

## **A guy from Staten Island brought drug lords to their knees**

By **Michael Kaplan**

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Robert Mazur (right) is seen here working with an undercover pilot.

In the 1980s, Staten Island native Robert Mazur was hired to launder over \$100 million for some of the world's largest drug-trafficking syndicates. Underworld kingpins, who knew him as Bob Musella, considered him family. But there was one thing they did not know: The money-mover was an undercover agent for the US government.

"I got my high from obtaining information that nobody else could get," Mazur, now in his 60s, tells *The Post*.

His exploits — which resulted in more than 100 indictments, in excess of 3,000 pounds of cocaine confiscated, and seizures and penalties that exceeded \$500 million — form

the basis of “[The Infiltrator](#),” starring Bryan Cranston as Mazur and opening in movie theaters on Wednesday.

A veteran investigator for the US Customs Service, Mazur — along with a female agent posing as his hot fiancée — penetrated the top levels of South American drug cartels, and the bankers who helped them to launder profits. Mazur believed it made more sense to follow the money than to follow the drugs. He accomplished this by posing as a financial genius with a larcenous soul.

It’s a long way to go for a blue-collar kid from Port Richmond. Mazur majored in business at SI’s Wagner College, staying close to his high school sweetheart Evelyn, whom he would later marry. He was introduced to the world of undercover work at the IRS: “The money side seemed to be the soft spot . . . for working our way into criminal organizations.”

Later, Mazur would use this way of thinking for US Customs. But first, he went through a sort of finishing school for undercover agents, learning that “it’s not good to put on an act; [people under investigation] see right through it. I lied as little as possible.” Mazur spent 18 months developing his character and putting together a portfolio of businesses that he could show himself to be a part of. He proved convincing enough to fool a lieutenant of Gerardo Moncada, right-hand man to Pablo Escobar. The two met in San José, Costa Rica, after an informant helped bring Mazur in at a low level and he worked his way up the chain of command.

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As Mazur explains, the lieutenant “made it clear that we would be getting \$20 million a month to launder. But it came with a consequence: possible death. He said that if things [got] messed up, my family and I would be killed.”

Years later, from prison, Escobar would have Moncada rubbed out. (Mazur never met Escobar, because a visit to Colombia was deemed too dangerous.)

As depicted in the film, Mazur showed up to meetings carrying a leather briefcase. Criminals knew it as the vessel for their illicit banking records; Mazur valued the bag because of its hidden recording device. The briefcase could have gotten him killed during a meeting with a cartel senior advisor, when the recorder sprang loose and “a nest of wires were sitting on top of the records.”

But he fast-fingered it, and got deeper into an organized-crime operation than anyone before him. Mazur went where the money led. A trip to Paris sealed the deal on laundering a \$100 million nest egg for elite traffickers. Meeting with corrupt bigwigs at

global outposts of BCCI Bank, he obtained evidence that helped shutter the operation. Detroit, with its proximity to soft borders in Montreal, was “a hot bed for the Medellín cartel.”

Through it all, he remained in character. “Musella” had a luxe home in Key Biscayne, Fla., as well as a private jet, Rolex watch and Mercedes-Benz car. His spoils were all goods that had been seized by the government: “bad guys paying for the demise of bad guys,” Mazur says.



Two years in, his bosses were ready to wrap it up, so Mazur and his “fiancée” threw an October 1988 wedding. Little did half the guests — crooked bankers and cartel members — know that the other half, posing as pals and relatives of the “couple,” were undercover agents.

At a prenuptial bash near Tampa, Fla., people due to be arrested were hustled into Town Cars under the auspices of an impending bachelor party. Undercover agents, portraying guests, “took them to a high-rise downtown and then, on different floors, executed the arrests,” says Mazur.

Two-and-a-half years of successful trials followed. Mazur recently sold his private investigation firm in Florida and is planning his next move; he remains married to Evelyn. Things have calmed down since the “wedding” — after which there was a \$500,000 price on his head, which necessitated Mazur assuming a third identity for a while — but, even now, he still refrains from posing for photos.