

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE KILLING OF BARRY SEAL

THE WHITE UNMARKED POLICE car carrying Louisiana State Police Lt. Robert Thommasson, head of a special 21 man narcotics unit tasked solely with stopping Barry Seal, rolled slowly out of New Orleans in the hazy twilight.... After another long day Thommasson was going home; his car inched through traffic onto the 24-mile long Causeway across Lake Pontchartrain, which connects New Orleans with its leafy northern suburbs.

Though Thommasson was tired, fatigue has not dulled his vivid recollections of what happened next.... A call crackled over his police radio. "1018. Repeat: 1018. Immediately call headquarters," ordered a grim dispatcher's voice.

A cop who had learned a grudging respect for his elusive quarry, Thommasson heard the news in disbelief...

"What's white-and-brown-and-red and rolling around in Baton Rouge?" asked the dispatcher in the mirthless tone cops use to distance themselves from bloody events. "Barry Seal. They just gutted him."

As he heard the news, in the distance he was still listening to his cruiser's tires rolling over the causeway's grating.

Thump... Thump... Thump...

A \$500,000 Medellin cartel murder contract had hung over Seal's head, upped to a cool \$1 million if he was brought alive to Columbia....

Still, the chilling brutal and clinical efficiency with which the 'renegade' agent had been dispatched was breath taking... especially given that Seal himself, a man with the most impeccable intelligence sources, had not felt threatened. He certainly hadn't availed himself of the Federal Witness Protection program when it was offered to him.

The dispatcher asked, "Hey, bud, where you at?"

Thump...

"Middle of the causeway," Thommasson replied numbly.

"Good," came the curt rejoinder. "Get a bridge ticket on your way back into town, stamped with date and time."

"See, how volatile the whole Seal thing was," says Thommasson today, "is that they wanted me to have proof of exactly where I had been when Seal was killed, to remove any suspicion that *we* had played any role in it. It felt very much like 'where were you when Kennedy was shot?' It was *that* big—at least in Louisiana it was—especially since tensions had been running so high since Barry was convicted."

In retrospect, Thommasson says, the murder was a shock, but no surprise; Seal had seemingly fallen from favor with whoever had been protecting him. He'd been on a well-documented downward spiral for over a year, losing status, possessions and immunity from prosecution he had once taken for granted as a member of a 'protected' class.

Even in defeat, Seal's sense of play, almost of camaraderie, with the law enforcement people charged with the thankless task of tracking his movements, remained intact, said long-time DEA pilot Dave "Chicken" Gorman. "Chicken" had flown B-52's and C130's in Southeast Asia, and then flew out of New Orleans for 17 years. Seal had plied his trade in the same regions.

So he had known Barry for a long time, Gorman told us. He recalled running into him one time at Hurlburt Field in Panama City, "in the company of civilian Israeli's who had left the military and Mossad, supposedly, and were now supervising training of the PDF (Panama Defense Forces.)"

This was not the first time we'd heard of American involvement with Israeli intelligence in the South American drug trade. A former Mossad agent told us that Seal had been running a big operation with their service right up until the time of his death.

Chicken Gorman explained the complexity of his relationship with Seal by means of an anecdote that occurred on one of Barry Seal's last days on Earth...

“Jake Jacobsen (Seal’s supposed DEA ‘handler’) sent me out to confiscate a plane of Barry’s at Ryan Field in Baton Rouge sometime in late ’85. And while I’m poking around looking for it Barry came right over to me.”

“‘Chicken are you looking for my plane?’ Barry asked.

“Yeah, Barry, I got orders to re-possess it, man” I told him.

“Well, its over here,” Barry said. And then he took me to it, and it was like, ‘no hard feelings,’” Chicken stated. “Barry was like that, a good guy, mostly.”

Dark machinations surrounded the months preceding Seal’s assassination. DEA pilot Gorman offered us a glimpse into the players, and the intrigue, swirling around Seal and the Central American operation...

“I was working in Belize out of Amberguy Cay. And we had been there for a month, flying ops around the Caribbean, when someone out at the airport decided to ‘squeeze’ us.... They hit us up for a huge bribe to continue operations.”

“So we made a few calls. We heard back from the CIA station chief in Guatemala, who said, ‘I understand you’re having problems. Speak to them. Tell them you talked to me. Everything will be fine.’”

Gorman continues, “So I walked over to the tower to this guy’s office that had been trying to make us pay. And now this guy is almost weeping with fear, cowering behind his desk, saying, ‘Please don’t kill me! Please don’t kill me! They told me you would kill me if we didn’t leave you alone!’”

“Then in late ’85 I got another call from the same guy who had fixed things for us earlier, the CIA station head in Guatemala. He told me, ‘Barry’s wife just flew in. She landed in a private plane in Honduras, then took off and flew to San Jose in Costa Rica, where at this very moment she’s depositing \$7 million in a bank there.’”

Barry’s wife Debbie has never been to Costa Rica. So, when she heard this, she was understandably curious about this money and drug courier who had been using her name.

She pressed Chicken Gorman on the point. “Who was this person in Guatemala who told you this?”

“Just a ‘leg’” he replied, shrugging. “A field agent, a soldier, nothing more.”

Piecing the story together took time. But even this small anecdote helped, another tiny piece of the puzzle...

From an eyewitness we heard that several weeks before his murder, Seal was frantically phoning associates—screaming at them—to stop two women from boarding a plane to fly to Central America who were on their way to ‘clean out’ his offshore bank accounts.

One of them, Barbara, was a teenage Cuban drug courier with whom Seal had been carrying on an affair; the other, Theresa, was the daughter of his Colombian associate, Stephen Planta.

What had happened? When word got out that Barry Seal’s ‘sanction’ had been removed, it became open season on him and his assets, we were told.

The IRS seizure of all of his property had been a signal that his assets had become fair game.

The feeding frenzy now began...

Was Seal’s downfall the same as John Gotti’s? Arrogance, growing notoriety, a refusal to take a fall—however slight—to protect those higher up on the food chain?

Someone who had known Seal all his life, childhood friend John Prevost, had never seen Barry so full of himself, so arrogant, acting like a character out of one of Seal’s favorite movies, the Al Pacino remake of *Scarface*, he said. Prevost watched Barry change in his last desperate months...

“I was a Dodge dealer, and Barry bought cars from us regularly, always paying cash, always bringing in just under \$10,000. All my managers would stand around and just snicker... you know?”

“Then I remember seeing him just before he died. He pulled up in a Mercedes, and he was on a ‘high’ from the 300K-ransom business, talking loud, boastful. And he had a gun under his seat. It wasn’t the Barry I knew.”

Seal’s assassination had a morality play dimension, Prevost felt. The results of the cocaine epidemic had begun to hit home.

“I had bumped into Barry’s ex-wife (Linda) in a restaurant in Baton Rouge, and she waved and I went over and said to her, “I’ve got two boys who are drug dependent. You tell Barry if he’s dealing drugs, he needs to die in a flaming car wreck.’

Little acts of private desperation tell the tale... While briefly in Witness Protection as he testified in a trial a few months before he died, Seal let a record producer from New York sell him his ‘foolproof’ formula for playing roulette for the price of the gold Rolex Barry was wearing on his wrist... a

sucker's bet, uncharacteristic for someone whose seeming recklessness had always camouflaged a shrewd capacity to calculate the odds.

Seal had been double-crossed, he felt, by the difficulties leading up to sentencing in Baton Rouge.

Why did Seal refuse to enter the federal witness protection program, which would have allowed him to assume a new identity in a secret location with the help of federal officials?

Incredibly, because Barry thought he could *walk*...

His attorney, Lewis Unglesby, had argued that U.S. Judge Frank Polozola should follow the lead of a federal judge in Miami, who had rewarded Seal for his 'work' as an 'informant' by approving a plea agreement on drug charges, letting him go free without serving time. He was already free of all of his Miami legal problems.

One need look no further than this for major scandal.... The biggest drug smuggler in American history, after being caught in multiple jurisdictions, was able, in Miami, to walk.

Convictions on multiple serious felonies resulted in nothing more than probation... and even *it* had now been vacated. He had, in fact, spent only one night in jail, after being convicted of charges for which convicts in every state in the US today are serving life without parole.

What's up with that? Had he *really* just been too valuable an informant? Or, was Barry Seal just too good an "earner" to spend more than a day in jail? The answer is in the non-identity in the drug world hierarchy of the 'pip-squeaks' whom Seal was, ostensibly, sprung from prison to send to jail.

None of them were ever a tiny fraction of the threat to society that Seal himself was. Today the 'drug dealing' Sandinistas are a fading memory.

But the drug business is as pervasive as ever.

Federal Judge Frank Polozola in Baton Rouge refused to follow the script in Seal's Louisiana sentencing. Instead of giving him 'time served' on his two drug felony convictions there, he sentenced Seal to six months in a Baton Rouge halfway house.

"I don't see any reason for coddling him," Polozola said during the sentencing hearing. "In my opinion, people like you ought to be in prison."

This begs, of course, the question of how it can be considered "coddling" to send someone convicted of major class A drug felonies to six months in a halfway house.... Most people in prison today for drug felonies would take that deal in a heartbeat.

But even that was an affront to the arrogant Seal, who, in his defense, has been used to having arrests “fixed” for him ever since he was a teenager caught flying weapons to Castro in Long View, Texas.

The idea of someone as “connected” as Barry Seal ever going to jail is even today preposterous. Speculation has always centered on who had ‘got’ to Judge Polozola... from one ‘deep background’ intelligence source, we heard that Polozola had a deep but hidden connection to Bill Casey.

Be that as it may, Polozola didn’t do to Seal anything more than the IRS already had.... When they seize all of your assets, including children’s toys, if you were Seal—when you look at the suddenly empty house around you—you’ve got an inkling that the good times may be over.

“They *had* Judge Polozola, I mean they’d put the mark of the beast on him,” said drug pilot Clarence Harp, about the federal judge’s inexplicable action of placing Seal in a Salvation Army halfway house...

What did *that* mean?

“I was trailing Barry at the time he was killed, shadowing him for the Agency, just to find out who he was talking to...asked to by Bill Casey, who was a friend of mine,” Harp told us.

“We didn’t know how much the ‘outside government’ knew. I was told not to make contact. You know, Barry had a way of playing both ends against the middle. And he didn’t have a whole lot of friends when he died.”

A former NSA agent, who’d done a lot of “Bolivian duty,” told us, “When Barry was killed a massive operation in Puerto Rico was closed down at the same time.... And \$23 million washed up on the beach of this one tiny village which operated right next to this DEA operation, which operated right next to a massive smuggling op with which Barry Seal was associated.”

The Puerto Rican op—we heard—was run by another drug smuggling legend, pilot Billy Lane. Lane also trained contra pilots before they moved on to the Mena, Arkansas portion of their training... in the ‘sure-busy-for-a-tiny-town’ of Long View, Texas, where Barry was nabbed by the FBI thirty years earlier and had the arrest ‘straightened out’ with the help of an accommodating local judge.

Why—we wondered—had the DEA situated itself right beside a smuggling operation in Puerto Rico? Our informant smiled...

“Pilots from the two different ops would see each other every morning at breakfast. A DEA pilot might ask, ‘which way you going?’ If the ‘smuggler’ pilot answered, ‘South,’ the DEA guy would say, ‘Well, I’ll head north then.’”

Just before Seal was murdered, his associate Russ Eakin had been attempting to help Barry transition back into the “straight” world, he told us...

“Barry called me the night before he was shot. He wanted out. I had already ‘converted,’ and he wanted to know how he could make that transition, too. And that’s what I do; I’m very good at moving money around. He wanted to resume a normal life, but, as it happened, wasn’t able to.”

“I was waiting in a restaurant across the street from him when he was killed,” Eakin told us. “I saw Barry get killed from the window of the Belmont hotel coffee shop. The killers were both out of the car, one on either side, but I only saw one shoot, cause Barry saw it coming and just put his head down on the steering column.”

Seal’s old friend Bill Maux had saw Barry Seal for the last time several days before he died.

“We lived right off Airline Highway, where the murder took place. Barry stopped by two days before it happened. He said they had him in a box. I told him to ‘pull up a suitcase’ and give it to Benjie (his brother) to hide for future needs. He said he was afraid that would tip off somebody. Two days later, when it happened, it tore me up. I was sick.”

“As long as he could go and come as he pleased it was okay,” Maux continued. “Because they weren’t about to come to his house to kill him. Before that, he didn’t have a schedule. But the Judge’s order left him with a schedule on the outside, to keep from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM.”

There had been others en route to kill Seal at the same time as the hit squad was preparing to swing into action, we discovered. Bill Maux, with a pipeline into the world of the Mob, had heard ‘something was coming,’ and then moved to forestall it...

“I told Barry, when I saw him two days before he was murdered, that I had got word that a certain ‘Chickie’ Phillici out of Pittsburgh was coming down. Chickie was an explosive man. Barry took this to the DEA; they assured him that Chickie had been killed in a gun fight a few years before.”

“But what they didn’t know, or I should say pretended they didn’t know,” Maux continues, “Is that Chickie had a son that went by the same name... Donald Phillici, 24 years old. I heard through the grapevine he was the guy after somebody in Louisiana. It came back that they were gonna hit a guy named Seal...”

“So I sent word back to Uncle Sal,” said Maux, “saying, keep your trash in Pittsburgh.”

We heard anecdotal evidence that a CIA agent had acted as 'paymaster' for the Seal hit...

Colonel Al Carone, who died in 1990, was a CIA paymaster and Mafia-connected money launderer who also held the rank of full Colonel in Army Intelligence. His daughter Dee told us that her father had even been sent to Dallas to pay off Jack Ruby before the Kennedy assassination.

Thirty-three years later, she said, he performed the same function for the Seal 'hit.' This proved impossible for us to verify; but one military intelligence source, who had known Seal since the 60's, admitted that he knew a "depressing number" of "Big Al's" confirmed 'close associates'...

"Big Al" had, clearly, been one of 'the boys.'

As Oliver North's bagman, Carone couriered large amounts of cash in and out of the country, according to former FAA investigator Rod Stich, "Carone was a member of the Gambino family, had connections to other crime groups in the eastern part of the United States, a member of the military, a CIA operative, and a detective and 'bag man' in the NYPD, collecting money that was distributed to captains and inspectors as payoffs for 'looking the other way' where drugs were involved."

Like Seal's, Carone's connections covered the waterfront.

Most who knew Barry Seal were saddened at his execution, but not surprised. His secretary Dandra Seale (no relation) was typical...

"The day Barry was killed, when he came back from lunch..." she began, and then stopped, her throat catching.

"See, he *knew* that day that they were killing him. Yes he did. Good lord. And he took it calmly, and continued with what he'd been doing, which was trying to get the Playboy Channel into the Salvation Army, so that he and the rest of the men could watch it while he was locked up there at night."

Not surprisingly, Dandra blames the 'government' for Seal's murder, and *not* the Medellin Cartel 'tar baby' of the official version of events...

"The CIA people here allowed it to happen. He had a chart, he had dirt on anybody and everybody."

Bob Thommasson, now a federal drug enforcement official teaching interdiction techniques to state and local police officers, recalled what happened when the state Police learned that Barry Seal had been murdered...

"I immediately put out troops in Baton Rouge. Now, keep in mind, we are the *State* Police. The murder jurisdiction was in the city/parish.

State police go in only when they're *called* in, all right? Then I put the crime lab on standby."

"The city cops took one look at Seal's bloody body, realized what they had, and requested the state police at the scene. So I immediately put the New Orleans office on standby," he continued.

"At that time we had no idea yet that these guys—the shooters—were like rabbits spreading out in a wildfire. None whatsoever. Thirty-five minutes after the shooting, I had dispatch call the Baton Rouge office of the FBI, and the New Orleans office of the FBI, to give a notification, just because its the right thing to do.... You know, we've got a major smuggler murdered, da-da-da-da-da."

We interrupted him...

"We discovered that one of the killers actually took pictures of the murder-in-progress, but that the FBI agent who nabbed this guy at New Orleans International Airport as he was trying to flee the country that night *exposed the film*, rendering it useless as evidence."

Thommasson chooses his words carefully. "What you get, when you call the FBI at night," he explains, "is a *duty agent*, okay? He's just a kid, usually, just out of the FBI Academy, his standing orders are, 'Make No Decisions Under Any Circumstances.'"

"What you *don't* get at that time of night is a seasoned agent or a SAC (Special Agent in Charge). You don't get anybody important. So the apprehension at the airport was made by a kid.

"It went like this: my headquarters called the New Orleans FBI office. As soon as that phone call was received, the two 'baby' agents that had watch that night—they're called 'watch supes'—went out to cover the airport."

"Now, never in a thousand years would this ever happen again, but these two lucky guys park their car at the airport, and head into the terminal *at the exact same time* as this shooter, and they've got a physical description over their radio that exactly matches the guy they're seeing. That's the only way that guy got caught."

"So... if you're asking me, did they deliberately expose that film at the airport? I gotta say: look at who these two FBI guys were. Rookies. These are *not* the Men in Black."

"Why was there so much suspicion of the CIA?" we asked.

From his grimace we surmise he feels we're pushing. He pauses, straightens in his chair, and then fixes us with a stare felt before, no doubt, by innumerable Southern miscreants.

"Tell me why you're doing this," Thommasson demands.

From the way he says “this,” we know exactly what he means.... And after we tell him he sits, thinking hard. And then without another word of comment, while staring fixedly out a 12th story window of a hotel room in Daytona Beach, Florida at the blue-green Atlantic, turning now a deeper blue as the sun slowly sets somewhere a million miles away, he starts to talk.... And the words at first come slowly, but soon enough are pouring out in torrents.

“This gets really black, okay, and it gets black for a *lot* of people.... But I’ll give you a sequence of events: The FBI appears, shows up, *on site*, *at the shooting*, okay?”

“And I go, hmmm... it happens... its not *too* fucking extraordinary, but still.... And then the contents of the car, the trunk, were seized.”

“But they can’t just seize material evidence in a capital crime!” we protested. “Isn’t it illegal for anyone but the investigating officers to remove evidence from a crime scene?”

“I told you,” he continued, “this gets really black. But some of the contents of the trunk, anyway, made it to my lab...our Louisiana State Police lab, which is definitely *not* a mom and pop shop—they’ve got 60-80 highly-trained employees...”

“Here’s the police procedural: if its *my* case and I call the lab, I *own* the lab, okay? They take orders only from *me*. It would be the same procedure if a sheriff from Podunk called—*they* would then own the lab, the lab would work only for them. Understand?”

“Now, it would be *beyond* a breach of ethics, it would be *criminal*... if, say, I called the lab, and said, hey, I hear the city police submitted a report on Joe Schmo, I’m coming by to pick it up. Its called “tampering with evidence.” We’re into criminal acts here.”

“The evidence that went into that lab on Barry Seal went to a guy that won’t talk to you, so don’t ask me for his name or phone number. This has caused a lot of stress in his life. He’s a long-time friend, and a top gun in forensics. And he gets the contents of Barry Seal’s briefcase, and some other contents of the car as lab exhibits. And he brings it into the lab. Our lab had worked the scene, and so had then brought the trunk’s contents back to the lab,” he continued.

We can’t help ourselves, and blurt out the ‘Big Question.’ “What was in the trunk of the Cadillac?”

“I’m not trying to be evasive...,” Thommasson answers somberly. “But, I want to make it *very clear*... I only have third-hand reports. *Okay?*”

“Seal’s trunk contained compelling and—*again, from 3rd hand data*—very very compelling documents and tapes. Several briefcases, boxes—wherever Seal’s Cadillac was, that was where Barry’s instant records were.”

From the way he stressed ‘3rd hand’ we knew he was speaking for the record. Later, we discovered that this man’s family dog was decapitated and left floating in their backyard pool as a warning... fully three months *after* Seal’s assassination...

“See, Barry taped his calls. Barry taped *all* of his calls, including all his calls to his controllers. I suspect that were you to have seen the contents of the trunk, it would certainly validate for whom he was employed, and what his mission was.”

“Okay, who has heard those tapes that I could talk to?”

The tension in the room rises. When he speaks his voice is soft, barely above a whisper.

“That’s living?” he asks. “No one. I told you: this gets really black.”

Barry Seal, who didn’t show any nervousness or anxiety about being assassinated by the Medellin cartel, had explicitly denied that he had anything to fear from them. In a television interview with TV reporter John Camp, he shrugged it off..., “If it’s to come, it will come.”

John Camp is the pseudo-journalist who disgraced himself and his profession by producing an hour-long documentary apologia for Seal called “Uncle Sam Wants You.”

No drug smuggler in history has ever received better publicity. We heard, but were unable to confirm, that the owner of the Baton Rouge station for which Camp produced this psy-ops piece had been personally asked to ‘help out’ by a figure who has already played a role in our drama, Democratic National Chairman Charles Manatt.

“Charles Manatt put Camp’s bosses up to it,” emphatically stated this source, who, for this piece of explosive information at least, insisted on strict anonymity.

Good doggies get tossed a few bones... and John Camp went from being just another small-market TV reporter with a bad toupee, to heading a “special investigations unit” at CNN.

Lily Tomlin put it best: “No matter how cynical I get, I just can’t keep up.”

If Seal was right in being unafraid of Medellin cartel retaliation, then who then *was* responsible for his murder?

There is no better source for this critical information than the three Colombians convicted of the killing, sentenced to life in prison without parole.

We interviewed Richard Sharpstein, a prominent Miami criminal defense attorney, and the lawyer for one of the three convicted assassins, who casually revealed the explosive truth about who ordered Barry Seal killed—and why.

“I represented Miguel Velez for the Barry Seal homicide, which was one of the most incredible experiences I have ever been through,” Sharpstein began.

“It was an amazing experience. Nobody wanted to think about what any of this meant back in 1986. The implications were just too big. And I’m only speaking with you now because some of this has leaked out.”

“All three of the Colombians who went on trial always told us—their lawyers—that they were being directed, after they got into this country, on what to do and where to go by an ‘anonymous gringo,’ a United States Military officer, who they quickly figured out was Oliver North,” Sharpstein says.

“Say that again?” we asked. We were sure we’d heard it right the first time; we just needed confirmation...

“Once they rendezvoused together in the States,” explained Sharpstein, “they, the Colombians, were being directed, by phone, by a man who insisted on remaining anonymous, but who did identify himself as being an officer in the American military...”

“They were put in touch with this officer through Rafa (a Colombian smuggler) who was the guy my client worked for. And they all believed that it was Oliver North.”

What corroborative indications are there to justify the charge of murder against Lt. Col. Oliver North?

North, numerous sources stated without prompting, had been running an assassination squad right out of his White House office. So the extra-judicial execution of Barry Seal wouldn’t have made him blink an eye. There are even allegations that he had been tasked with drawing up plans to suspend the US Constitution and declare martial law, in the event the massive drug smuggling taking place ever came to public light.

In *Guts and Glory: The Rise and Fall of Oliver North*, author Ben Bradlee, Jr., writes... “North’s work for FEMA from 1982 to the spring of 1984 was highly classified, and some would say bizarre. He was involved in helping to draft a sweeping contingency plan to impose

martial law in the event of a nuclear war or less serious national crises such as widespread internal dissent or opposition to an American military invasion abroad.”

But the popular mythology of Seal’s assassination is—not just *wrong*—but active disinformation.

When we began to examine Seal’s assassination more closely, we saw that even basic facts, like how many killers there were, was stated wrong to slant the story. In the official version of events recounted in newspapers the killers were always described as a “three man hit team of Colombian nationals.”

Even a cursory reading of the headlines revealed, to our amazement, there weren’t hadn’t been three men involved... there had been *eight*.

Three men may be a hit ‘team. Eight is a hit ‘squad.’

So this is clearly active disinformation; even newspaper reporters can count to ten... *unaided*.

Six men had been arrested at various stages of attempting to flee the scene. A seventh, Rafa Cardona, who had dispatched the team, was safely ensconced in Colombia... at least for a while. He was charged in absentia for planning the hit, but was himself mowed down, in a spray of automatic gunfire inside his antique car dealership, in Colombia later that year.

Then there was the “eight man,” Miami CIA ‘asset’ Jose Coutin, who had supplied the machine gun. More on him in a moment...

Richard Sharpstein’s client, Miguel Velez, *aka* ‘Cumbamba,’ has been described as a “CIA hit man” in the New York press, where he was wanted for murder.

It was a total fluke that he was caught. He was done in by a deer. Earlier, Velez had been spotted, questioned, and then released at the airport, by those sharp dressers at the FBI.

After escaping the feeble clutches of the FBI at the airport, Velez had hired a cab to *drive* him from New Orleans to Miami.

In the middle of the night, in Meridian Mississippi, the cab hit a deer at a lonely gas station on the interstate. While waiting for repairs, a highway patrolman happened by, and noticed that the surgical outfit worn by the cab’s passenger fit the description released by Baton Rouge police of one of the triggermen.

Officers immediately put Velez in handcuffs. The cabbie, irate at losing such a big fare, professed to the cops that he couldn’t understand why the police were making such a fuss over a dead deer...

Police then raided two “safe” houses in Algiers, a seamy suburb of New Orleans, and nabbed Bernardo Vasquez and Louis Quintero-Cruz, the other two men later convicted, as well as John Cardona, brother of the man fingered as at the trial, Rafa Cardona Salazar.

Eliberto Sanchez was caught trying to flee at the New Orleans International Airport. Jose Renteria was nabbed the next day while waiting to board a plane in Miami.

The “eighth man” in the assassination is Jose Coutin, who had supplied the weapons for the hit. He is thus, by law, guilty of murder; or, at the very least, of conspiracy to murder.

But being connected means never having to say you’re sorry...

Coutin was never even charged with a crime. He went on to testify before the Kerry Committee, saying, no doubt, anything his ‘benefactors’ wanted him to say.

Coutin was the proprietor of the Broadway Boutique, a Miami fashion shop with a unique inventory: ladies clothing in the front, and military gear in the back. According to Lesley Cockburn in “Out of Control,” he was a well-known CIA asset, FBI informant, and Contra weapons supplier.

Why Sanchez and Cardona were simply deported and never charged with murder has never, unsurprisingly, been satisfactorily explained...

But what happened to Jose Renteria is revealing. Testimony at the trial of the three accused of killing Seal revealed that Renteria had been the cut-out between Coutin, known to be linked to Oliver North, and the shooters, to whom he delivered the weapons from Coutin.... So Jose Renteria’s case was severed from the trial of the other three.

“It was the strangest thing,” says attorney Sharpstein. “He was severed on some odd theory that he wasn’t at the murder scene. What really happened, is he had indicated that he might—in exchange for a deal—be willing to talk...”

“Someone on the government side was clearly not very eager for that to happen.”

According to trial testimony, it was Renteria who took pictures of the murder. When his camera was confiscated by an FBI agent at the New Orleans airport, it was opened and the film inside exposed.

Renteria was sent to Miami to face (minor) pending charges. His bosses must have felt that his had been a job well done.

“They cut him a deal, they made a fast plea and he was in and out, serving a bit of time and then being deported,” states Sharpstein.

“The result was we never got to hear the story he was ready to sing at the trial.”

And Coutin?

“Same thing,” Sharpstein said. “They made a deal with him; he testified at the trial, and then later before the Kerry hearings in Washington. I was the lawyer who brought up his CIA and Contra connections in the trial, because I felt that there were *lots* of reasons why the CIA might want to murder Barry...”

“And Coutin went crazy on the stand when I did. You’d have thought he’d been zapped with a ray gun.”

Had the Colombians discussed motive with their lawyers?

“They were just soldiers,” Sharpstein stated. “They did what they were told. But in testimony at the trial given by one of Seal’s attorneys, Lewis Unglesby, we *did* finally hear about motive...”

Lewis Unglesby is today a prominent and *very* well connected Louisiana lawyer. At the time his name was daily on the front page of the state’s newspapers, defending his long-time client and associate, Governor Edwin Edwards.

Unglesby had told *us* about a confrontation he had with Barry over the fact that Seal was keeping him in the dark about matters Unglesby considered crucial to defending him...

“Barry pushed the phone across the desk to me and said, ‘You wanna know what’s going on? Here. Dial this number. Tell ‘em you’re me,’ Unglesby related.

“When I did what he requested,” he continued, “A female voice answered the phone, sayin’, ‘Vice President Bush’s office, may I help you?’”

“I said, ‘This is Barry Seal.’ She asked me to wait while she transferred the call, which was immediately picked up by a man who identified himself as Admiral somebody or other, who said to me ‘Barry! Where you been?’”

“That’s when I told him that I wasn’t Barry Seal, I was his lawyer,” said Unglesby. “Immediately he slammed down the phone.”

“So why was Barry Seal murdered?” we asked Sharpstein.

“Unglesby said he had been with Seal when the IRS came and seized all his property,” Sharpstein related. “The IRS man said, ‘You owe us \$30 million for the money you made in drug dealing.’”

“Hey, I work for you,” was Seal’s reply. “We work for the same people.”

“You don’t work for us,” the IRS agent stated. “We’re the IRS.”

“Unglesby was with Seal when he retired to a back room,” Sharpstein stated. “He watched as Seal placed a call to George Bush. He heard Barry Seal tell Bush, ‘If you don’t get these IRS assholes off my back I’m going to blow the whistle on the Contra scheme.’”

Sharpstein spoke solemnly, aware of the gravity of his words..., “‘That’s why he’s dead,’ is what Unglesby said.”

One week after the phone conversation between Barry Seal and George Bush, Seal was sentenced to a halfway house. Two weeks later he was dead.

“Barry Seal, you mean that agent that went ‘*bad?*’” Gordon Novel had casually inquired, when we’d posed the question of his associations with Seal.

An agent that ‘goes bad,’ as we understand intelligence industry trade jargon, is one who contemplates *talking*.

“Seal was gunned down, supposedly by those Colombians,” says Sharpstein. “But they were fed information by the assholes in our government who wanted him dead.”

The assassination of Barry Seal was very likely even not the first attempt on Seal’s life by North, we were told by CIA electronics expert Red Hall, on the ground in Nicaragua with Seal on the Sandinista drug sting...

“The only thing I knew was the CIA had to do a lot with it (Barry’s murder.) The killers were being directed by Oliver North at the time. It was the same thing Oliver North pulled on us down in Nicaragua.”

“Then, I didn’t know yet that Oliver North had it for Barry Seal, because he was working with Oliver at that particular point. We was undercover, and we were still down there (Nicaragua), when Oliver North blew the whistle on us.”

Chip Tatum, another covert operative who had known Seal and shared confidences with him, listened with amusement the first time we breathlessly relayed what we’d discovered: that Oliver North is guilty in the assassination of Barry Seal...

“No shit, Sherlock,” he replied, laughing. “It ain’t exactly the secret of the century, I can tell you.”

Barry Seal had threatened George Bush over the IRS trouble he was having. Why couldn’t Bush have ‘taken care’ of the IRS?

Perhaps he could have. But there were other Seal ‘problems’ as well, like state police so disgusted they were threatening to go to the media with damning evidence of official corruption in Seal’s case, should the

biggest drug smuggler any of them had ever seen receive no ‘time’ at all.

“Al Capone killed over five hundred people. What did he go to prison for?” asked one former state police official.

We remembered. “Tax evasion?”

“Exactly. Tax evasion. Get the picture? I beat on desktops in IRS offices all across the United States to find somebody that would take the case, till I found a criminal investigator for the IRS named Earl Buck Holmes, willing to come down and set up a war -room in my office.”

Some ‘wised-up’ local and state cops had figured out that Barry Seal had been too valuable to certain people in the federal government of the United States of America to ever go to prison for his crimes...

Knowing this, local law enforcement had done an end-around on them, and taken their case to the IRS, where they hatched a plan to at least strip Seal of some of his ill-gotten goods.

Remarkably, in the court proceedings in neither Miami nor Baton Rouge had Seal’s organizational assets—like his fleet of planes—been confiscated, although this is standard operating procedure in drug cases?

Why not? Because they were still being *used*...

Local and state cops, we found, to our amazement, had tracked a shipment of cocaine to one of Seal’s ocean-going vessels, the Captain Wonderful, just weeks before Seals’ murder. There they were met—and dissuaded from boarding—by DEA and CIA agents.

State and local cops in the South often appear to know the score... When we told one Louisiana law enforcement source what we had learned from Miami attorney Richard Sharpstein, about how the hit team had been getting orders from Oliver North, he said simply, “That doesn’t surprise me at all.”

Then we discovered why Seal had been so unconcerned about being killed by the Medellin cartel...

“I asked Barry why he wasn’t worried about the Colombians killing him,” stated close associate, Mob pilot Rene Martin. “He said he had told the Colombians he was going to pull a fast one, and testify for Ochoa *against* the US government.”

Two weeks before he died, Barry Seal had hired a private investigator in Miami, Steve Dinerstein, to run FAA title searches on 15 different airplanes he had used in his smuggling Enterprise....

Seal was getting ready to talk about who had owned his smuggling fleet fifteen years ago.

Barry Seal was assassinated because he was getting ready to *talk*... He had even contacted a Paramount Studios production vice president about making a movie.

While the killers approached Barry Seal's Cadillac in the Baton Rouge twilight, Seal had been on his car phone with a CIA aircraft procurement executive in Arizona, Bill Lambeth, who will himself be murdered in Phoenix seven years later.

Suddenly cut off, and fearing the worst, Lambeth frantically dialed Barry's home phone, where his wife Debbie answered. "I think something's wrong with Barry," Lambeth said ominously.

Debbie—unable to reach her husband—bundled her three small children into the car and frantically headed for the Salvation Army halfway house where he had been sentenced to sleep for six months. On the way she stopped at a pay phone to make another attempt to reach her husband, and learned he was now 'unreachable.'

"He's not going to the hospital," she remembers being told. "He's dead. Don't come here Debbie. Don't."

As she returned to her car she could see through her tears, her three small children's heads barely peeking over the car seats. And though Barry Seal is anything *but* blameless, his three small children were... they symbolize the millions of lives ruined by a phony drug war whose only purpose is to line-still-more the pockets of a crew of elite deviants who took over our country.

"All I could think of was my poor little babies... my poor babies," Debbie Seal told us, choking back tears. "I didn't know how I was going to tell them that their Daddy was dead."

We were to make one final discovery.

After Barry Seal had threatened to roll on Richard Ben-Veniste, and while he was still in possession of those "two briefcases" filled with incriminating information he had 'liberated' from Ben-Veniste's office, Ben-Veniste had interceded for Seal and set up a meeting with the then-Vice President of the United States, George Bush.

We learned that Seal had not attended this meeting.

Instead, he sent the Attorney General for the state of Louisiana, William J. Guste, Jr., to argue on his behalf. The Vice President of the United States, George Bush, sat down and cut a deal with the Attorney General of the State of Louisiana—in what amounted to state-to-state-negotiations—about the fate of a Louisiana native CIA agent with a 'little problem,' Barry Seal.

The result, which we already knew, was that Seal had moved his operation to Mena in the spring of 1982, and went to work for Oliver North.

But who was William Guste? Why had Seal placed such faith in him?

And the answer, when we found it, brought our story of Barry and ‘the boys’ full circle...

William Guste, Jr., in addition to involvement with Edwin Edwards in shady casino deals—standard Louisiana fare—had been, way back in 1956 and ‘57, when our story began, the head of the New Orleans Metropolitan Crime Commission, where he had been instrumental in bringing to town Guy Banister, the agent who had helmed the entire New Orleans operation from its inception.

Small world.

At the Baton Rouge funeral home where mourners gathered for Barry Seal’s wake, the newly-widowed Debbie Seal’s oldest childhood friend noticed with curiosity an entire line of men in sleek dark suits hovering at the back of the room.

“Who are they?” she asked Debbie.

“They’re with the government,” Debbie replied. “They’ve come to make sure that he’s dead.”

This has been the story of Barry Seal, the biggest drug smuggler in American history, who died in a hail of bullets with George Bush’s private phone number in his wallet.

