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'Mafia cop' Louis Eppolito died in prison, his wife says

Louis Eppolito leaves federal court in Downtown Brooklyn with his daughter, left, and wife, Frances, in 2006. Credit: Charles Eckert

By Anthony M. DeStefano

anthony.destefano@newsday.com

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Former NYPD detective Louis Eppolito, one of the deadly duo known as the “Mafia Cops” following their convictions for committing murders for the mob in the 1980s and '90s, died in federal prison, his wife told Newsday.

Eppolito, 71, who had been serving a life sentence after his federal racketeering conviction in 2006, died at the Tucson Medical Center in Arizona, his wife, Frances, said in a telephone interview Tuesday morning. The Bureau of Prisons website gave the date of death as Nov. 3.

“Louie died with dignity, the way he lived, on his own terms,” said Frances Eppolito, who declined to give the cause of death. She added that her husband was fighting to the end to clear his name and get out of prison.



Louis Eppolito in front of federal court in Brooklyn in March of 2006. Credit: Charles Eckert



After a trial in Brooklyn federal court, Eppolito and another ex-NYPD detective, Stephen Caracappa, were convicted in 2006 of taking large payoffs from acting Lucchese crime boss Anthony “Gaspipe” Casso to carry out numerous murders. The payments — amounting to \$4,000 a month on retainers and sometimes totaling tens of thousands for mob hits — were often passed to the detectives by Burton Kaplan, a garment industry businessman and convicted drug trafficker who turned into a cooperating witness and testified against the two former detectives.

Trial testimony also showed the corruption was first engineered by Eppolito’s cousin, reputed Gambino associate Frank Santora, who had met Kaplan in prison. It was Santora, now deceased, who first made the offer to Kaplan that Eppolito and Caracappa could provide information and services for a fee, testimony showed.

Among those killed, according to court testimony and law enforcement officials, was Gambino crime family captain Edward Lino of Fort Salonga. Lino was gunned down on Nov. 6, 1990, on a road just off the Belt Parkway after he had been pulled over by Eppolito and Caracappa under the ruse of a traffic stop, evidence showed. Investigators said Casso wanted Lino killed because he believed the Gambino captain had taken part in a plot to kill him. In December 1985, Lino allegedly was one of the shooters in the murder of Gambino boss Paul Castellano.

A total of eight homicides were allegedly carried out by Eppolito and Caracappa, according to investigators, including one case in which an innocent Nicholas Guido was killed on Christmas Day in 1986 in what turned out to be a case of mistaken identity. New York City eventually paid out \$18.4 million to settle lawsuits by the families of all the victims.

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The corpulent and talkative Eppolito was in sharp contrast physically to Caracappa, who was thin, gaunt and quiet. During the federal trial, Eppolito talked openly with reporters while Caracappa would stand silently and avoid the press. Caracappa died in prison in 2017 at the age of 75.

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Both men had been highly regarded Brooklyn detectives in the NYPD. Eppolito was the son of Gambino soldier Ralph Eppolito of Brooklyn and had other relatives who were either members or associates of the mob. In contrast, Caracappa had no criminal family ties and during his trial lived with his mother on Staten Island after retiring from the NYPD. After leaving the NYPD, Eppolito and Caracappa moved to Las Vegas. Eppolito tried working as an actor and had a small role in the classic mob film "Goodfellas" as "Fat Andy."

Frances Eppolito said her husband is survived by their two daughters and son. Another son from a previous marriage, Louis Jr., showed up at his father's trial and said at the time he had been estranged from his father. Frances Eppolito said funeral arrangements would be private.

By Anthony M. DeStefano

anthony.destefano@newsday.com

Anthony M. DeStefano has been a reporter for Newsday since 1986 and covers law enforcement, criminal justice and legal affairs from its New York City offices.

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