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Murderous boast at issue in pending Phila. mob trial

George Anastasia Inquirer Staff Writer

Mobster George Borgesi once boasted that he was a "professional" killer who had been involved in 11 murders, according to a government memo filed in the **pending** racketeering case against Borgesi and eight others.

But whether a jury hears that allegation will depend on U.S. District Judge Eduardo Robreno, who spent more than four hours Friday considering a series of motions and defense objections to potential evidence in the **pending** case.

Borgesi's lawyer, Paul J. Hetznecker, vehemently opposed the prosecution's attempt to enter evidence about the **murderous boast** and about several other crimes tied to Borgesi by cooperating government witness Louis "Bent Finger Lou" Monacello.

Hetznecker cited a government memo, which has not yet been made public, that alludes to seven uncharged crimes tied to Borgesi that the prosecution wants Monacello to testify about.

None of the crimes is linked to the racketeering conspiracy case before Robreno. Allowing the jury to hear about them, Hetznecker said, would "undermine my client's right to a fair **trial**." Hetznecker also said the charges were unfounded and had no basis in fact.

Borgesi, his uncle, reputed **mob** boss Joseph "Uncle Joe" Ligambi, and seven others are scheduled to be tried on racketeering conspiracy charges in October. The case revolves around allegations of gambling, loan-sharking, extortion, and the operation of illegal video poker machines.

Friday's hearing focused on objections defense attorneys have raised to the prosecution's plan to introduce evidence about the violent history of the Philadelphia **mob**. The defense contends that it is irrelevant and prejudicial.

Robreno said he expected to rule on the motions within seven to 10 days.

In addition to Monacello's allegations, lawyers argued **at** length about the admissibility of conversations from two secretly recorded **mob** meetings picked up on a body wire worn by a cooperating government witness.

The meetings, **at** restaurants in North Jersey, included discussions about murders, extortions, and **mob** initiation ceremonies.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Frank Labor described one of those meetings, **at** La Griglia, a restaurant in Kenilworth, N.J., as "tantamount to a meeting of the board of directors of organized crime."

Ligambi, 73, codefendants Joseph "Scoops" Licata, 71, Anthony Staino, 54, and Louis "Big Lou" Fazzini, 45, attended that session along with several reputed leaders of New York's Gambino crime family.

Though the restaurant meeting tapes have been discussed in several previous court documents, references to Monacello's allegations had not been made public before Friday's hearing.

Monacello, 43, was indicted along with Borgesi, Ligambi, and the others in May 2011. He began cooperating with the government a few weeks after he was jailed, alleging he did so because he believed Ligambi was going to have him killed.

Monacello has been described as a close associate of Borgesi's who ran the mobster's bookmaking and loan-sharking businesses after Borgesi was jailed on racketeering charges in 2000.

Borgesi was sentenced to 14 years in prison. He was less than a year away from release when he was indicted in the current case.

According to arguments in court Friday, Monacello has alleged that he was riding in a car with Borgesi sometime in the late 1990s when Borgesi bragged about his involvement in a number of murders, using hand signals to indicate he had been responsible for 11 killings.

Monacello has also alleged that he carried out assaults on Borgesi's orders and that Borgesi assigned him and others to attempt to intimidate witnesses in the 2001 case. He also said Borgesi gave him a revolver, a machine gun, and ammunition.

Monacello's credibility is expected to be vigorously attacked during the **trial**.

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Caption: George Borgesi in 2000. He faces racketeering charges with **mob** boss Joseph Ligambi, his uncle.

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