

DEALER WASN'T TOUGH ENOUGH \ POLICE CALL HOSPITAL KILLING A DRUG FIGHT

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Richard (Maserati Rick) Carter fancied himself one of the **tough** guys of Detroit's drug underworld. But he was executed by somebody **tougher** , law enforcement officials said Tuesday.

Carter, 29, was in a struggle for control of the lucrative drug trade on the city's east side when he was shot in the head Monday while lying in a bed at Mt. Carmel Mercy Hospital, the officials said.

"Rick tried to take out a guy who was badder then he was. It's as simple as that," said a narcotics officer who had documented Carter's rise to power.

Vendettas between drug **dealers** almost have become routine in Detroit, but even veteran investigators were startled that Carter was executed in a hospital. No one could recall a previous case in which a drug figure was slain in a hospital.

One official said Carter had **enough** enemies to "fill Tiger Stadium" but homicide investigators tied the slaying to a failed execution they said Carter recently ordered.

"Rick wanted to control the east side, so he ordered a hit on his major competitor. And they hit the guy just like Rick wanted. But there was only one problem -- he didn't die," said a law enforcement official who spoke on condition that he not be named.

"Everybody knew it was only a matter of time before he tried to put Rick away," the official said.

William Coonce, special agent in charge of the Detroit office of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, said that in the drug trade, "that is a common trait, somebody trying to exterminate his competitors when they're operating at the street and wholesale level."

Carter apparently was expecting trouble. While searching his hospital room after the killing, police found a loaded 9mm semiautomatic handgun in the nightstand next to his bed.

Homicide investigators believe Carter's death came on the second attempt on his life since the failed execution Carter had ordered on an east side **dealer** known as "Big Ed."

The first attempt, which put Carter in the hospital, came at 5 p.m. Saturday when a 29-year-old reputed drug hit man got into a shootout with Carter outside a car wash at W. Seven Mile Road and Mansfield in northwest Detroit, police said.

Carter was wounded in the stomach. The other man, slightly wounded in an arm, was treated and released from Sinai Hospital, police said.

On Monday, the first day Carter had accepted visitors since he was admitted to Mt. Carmel, investigators believe, two men -- one of them the 29-year-old from the earlier shooting -- spent at least 90 minutes watching Room 307, which Carter occupied alone. Then, after hospital personnel left the area, investigators believe, one or both men walked into the room, shot Carter once in the head and fled.

Carter was pronounced dead at 6:01 p.m. Although no one was in custody Tuesday, police said their prime suspect is the 29-year-old man; the accomplice also was being sought.

Just hours after his death, Carter's name surfaced as "the pivotal witness" for the defense in a drug case in Detroit Recorder's Court.

"Talk about your bad timing," said Patricia Streeter, attorney for Harold Freeman, who contended that because of a feud between the two men, Carter planted heroin and a gun in a car Freeman was driving when Detroit police arrested him in 1986.

Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Richard Cunningham said Freeman and Carter were partners in the drug business and the heroin was left in the car as an arranged "drop." But Cunningham said he did not know if Carter's killing was related to his impending role as a witness in Freeman's trial.

Carter was convicted of receiving stolen property in 1977 but first came to the attention of Detroit police narcotics investigators and federal drug agents in 1982. They learned he was an associate of teenage drug kingpin Richard (White Boy Rick) Wershe Jr. and Reginald (Rockin' Reggie) Brown, a convicted murderer who is the former leader of Best Friends, a murder-for-hire ring.

Carter "began making drug runs -- to Florida for cocaine and to Los Angeles for heroin -- and he kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger," said one federal drug agent.

Carter was nicknamed "Maserati" not because he owned one of the sleek Italian sports cars -- the only car registered in his name is a 1988 GMC station wagon, according to Michigan Secretary of State records -- but because he lived in flashy fashion, officials said.

His driver's license, which had been suspended or revoked 14 times since 1981, according to state records, listed his home as a bungalow on Birwood in northwest Detroit. But Carter lived at two other locations during the last four years, investigators said.

One was a fortified flat near Alter Road and E. Jefferson and the other was a condominium in a posh riverfront development, investigators said.

Carter, who routinely used more than 10 aliases -- his favorites being "Richard Crosby" and "Keith Patton" -- was fond of making drug deals from a portable telephone he carried inside a briefcase, officials said.

"He was a kilo (2.2 lbs.) man, although he usually could get you any amount you wanted," said one law enforcement official.

Carter had business interests in several east side car washes and it was from them that investigators said he distributed bulk cocaine and heroin.

"It didn't take us long to figure that one out. I mean, when all you've got going in for car washes are flashy Bimmers (BMW's) or Benzes, you don't have to be a brain surgeon to figure out what the hell's going on," said a narcotics officer who had investigated Carter.

At the time of his death, Carter, who was convicted of receiving stolen property in 1983, had charges of possession of drugs, carrying a concealed weapon and two counts of assault with intent to commit murder pending against him, according to police records.

But Carter talked a better game than he played, according to one former associate.

"To listen to him, he had more money than God, he killed 50 million people and sold all the dope in the world," said the former associate, who spoke on condition that he not be named.

"I **wasn't** surprised it happened. What surprised me is that it didn't happen sooner," he said.

But somebody apparently thought **enough** of Carter to send flowers to his hospital room.

Shortly before he was shot, Carter received two dozen red roses and a white orchid, according to Mt. Carmel employees. Afterward, a dozen white carnations arrived in a black vase, the employees said. They could not determine who sent the flowers.

CUTLINE:

Carter

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