

Larger-than-life slices of Pizza 3

ANY TIME A CASE has 150 suspects, it's already unusual, but unprecedented and truly bizarre events took place last week in two trials stemming from the same international heroin-trafficking probe.

In fact, the feds might have been better off conducting the trials in a hospital. In fact, in one of them, they did.

In one trial, after one defendant passed out, another defendant slashed his wrist when a jury found him guilty; in the other, two jurors announced in open court that they disagreed with their closed-door verdict.

Both racketeering trials grew out of the arrests of more than 150 suspects here and in Italy in 1988 — the so-called Pizza Connection III case.

The wrist-slashing occurred Friday when an obviously upset defendant, Antonio Cassella, was pronounced guilty of aiding and abetting a heroin ring allegedly run by the Sicilian faction of New York's Gambino crime family.

Cassella pulled out a razor just after the jury decided he had helped the ring buy half a kilogram of heroin at the Gramercy Park Hotel in 1987.

"Have you ever seen a man scared for his life?" Cassella asked the jurors as he stood up. He then produced the razor and ran it across his left wrist as jurors reacted in horror and blood squirted onto the defense table.

"It looked like something out of 'L.A. Law,'" said Cassella's attorney, James Druker. "Only it was real blood and real life."

Deputy U.S. marshals in court for the verdict quickly disarmed Cassella, put pressure on his wound, and rushed him to Beekman-Downtown Hospital, where he was treated and then released to the Metropolitan Correctional Center.

Until Cassella slashed his wrist, Druker thought he had a good chance of convincing Judge Mary Johnson Lowe to let his client remain free on bail.

Earlier in the three-week trial, Cassella's co-defendant, Joseph Cook, a retired cop charged with providing security for the heroin buy, passed out in court when his blood pressure dropped dangerously.

While Cook was hospitalized, he decided to avoid additional stress and plead guilty. To take the plea, Judge Lowe took her court to an Edison, N.J., hospital, but only after Cook's lawyer, Jerry Tritz, was released from another hospital following a bout with kidney stones.

In the other trial, four defendants arrested with Cook and Cassella in 1988 were acquitted of heroin trafficking. But two co-defendants, Salvatore D'Amico and Salvatore Lobuglio, were pronounced guilty.

As the acquitted defendants and relatives celebrated, the two Salvatores got new hope when, during a routine poll of the jury, one juror told Judge Peter Leisure he disagreed with the verdict, and a second said, "No, not guilty."

Lobuglio's lawyer, Jacob Evseroff, demanded a mistrial, but Leisure sent the jury back to re-deliberate the fate of Lobuglio and D'Amico.

TWO HOURS LATER, with U.S. Attorney Otto Obermaier looking on, the jury returned. With all doubters apparently in accord, the jury convicted the two Salvatores, who were promptly remanded.

"Later," said Evseroff, "I talked to Otto, and we agreed we'd never seen or heard of a case where two jurors said they didn't agree with the verdict. I think we've got good grounds for appeal."

Michael Franzese and Assistant District Attorney Ray Jermyn were on the same side in federal court last week, but things are different this week in the

GANG LAND JERRY CAPECI



continuing saga of the Colombo capo turned prosecution witness.

Franzese and Jermyn, chief of the Suffolk County Rackets Bureau, each testified against Ornge Tutt, a janitor ultimately convicted of obstructing justice by leaking information to Franzese about a 1984 federal grand jury probe of Franzese.

Jermyn was part of a joint state-federal task force that successfully prosecuted him for the theft of millions of dollars in state and federal taxes from the sale of bootleg gasoline.

Last week, Franzese, looking tan and fit, like the movie executive he is, shook hands and kidded that he was trying to cast Danny DeVito as Jermyn in the biographical movie he's making to help pay the \$15 million he owes in fines and restitution.

Franzese, whom Jermyn is prosecuting for criminal contempt for refusing to testify before a state grand jury, asked Jermyn to adjourn his case, set for Friday.

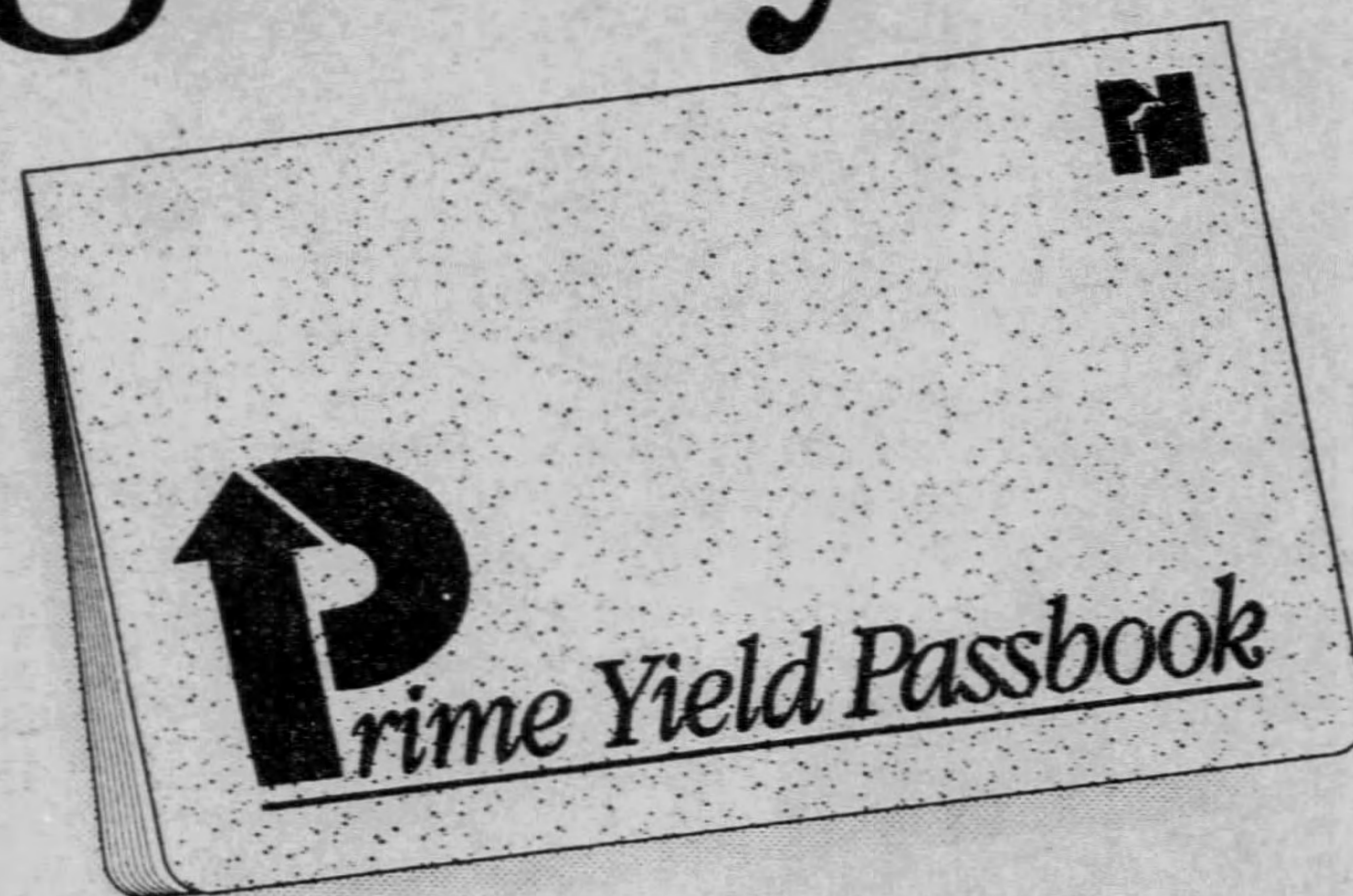
"I'm having trouble getting a lawyer," said Franzese.

"Sorry, Michael," said Jermyn.

"Come on, Ray, I was looking to take a vacation," said Franzese.

"See you in court, Michael," said Jermyn.

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