

Uncle Sam's double cross

By Brenda Power

JUST ABOUT everybody can remember where they were when they were told President Kennedy had been shot. But very few can claim to recall where they were when they were told that their Uncle Sam had had President Kennedy shot. "I was in the sitting room of my parents' home when my father told me," says Sam Giancana, nephew and godson of the notorious Mafia don of the same name, "and it was quite a shock to hear it."

Sam, who was in Dublin with his wife Bettina this weekend to promote "Double Cross" — the explosive Mafia exposé he wrote with his father Chuck — says he

idolised President Kennedy.

But his uncle Sam Giancana was rather less of a hero. "All the stuff you see in the Godfather films about Italian mafia families all sitting down around the table eating spaghetti holognese is nonsense — there was nothing cosy or glamorous about the Mafia. It was violent, vicious and destructive.

"I remember my Uncle Sam as a very intimidating man: when I'd meet him he'd grab my hand and squeeze it as hard as he could to make me cry, but I wouldn't cry. Once my mother watched him do it to me when I was nine years old and she was so frightened of him, she wouldn't say a word."

But Uncle Sam was not testing Sam Junior's toughness to see if he'd make a future don: "He wasn't looking for an heir because the Mafia wasn't family oriented, the way you see in the movies . . . it was strictly business."

Sam's father Chuck had, initially, worked with his brother but then decided to break all links with the Mob, so he changed the family name and they moved away.

"The name Sam Giancana was an albatross around my neck — as soon as I'd say who I was the room would fall silent."

Sam now runs "a communications firm in the health care industry" — which sounds like

Mafia-speak for the job of reminding businessmen of the beneficial effects of promptly paying their protection money but his family, he says, has had no contact with organised crime for 30 years.

"It was like leaving your job and moving out of town — that's the end of it, and I don't fear any retributions from the Mafia . . . it's all a long time ago."

He wrote the book, he says, in order to record the part his uncle played in changing world history. "If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have been in Vietnam; thousands of lives were lost because President Kennedy was assassinated, and all for what . . . for greed."