
Interview: Terry Reed and John Cummings

Were Bush and North behind the murder of Barry Seal?

On May 10, Terry Reed and John Cummings, the authors of Compromised: Clinton, Bush and the CIA (SPI, New York, 1994), were interviewed by EIR's Counterintelligence Director Jeffrey Steinberg. The book recounts Reed's experiences inside the Reagan-Bush administration's secret war in Central America, and provides the most in-depth account to date of the Nicaraguan Contra secret training and arms supply operation in Arkansas and Mexico. Reed, a retired Air Force intelligence non-commissioned officer, went into the machine tool business following his discharge from the service. While working in this business in Oklahoma, he was drawn into the shadow world of covert domestic U.S. intelligence operations by Oliver North.

As a trained pilot, an experienced Vietnam War intelligence operator, and a talented manufacturing executive, Reed was an ideal candidate for recruitment into the secret side of the Reagan administration's war against the "Evil Empire."

John Cummings is a well-known author and investigator, who followed a long career with Newsday with several books on organized crime and the intelligence community. In addition to telling Reed's story, Cummings did considerable independent investigative work on the Mena, Arkansas and Mexico secret projects, which forms an important part of the book.

Compromised has been on the Los Angeles Times's best-seller list since late April. It was reviewed in EIR in our April 29 issue, p. 58.

EIR: I want to begin by reading a brief quote from the author's note at the beginning of your book: "Despite what I know about Bill Clinton's involvement with the CIA, I still voted for him. I, like many Americans, voted for change. The country had to get rid of George Bush and the outdated, misguided attitudes demonstrated by his wing of the Republican Party." Yours may have very well been the hardest-earned vote that Bill Clinton received in 1992. Give us a brief idea of how you came to be involved in the Arkansas project. I believe the story begins in Oklahoma City with Oliver North.

Reed: First, I'd like to comment on the quote from me. I feel the most patriotic thing I've ever done in my life was voting for Bill Clinton. And by that I mean, I held my nose

and voted for him. I wanted to change the value system in this country, especially the whole philosophy of industry. I'm not saying that Bill Clinton even reflects my philosophy, but it got George Bush out; so, I was voting George Bush out, and feeling that Bill Clinton was the lesser of two evils, and somebody of my generation that could, hopefully, identify problems that needed to be tackled, especially economic problems.

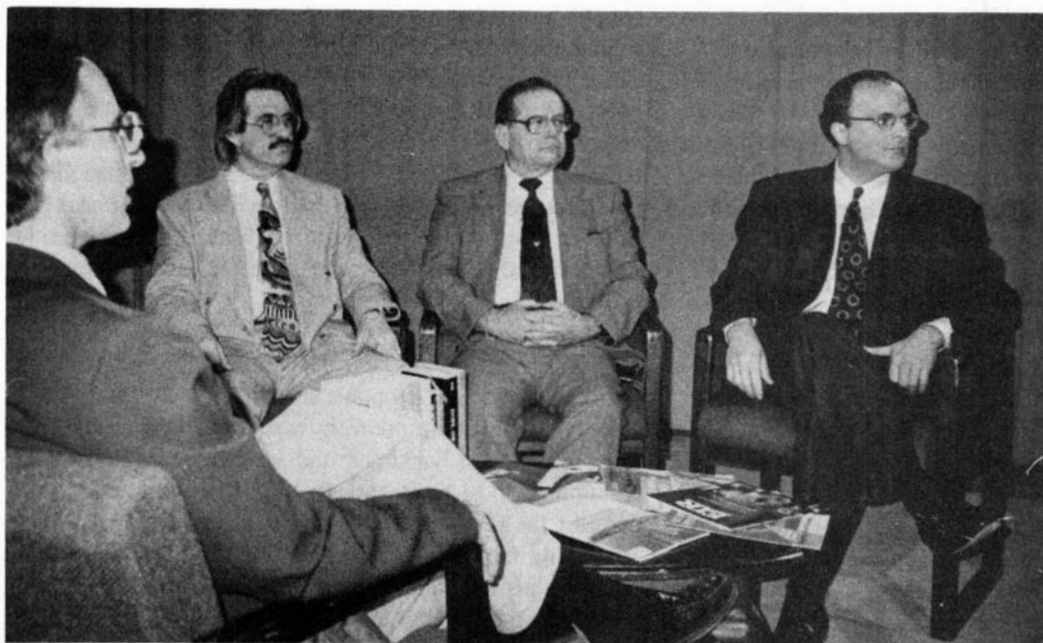
As for your question about what got me involved in Arkansas: I felt that I was getting a unique opportunity to get involved in a program that was a sub-element in the overall scheme of destroying communism in eight years or less, and destroying the U.S.S.R. I'm a Cold War veteran, a true baby-boomer, born in 1948, raised under the continuous threat of a nuclear holocaust; and I didn't want my children to be raised like that. That's what got me started in all this.

EIR: And it was an approach by Oliver North, a.k.a. John Cathey, in Oklahoma City in the early 1980s that drew you into the Mena project. Could you give a little background on that?

Reed: First, I'd like to briefly point out that I was in Southeast Asia with a unit called Task Force Alpha, in Thailand, which was a top-secret project—in fact it was a pet project—of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. It was handed down to Melvin G. Laird.

I discovered, once I got there, that this unit was integral to the illegal war in Laos (by illegal, I mean the one the American public didn't know about—the undeclared war), and oversaw the activities of Air America. Through that I met a lot of the people who would later surface in the Iran-Contra scandal. Bill Cooper is the pilot who was flying the C-123 that was shot down in Nicaragua on Oct. 5, 1986; he was the man who was a classified courier, whom I'd met in the performance of my duties in Southeast Asia.

Back in the States, after eight years of Air Force Intelligence service, I was discharged honorably; I selected a field that appealed to one of my personal passions: the reindustrialization of American's factories—the machine tool business. I found out that that field is laden with KGB agents, Japanese agents, stealing American defense and technology secrets. I was put into play with a bevy of FBI and subsequently CIA people, and in the course of that, I met CIA Special Agent



Jeffrey Steinberg (back to camera) interviewing John Cummings, Robert Meloni, and Terry Reed for The LaRouche Connection cable TV show on May 10.

John Cathey, who, years later I would learn, was actually Oliver North, operating out of the National Security Council [NSC]. It was through North that this opportunity developed to get involved in the Nicaraguan Contra effort, which was a small pimple of the complexion of the “Reagan Doctrine.”

EIR: And it was through these initial encounters with Cathey/North that you eventually were introduced to a man named Barry Seal, at the point that your business took you from Oklahoma to Arkansas?

Reed: Right. The very first time I heard the name Barry Seal spoken, it came from Oliver North’s lips.

EIR: There’s a great deal of controversy about both the life and death of Barry Seal. He was one of the people who became prominently associated with the secret Contra project in Mena, Arkansas. Can you tell us a bit about Barry Seal, the circumstances of his involvement in Mena, who he was working for, and also, what in your judgment were the circumstances and cause of his death?

Cummings: Barry Seal was very controversial. He was a man about whom there was much misinformation and half-truths. There was a movie made about his life, which was interesting, and, to a good degree, true, as far as it went. What was interesting to me, in all the things that have been said and have been written about Barry Seal, never once did the state of Arkansas come up in all of this, as far as Seal was concerned.

It’s clear to me now that he went to great pains to not talk about Arkansas, for a variety of reasons.

I had been very much involved in tracking this whole scene, since the Bay of Pigs. I had written a lot of stories

about some of the wild and improbable things I had witnessed in Florida. As a result of that, at one point, I was contacted by someone from the Louisiana State Police—he was a narcotics investigator, and I don’t know if he would want his name mentioned; he’s now working for the federal government. I had heard about Barry Seal being murdered, but I didn’t know much about him. He told me, “You write a lot about people who work for the Agency and who did a lot of things in the name of the Agency. We had a person here in Louisiana that we believe was operating as intelligence, because every time we attempted to go after him as a drug trafficker—which we believed he was—a sort of a wall would come down. Or they would contact federal agencies for information and they would claim they didn’t have it, when they knew it was there.” And he said, “There’s something about this guy that begs being looked into.”

Of course, I had heard about Seal’s murder—his assassination—supposedly by the Medellín Cartel. And he said to me, “What we really couldn’t understand is that not only couldn’t we get to him in Louisiana, but he seemed to be operating with impunity up in Arkansas.” And I asked, “Where in Arkansas?” and he told me, a little town named Mena. He said, “There’s all kind of speculation about this.” So, it was when I got to Mena that I began to turn some dirt over there, that I first heard the name of Terry Reed. Because if Seal was what they suspected, what I was beginning to perceive him to be—mainly an intelligence operative; he was not a drug trafficker per se, but he was simply working in raw intelligence—whatever else he may have been doing was certainly a cover.

I was looking for a connection between Barry Seal and Oliver North. Then I heard about Terry. Now Terry, at that

point in the early summer of 1990, was under indictment in Wichita, Kansas, in a really trumped up federal charge. I contacted his lawyer and asked her to send me some information—court papers, documents—I could see. She knew who I was, because of an article I had written about Barry Seal in *Penthouse*. So, she sent me the court records—and there it was: She was talking about Terry, about Barry Seal, about Oliver North, and about Mena; and then I knew I had found my Rosetta Stone.

That's how I came to meet Terry, and I also found that Terry was in Arkansas at that time; he was in Mena. Through other sources, I was able to find out that all the planes he was flying up there, which Seal had given him, were stolen aircraft. You know, Terry never knew they were stolen. And it became very enlightening to me.

Then I contacted Terry, who I would say at the time was not particularly anxious to talk to me, or anybody in my vocation. I met Terry, of all places, in Mena on top of a mountain. And we didn't talk for very long. . . . Terry and I opened the dialogue, but it was a very limited one at that point. He was subsequently acquitted by a judge, and that was, to me, the clincher. When the judge threw this whole case to the winds—acquitted him, he didn't dismiss the charges, he *acquitted* him—because of what the government had done. The judge later told me that he thought this whole case, to use his words, "had a high odor to it."

EIR: Terry, I want to ask you about a provocative reference in the book to a conversation that you had with Barry Seal in a private aircraft flying back from Panama in 1985, just before he was murdered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He made some extraordinary allegations about Vice President Bush and his family. Tell us about that.

Reed: That was aboard a Lear 25, 13SN, coming back from Ilopango Air Base in El Salvador. First, you had to know Seal and his sense of humor, which was also his sense of survival: In intelligence, it's a very dirty business; it's not what 007 movies are about, it's about compromising people; it's about blackmailing people; it's about controlling and manipulating people. What you're trained in is blackmail. They don't discuss it as such—Seal affectionately referred to that whole area of espionage as "developing neutralizing material"; what he meant by that was having information on people that would be embarrassing, or information that he could leverage for his own security and survival.

In the meeting that you brought up, Seal was very elated. This was late 1985, about two months before his assassination. But he seemed to be very elated that he had the ultimate neutralizing material. I didn't know what he was referring to, but it was obvious that he had just had a meeting with his handler, an agent named Leroy Trachter, and he had had a private discussion about what he was going to do with the material. . . .

Barry professed to have amassed a lot of dirt on a lot of

people throughout the course of my involvement with him. In that particular meeting, he was referring to a DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] sting operation in which, allegedly, two of the vice president's sons had been ensnared in a videotaped trap—it caught them red-handed in the cocaine business. And he had put together . . . a kit that had videotape and the necessary information that would make him immune from federal prosecution. With this evidence, he was above the law; he was outside the law. He was untouchable.

EIR: Yet, two months later, he was dead. Do you have any personal assessment about his death?

Reed: Yes, I have a premise, based on evidence and feelings. But if you backtrack and look at Seal's life—John Cummings and I have, though court discovery, obtained a copy of the report that was sent to Lawrence Walsh. The Walsh file memo talks about the fact that Barry Seal was taken by his handlers to the Old Executive Building, and was paraded in front of the National Security Council. CIA, DEA, NSC were present. In that meeting, he talked about the Sandinistas and his direct knowledge that the Sandinistas were trafficking in cocaine. Keep in mind that, at the time that revelation hit upon these ears in the NSC, \$100 million was hung up in Contra funding, and you had the Boland Amendment in effect (probably Boland II at that time). So here was Seal giving them information that the DEA wanted to keep secret and further develop, to penetrate the Medellín Cartel deeper; and, of course, Seal was already orbiting with [Jorge] Ochoa and [Pablo] Escobar, so you can't get much deeper than that.

But somebody in the NSC and the Reagan White House saw this information as tantalizing. It's what they needed to convince the public that the Sandinistas were really bad people; that they needed this money freed up to further sustain the Contra effort against the Sandinista soldiers. The bottom line is that the information was leaked. There's good evidence that that information was leaked by Oliver North to the media, so that the media could seize upon it and the President could get his way. In so doing, they signed Seal's death warrant.

Now, it's my personal theory and premise that the man who allowed the leak to occur was George Bush. I don't think Oliver North would have the latitude to take that information and call the newspaper. In so doing, the man that killed Barry Seal, I allege, is George Bush.

Here, Seal has dirt on the Bush family. He has material that could bring down the entire Bush-Reagan government, and I just find it too convenient that they decided to waste this agent's life by going forward on a \$100 million congressional funding effort when, in fact, they're going to accomplish their stated goal. They're going to have a war on drugs. They're going to know where the leaders sit, eat, drink, sleep, and so on.

EIR: You were introduced to Oliver North under his alias, John Cathey. There were a number of other players in the Mena, and later in the Mexico project to whom you were introduced by their aliases: I believe one was Max Gomez, another was Pat Weber, and a third was Robert Johnson. You've subsequently learned who these people really were. Can you tell us about that?

Reed: Let's start with Max Gomez: I was sent to Vera Cruz, Mexico to have a meeting in the fall of 1985. I was given the name of Max Gomez, and I met a Hispanic male that, it turns out, was a man named Felix Rodriguez, a Bay of Pigs veteran; a man responsible for the apprehension, or was present representing the CIA, during the apprehension and execution of Che Guevara; a man who, to this day, has photographs of Guevara's hands, having been chopped off and sent back to the United States for identification purposes.

On Pat Weber: In Mexico, once I was firmly implanted down there in December 1986, I came into contact with an agent who was introduced to me as "Pat Weber." He was working with Felix Rodriguez. It was made known to me that he was an Israeli agent. I didn't know what his function was, other than that his country seemed to be deeply involved in the weapons-manufacturing element of our business plan, which was to build a factory somewhere in Mexico that would be building untraceable weapons and components. He seemed to be the facilitator of that side of the story.

He died in an aircraft accident in the state of Michoacán, near the capital of Michoacán—he crashed while inspecting mango plants, I believe is the story. Through the course of the investigation into that, it was discovered that Pat Weber was actually Amiram Nir, an Israeli Mossad-connected person, and, I believe, right out of the Israeli Defense Ministry. . . .

Cummings: I think you should point out, too, that Mr. Nir figures prominently with George Bush. He was the man who, in Jerusalem, briefed George Bush about the Iran initiative. Amiram Nir is a major figure. At the time, he was not a member of the Israeli cabinet, but he was an adviser to the prime minister of Israel on terrorism.

Everyone has been speculating as to why Nir would turn up in Mexico. They thought that he had left Israel and had gone to work in London; and he suddenly appears. And even some of the best books about Israeli intelligence seem to be at a loss as to why; and, I think, Terry provides a very good *reason* as to why, because Nir was very much a part of this Mexican operation *with Gomez and* with the man who, some say, could be the next President of Mexico, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

EIR: Let's go back to 1987: You're down in Mexico. This project is up and running. It's Arkansas take two; now it's in Michoacán. But all of a sudden, you decided you didn't want anything to do with this anymore.

Reed: You're talking about the day I mentally resigned from intelligence gathering, which was July 5, 1987. That was the day that I discovered, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that

certain people around me who were CIA agents were trafficking in cocaine in a very, very large way.

EIR: How did you find that out?

Reed: Well, I walked into my facility, Machinaria Internacional. We had a warehouse in Guadalajara, and there was an L-100, which is a C-130-style aircraft that was there to pick up cargo. I had to go down and unlock the warehouse. I had to inspect some containers to find out which ones contained the equipment that was to be picked up, and I discovered, lo and behold, that one was full of cocaine.

Cummings: We're talking about tons of cocaine, not just a few kilos—

Reed: We're talking about weapons crates—you could live in a Conex container. The homeless of New York would love to have Conex containers.

Cummings: In fact, Terry had a witness to this, and he looked in there and turned to Terry and said, "It's gotta be tons." And Terry turned to him, and said, "Well, so much for the war on drugs." . . .

I won't go into it, but there were a lot of things happening that had made Terry suspicious—

Reed: I want to talk about the hypocrisy. I'm not making a moral decision about the rightness or wrongness of drugs. I can't live with the hypocrisy of sending people to prison in the United States—I mean, as we speak, people are rotting in prison for possession, for trafficking, for small quantities—if people within our government are facilitating that, that's wrong. We just need some national policy that's enforced, one way or the other. That's why I got out of it.

EIR: At the point that you decided to get out, you packed your family up and, after a few months, returned to the United States. That's when the nightmare really began.

Reed: I'm sure that the moment I stood up and took Nancy Reagan's advice and said, "No," I'm sure someone was saying, "We gotta get rid of this guy."

EIR: And you said "No!" personally to Felix Rodriguez/Max Gomez in Mexico?

Reed: That's correct. It was a one-on-one meeting, in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. But, in hindsight, at that point, I was considered—I hate the word—a whistleblower. That's what I'm sure I was considered—a threat, unpatriotic, not to be trusted. And when I crossed the border on Black Monday, Oct. 19, 1987, I discovered that I was a wanted man; that Bill Clinton's chief of security, then-Arkansas State Police Lt. Raymond Young, had already inserted me in government computers as being an armed and dangerous drug runner, operating out of Central and South America—

EIR: The kind of thing that triggers a "shoot first" order among American law enforcement.

Reed: Sure. That's all it takes.