon the money he promised him; and Sheldon took the hint and lit out for the southwest. He hasn't been seen in Chicago since.

While I'm on the general subject of gangland executions, here's a story that shows you what nice, gentle playmates these Capone gangsters are. It was told to me by the wife of one of the gangsters who used to be on Capone's firing squad—a woman who finally left her husband to keep from being murdered by him, and who gave me a good deal of information about the Capone gang's activities.

Here's the story of one execution as she gave it to me. She, of course, got it from her husband, who for a long time was one of Capone's most valued gunmen.

There were three gangsters from St. Louis, up in Chicago on a sort of combined business and pleasure trip. They were in trouble with their own gang in St. Louis; and this gang, which had a sort of working agreement with the South Side gang here in Chicago, sent word on to Capone that these three men were to be erased.

I might say here that most of the big city gangs have inter-city agreements like that, so that they can strike at a distance. The Capone gang agreed, and detailed a squad, with this woman's husband included, to do the job.



Just a Brooklyn boy who made good in Chicago . . . in his chosen field of vice, robbery, murder. . . Scarface Al Capone, alias Brown, relaxes in Florida. . . His Uncle Sam taught him machine gunnery during the war . . . but his scars are not the honorable scars of battle for his country.

THE St. Louis gangsters were taken in tow and shown a wild time in Chicago and its suburbs. Capone's men took them to various cabarets and speakeasies and got the three of them paralyzed drunk. Everybody was having an uproarious evening, and finally the party, in a couple of touring cars, headed out through the open country.

There, along a lonely road, the cars were stopped and everybody piled out. The three St. Louis gangsters were so completely intoxicated by this time that they didn't know what was going on. Furthermore, they were too drunk to stand up. So they were tied up to fence posts. Capone's crew got out, stood off at a little distance, drew their revolvers—and had a session of target practice.

Target practice—with living targets! Or at least the targets were living when the sinister fun commenced. According to the story told me by this woman, who had it from her husband, who was one of the ringleaders in the proceedings, the firing squad simply stood off and brushed up its marksmanship, with the unlucky men from St. Louis on the receiving end.

But if Capone's firing squad strikes with deadly, remorseless certainty, it defends his own person with equal sureness. That is the reason Capone has lived so long. He has seen many of his rivals fall, and many of his own lieutenants, but he himself has always escaped.

Capone hasn't the courage that the other gang leaders have. Either that, or he has more discretion. You can put either interpretation on it you want to. The other gang leaders will go out alone, now and then, to go to cabarets and so on and have a good time. They can be reached there. A gang can lie in wait for them and get them. But Capone never goes out without a gang to protect him.

HERE'S an illustration that will show what I mean: You'll remember how Hymie Weiss was murdered? The Capone outfit rented rooms across the street from Weiss' headquarters, set up a machine gun there and waited for their chance. They had to wait two weeks, but the chance came at last. Weiss came out into the open, stepped within range of their gun—and that was the end of him. And shortly afterward a Capone gangster made the following contemptuous remark:

"Do you suppose that anybody could lay plans for weeks in advance and establish a machine gun nest that close to

Capone's headquarters so as to get 'the big fellow'?"

"In the first place, Capone's men are loyal to him. They are willing to lay down their lives for him at any time."

"In the second place, he is never without a bodyguard. I was away from him for a time and tried to come in to see him. I had to pass a double line of his men, and was not allowed to come in until after Mops Volpi, one of Capone's most trusted lieutenants, who knew me well, got permission. Capone himself had a small gun sticking out of a vest pocket, and a clip for the same automatic showing out of his other pocket."

"Once I saw him sitting in a restaurant, the Garden of Italy, his regular eating place, near the Hawthorne Hotel. While he was eating his men were scattered along the bar and out into the street. An automobile was parked at the curb and a driver in it. A lady asked to see Capone. He gave permission and received her with courtesy, but every bodyguard looked her over carefully, and the driver started the engine of his machine. It was running every minute Capone was talking to her."

They kept it running, just to be ready, in case—

When he's at his winter home in Florida it's much the same. His guards are always on the alert. Whenever an automobile swings into the drive leading into his place, one of his cars that has been lying in wait just inside the gate will slide out behind it and stop right across the drive—thus blocking the exit until the word is passed out from the house that everything is all right. On the front steps will be a couple more men, to give the occupants of the incoming car a quick inspection.

ALL of this is pretty distasteful to Capone. I don't think there's any question that it has gotten on his nerves pretty badly. He likes a good time—likes to step out, throw parties and forget his troubles—and the necessity of keeping those bodyguards with him all the time cramps his style.

In the old days Capone liked nothing better than to swoop down on some cafe with his crew and take the place over for the night. Sometimes he'd have as many as 200 people as his guests at a party of that kind. The bill, at the end of things, might come to several thousand dollars.

That was his idea of a fine time.

He always was a free spender. He is said to have admitted to a friend once that he had spent upwards of \$7,000,000 since he came to Chicago—and that, of course, doesn't include any of his business expenditures. It's easy come, easy go, with him. Another surprising thing is that Capone, who owes so much of his wealth to his gambling outfits, has lost a great deal of money on the horses. In two years time he is said to have dropped around \$1,500,000. At one race meeting he was at one time \$600,000 ahead, but when the meeting closed he owed the bookies something like \$200,000. Incidentally, he paid every cent of it. He's not a welsber.

Capone's influence in the suburbs to the south and west isn't anything like what it used to be, two or three years ago; but for a time he was supreme in many a suburban village near Chicago. He got into those places rather cleverly, too.

Suppose he wanted to put up a big roadhouse in some

little town outside of Chicago—and "roadhouse," by the way, is a very polite name for the sort of establishment Capone would open. Well the ordinary citizens of that town might not exactly like the idea of having a wild roadhouse planked down in their midst. So Capone's lieutenants would look the land over carefully and make themselves familiar with conditions in the neighborhood. Then they'd make overtures to the residents. They'd go to them and establish good relations with them. They'd build a new sidewalk in front of one man's house, give another man's house a nice coat of paint, and so on—explaining that they were glad to do it so as to improve the appearance of the neighborhood and add to the value of their own investment.

THAT, though, is pretty much ancient history now. The state's attorney's office has spent a lot of time and effort on these suburbs during the past year, and they are fairly well cleaned up right now. It's in Chicago that Capone is working these days.

I have felt for a long time that Capone, some day, will meet the same fate that so many of his underworld rivals have met—death at the hands of a gunman.

When that day comes, I believe, he will be murdered by one of his own men. His enemies, sooner or later, will get to one or another of the men in his own bodyguard, and that'll be the end of Capone.

Since he has been released from jail, Capone has had a lot to say about "getting out of the racket." Don't you believe it. He'll never get out. He can't. When you are in a Chicago gang you are in for life. There's no such thing as retiring.

He'll stick at the game until he dies. And I don't believe he'll die peacefully, in a comfortable bed, either.



The king's bodyguard. . . . The Big Fellow, his head ducked to avoid the camera, is indicated by the arrow . . . but the two men at the left have ready hands in coat pockets not empty. . . . At the extreme right is Jake Lingle, murdered Chicago newspaperman . . . who knew too much.

NOW perhaps you can understand why Capone has outlived most of his rivals. He takes no chances. The same care is taken when Capone goes out anywhere.

When he walks along a sidewalk he usually has eight men in his bodyguard. Two men walk along at least half a block ahead of him. Then there are four who form a sort of diamond formation around him; one a few paces in front, one on each side, and one behind. Then two more bring up the rear, several yards behind the main body.

His automobile also is especially designed for his purposes. It could practically be called an armor-plated affair, with bullet-proof glass in all its doors, and its protective armor makes it about twice as heavy as the ordinary sedan of its size. Capone decided that he needed a car of this kind after his North Side rivals made an attempt on his life some five years ago. He was riding along in his car when a big touring car swept up alongside and sent a few rounds of bullets at him. Capone himself escaped unhurt, but his chauffeur was badly wounded. After that Capone took up the armored car idea.

But he doesn't rely solely on this for his protection when he rides out. Preceding his car there is always a touring car occupied by four gunmen. Following Capone's car there will be another touring car, with four more gunmen in it.

It's the same when he goes to a theater. Instead of buying just two seats, for himself and his wife or a friend, he buys eight or ten, and has his bodyguard all around him right in the theater. When he goes to a store to buy clothing or any sort of merchandise, his guards lounge in with him, standing about unobtrusively and keeping their eyes busy while he is waited on, scrutinizing all who approach.