John R. Stompanato, Jr. Biography

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Biography

Johnny Stompanato, with links to organized crime, became more famous for the way he died than the way he lived. He was stabbed to death by the 14-year-old daughter of screen legend Lana Turner in Beverly Hills, California. Born in Illinois in 1925, Stompanato served in the Marines during World War II. A well-built, darkly handsome man, he became a bodyguard for known underworld figure, Mickey Cohen, in Los Angeles. He married and divorced three times and had one son. In 1957, Stompanato began an affair with Lana Turner.

Turner (1920-1995) was one of the world's most popular stars, a beautiful, sultry blonde with personal troubles. In 1953, she had divorced her fourth husband, former Tarzan star Lex Barker. Cheryl, Turner's daughter by her second husband, Stephen Crane, claimed that Barker had been molesting her.

The affair between Stompanato and Turner was stormy. He was jealous and physically abusive. In a time when Hollywood guarded its stars' reputations, Turner was afraid to be seen with him in public because of his underworld connections. Stompanato was especially angry because Turner refused to let him escort her to that year's Academy Awards. On the night of April 4, 1958, Stompanato and Turner quarreled violently. When Cheryl heard him threaten her mother, she took a kitchen carving knife, entered the bedroom, and stabbed him to death. Amid speculation that it was actually Turner who held the knife, Cheryl Crane was convicted of justifiable homicide. Stompanato was buried with military honors in Woodstock, Illinois.