

Whitewatergaters are playing with fire

by Edward Spannaus

If the desperation of President Clinton's enemies is any indication, the Whitewater plot must not be going so well. The most recent indication of this is the article in the current issue of the *American Spectator*, written by the Anglophiliac adolescent who parades as its editor-in-chief, Emmett Tyrrell.

Tyrrell's article purports to describe Clinton's involvement in the alleged CIA drug-running and gun-running operations which were conducted out of the remote airfield in Mena, Arkansas, during the mid-1980s. Despite the massive amount of evidence in the public record indicating that the Mena operation was one of the covert operations run out of Vice President George Bush's office in the 1980s, and that it was an integral part of the Contra support operation run by Oliver North and Richard Secord, Tyrrell tells his fable as if Bill Clinton, Governor of Arkansas, ran the whole thing. As if the governor of Arkansas were more powerful than the President or vice-president of the United States, or as if the governor were in charge of operations nominally designated as CIA or National Security Council operations.

Bet you didn't know such power resided in Little Rock. That's because you haven't been reading the *American Spectator*.

The search for gullible readers is not limited to Tyrrell's rag. His article was lavishly previewed in the July 9 London *Sunday Telegraph* under the byline of Ambrose Evans-Pritchard. Pritchard's laudatory essay was headlined "Clinton 'Involved in CIA Arms and Drugs Racket,'" and was his latest attempt to proclaim that the Mena guns-and-drugs story is about to engulf Clinton.

Pritchard gushed that the *American Spectator* was about to publish "astonishing allegations that Bill Clinton was linked to an illegal CIA operation in the early 1980s to smuggle weapons from Arkansas to the right-wing Contra rebels in Nicaragua." Evans-Pritchard says that Tyrrell's account "parallels the experience of another intelligence operative, Terry Reed," but omits the fact that Reed's account put the primary responsibility for the Mena operation on Bush and his operative Oliver North.

The Tyrrell story purports to be based on interviews with L.D. Brown, an Arkansas state trooper who served on the security detail of the governor's mansion, and who claims to have been a confidant of then-Governor Clinton.

Brown claims he was encouraged by Governor Clinton

to apply for a job with the CIA, and then—without saying how—Brown asserts that he was assigned to work with Barry Seal, who was running guns to Central America, and bringing cocaine into the United States.

According to Tyrrell's implausible account, Brown could only establish that Clinton was on top of the operation, saying that it may "never be known whether CIA officials knew or approved of Seal's activities." Why the governor of one of the poorest states in the union would be shipping weapons to Central America is never explained.

The *American Spectator* article was also the subject of the lead editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* on July 9, but with a decidedly different emphasis. In contrast to the *Sunday Telegraph* fraud, the *Journal* noted that its own reporting on Mena "points more toward Washington than Arkansas." The *Journal* cited its own earlier stories about Seal and drug- and gun-running to the Contras, and urged a full Congressional investigation. "If some chips fall on the Republican side, so be it."

The Seal papers

Probably the best-documented treatment of the Barry Seal-Mena operation has finally made it into print, after a long and sorry saga. This is the article by former National Security Council official Roger Morris and investigative reporter Sally Denton, which was fact-checked and edited for three months at the end of last year by the *Washington Post*, before *Post* editors killed it for political reasons in January 1995.

After a search for another publisher, the Denton-Morris article was published in the July issue of *Penthouse* magazine. It is based on a study of over 2,000 pages of Seal's personal documents, which substantiate much of what has been asserted elsewhere about the Mena operation. Denton and Morris comment that, although Mena "has been a topic of ubiquitous anti-Clinton diatribes circulated by right-wing extremists," the irony is that "the Mena operation was the apparent brainchild of the two previous and Republican administrations." Not only was it the brainchild of the two previous administrations, but they also show that some nine different investigations of Mena, from 1987 on, went nowhere, "from allegedly compromised federal grand juries to congressional inquiries suppressed by the National Security Council in 1988 under Ronald Reagan to still later Justice Department inaction under George Bush."

The Denton-Morris article documents how one of the largest drug-smuggling operations in U.S. history was centered in Mena in 1981-86, involving at least \$3-5 billion worth of drugs. Some indication of what was actually involved, is shown by the fact that, after Seal's death, the IRS determined that the money earned by Seal in 1984-85—the last two years of his life—was not illegal, because of his "CIA-DEA employment."

The IRS did not find that Seal was employed by Governor Clinton or the State of Arkansas.