

Hollywood 'Fixer' Now Has Some Celebrities Fearing the Worst

By ABC News



Feb. 16, 2006 -- In a town that's no stranger to scandal, this might be one of the biggest -- a massive wiretapping scheme that might reveal Hollywood's darkest secrets and implicate some of the leading lawyers in show business and their celebrity clients.

It all centers on the actions of one man -- private eye to the stars Anthony Pellicano.

The 61-year-old came out of Chicago with a reputation for tough tactics and a knack for getting the dirt on just about everybody. Pellicano was the quintessential Hollywood gumshoe, boasting a client list that read like a who's who: John Travolta, Farrah Fawcett, Kevin Costner, Tom Cruise and Arnold Schwarzenegger among them.

"Pellicano is the last-resort guy, and no matter what you have to do to put a fire out for a celebrity, that's what you gotta do," said Paul Barresi, a former porn star and freelance private investigator who worked for Pellicano.

But other private investigators said that Pellicano employed some questionable tactics in getting information.

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Private eye Richard DiSabatino, who has known Pellicano for more than a decade, put it this way: "He broke the law to satisfy his clients. And normal PIs don't do that."

But Pellicano's wise-guy persona was tailor-made for Hollywood. His mystique actually became the stuff of movies. Travolta reportedly modeled the lead character in "Get Shorty" -- mob-guy-turned-movie-man Chili Palmer -- after him.

"He was very friendly with him. With ... Travolta," said DiSabatino. "You know the fact where, uh, Chili Palmer would always say, 'Look into my eyes'? Well, that was Pellicano's favorite saying."

He called himself the "sin-eater" -- the ultimate Hollywood fixer. But his own "sins" have landed him in trouble with the law. He already served 2½ years in prison on weapons charges, and he's now facing a 110-count federal indictment for racketeering and conspiracy.

"What he did was basically set up wiretaps and listened in on people's communications that they believed were private without them knowing," said George Cardona, the U.S. attorney prosecuting the case.

According to prosecutors, Pellicano's gift for getting dirt was primarily a highly sophisticated illegal eavesdropping scheme. Pellicano allegedly paid two phone company employees thousands of dollars to help him listen in on Hollywood's secrets.

With the reams of information Pellicano allegedly got from the wiretaps, he seemed able to solve clients' problems with ex-wives, business rivals and even the law. With his reputation on the rise, it seemed that everyone in show business with a crisis came calling.

When Michael Jackson was accused of molesting a 13-year-old boy in 1993, it was Pellicano who produced a tape he said proved the boy's family was trying to extort money from the pop star. Eventually, the family agreed to settle, and no criminal charges were brought against Jackson.

In 1991, when a British tabloid paid a woman \$30,000 for her story alleging an affair with Kevin Costner, his lawyer hired Pellicano and the story was killed before it appeared in the United States.

During the messy public divorce of Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, Pellicano was on the case for Cruise. But unbeknown to Pellicano, DiSabatino was hired by Kidman.

"So I put her on scramblers immediately," DiSabatino said. "So that, uh, if there was anybody who was eavesdropping, it wasn't gonna happen."

DiSabatino said that some of the ugly headlines that surfaced around that time weren't an accident.

"What became very obvious was that he had a contact in one of the tabloids," he said.

Actually, Pellicano had several tabloid reporters on the payroll.

Paul Barresi, the first man ever to appear on the cover of Hustler magazine, worked as an investigator for Eddie Murphy's lawyer when the star was arrested

for picking up a transsexual prostitute. (No charges were ever brought against Murphy.) Barresi also regularly freelanced for Pellicano.

"Whenever there was a damaging story involving a celebrity client that involved sex, then I was involved," Barresi said.

Barresi said that Pellicano hired him to "get dirt on" Sylvester Stallone. In addition, the the actor's phone was allegedly bugged by Pellicano when Stallone was in the midst of a bitter lawsuit over stock losses at Planet Hollywood.

"He may very well have wanted the dirt to use against Stallone. Maybe Stallone crossed him. I don't know. But I never asked questions," Barresi said.

And Pellicano wasn't just getting the dirt and dishing it. There were also times when he allegedly got physical. When hired by billionaire financier Leonard Green to help with his divorce from his wife of five years, Jude Green, she said he delivered his "beware" message in person.

"I pulled up at the dog groomer and this man blocked my car, I couldn't get out," said Green. "And then he came up to the window and thrust his face. I came out, and I asked him to move his car and he sort of like shoved me. No matter where I went that day, he was in my face blocking my car and constantly."

The experience was more than a little unnerving. "I just remember my heart beating out of my chest and really being terrified," she said.

Later, the FBI told Green that Pellicano had been monitoring her home telephone calls. And Green said there was more -- telephone threats, damage to her property's gate and more than once, she said, her car's brakes were tampered with.

"Pellicano had a reputation in Hollywood as a bully for hire," DiSabatino. "So people would hire him and they would like when he'd talk to people and threaten them."

Eventually, Pellicano got so big that even the future governor put him to work. The Schwarzenegger campaign, reeling from allegations of sexual harassment, asked Pellicano to investigate the actor's entire past to find every kind of claim an opponent might throw at him.

Barresi got the call. "Pellicano said to me, 'I want you to find out everything you can about Schwarzenegger. Get all the dirt you can,'" he said.

Pellicano bragged about the Schwarzenegger job, said DiSabatino.

"And I asked him, 'What was the outcome?' And he laughed. He said, 'The outcome is he shouldn't run for anything,'" said DiSabatino.

Pellicano, of course, got it wrong about the future governor. But perhaps a bigger mistake was that he began to believe his own hype.

In 2002, Pellicano allegedly threatened a Los Angeles Times reporter. The FBI raided Pellicano's office and found explosives, a detonator and hand grenades.

In 2004, Pellicano was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison for illegal possession of dangerous weapons. He was set to be released earlier this month -- until the wiretapping charges were handed down Feb. 6, after a three-year federal investigation.

Pellicano has pleaded not guilty to the charges, but he remains in custody.

Meanwhile, some big names in Hollywood are holding their breath. It seems the style that made this Tinseltown gumshoe so sought after just may be his undoing.

"He felt that he was untouchable," said Barresi. "And he also probably felt protected."



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