

# Los Angeles sheriff's report reveals drug-intelligence links

by Edward Spannaus

In a rather clumsy cover-up attempt, Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block on Dec. 10 released the purported results of a two-month investigation on the 1986 raid on the Contra-linked Danilo Blandón drug ring. The obvious intention of the report was to discredit anyone and everyone who had ever made allegations of CIA or other U.S. government involvement with the Blandón crack cocaine organization, which was the subject of the controversial August 1996 series in the *San Jose Mercury News*.

However, inadvertently, the report contains much information which *confirms* the fact that key personnel involved in the Blandón ring were linked to U.S. intelligence agencies—but not necessarily the CIA.

## Block's 'findings'

Sheriff Block's major finding was proclaimed to be that sheriff's deputies themselves stole between \$40,000 and \$60,000 during the 1986 raids. In fact, although no drug dealers were indicted as a result of the raids, a number of deputies were indicted and convicted.

Block denied that any evidence had mysteriously disappeared after the raid, as some deputies had said. This report was attributed to a joking comment by a deputy. Although the original search warrant affidavit said that profits from the drug ring were going to the Contras, Block said that the affidavit was embellished. Although a deputy had logged "miscellaneous CIA info" as found on the raid, a sergeant said he had no idea why the log said this.

However, interviews with deputies described in Block's report indicate that they thought, at the time, that the raid was going to hit a U.S. government-related drug operation.

Block's report also attacked *San Jose Mercury News* reporter Gary Webb, accusing him of having a financial interest in his story.

A special target of the report is attorney Harlan Braun, the defense lawyer for one of the Los Angeles sheriff's deputies indicted on graft charges. The sheriff's report says that although the inquiry was initiated because of the *San Jose Mercury News* articles, "the true genesis" of the allegations stems from a motion filed by Braun in 1990; a major portion of the report is devoted to attempting to discredit Braun's allegations about federal government involvement in the Blandón drug ring, and federal agencies' interference with the raid.

## Investigators were targeted

The investigation of the Blandón drug ring appears to have begun in late 1984 with an investigation of a Colombian money-laundering operation in the city of Bell, California, near southeast Los Angeles. Bell police officer Jerry Guzzetta initiated an investigation at the request of agents from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and Customs Service. Guzzetta identified former Laguna Beach police officer Ronald Lister as transporting large amounts of cocaine and "millions of dollars" for Danilo Blandón.

As the investigation of the Blandón ring proceeded, Guzzetta came to believe that some of the federal agents did not want the investigation to go forward. In fact, after the 1986 raid, the investigation was handed over to a federal task force, which dropped it.

The report says:

"Guzzetta expressed very strong feelings about the fate of the majority of law enforcement officers who investigated Blandon. He stated, 'Every policeman who ever got close to Blandon was either told to back-off, investigated by their own department, forced to retire, or indicted.' "

Guzzetta is now retired; the Los Angeles sheriff's report states that Guzzetta's office was burglarized about six months ago, and that "all that was taken was his computer and some files. Later, when *San Jose Mercury News* reporter Gary Webb called him for an interview, Guzzetta discovered that the files that were taken all pertained to the Blandon case. In addition, he said that the police found no prints in his office, not even his own. He believed that his office had been 'wiped clean' of prints after the burglary."

## 'You're over your head . . .'

Despite the overall intent of the report, it does reveal a lot of fascinating details about what happened around the October 1986 raid on the Blandón drug ring, particularly in connection with Lister. Interviews with deputies and others involved in the pre-raid briefing show that many of them recalled being told about U.S. government involvement with the Blandón ring.

One deputy recalled being told that the U.S. government "backed" the operation, which he took to mean that the government was bringing drugs into the country. (This deputy was later convicted for graft.) Another deputy recalled being

told that the “feds” had said: “Don’t do this warrant service. You don’t know who you’re messing with. You don’t get the big picture.” But, the sheriff’s report dismisses this deputy’s statements, because his recollections “are not supported by the statements of other personnel who were present at the home of Ronald Lister.”

The same deputy recalled hearing Lister say to officers during the raid: “You guys are in over your head; you don’t know what you’re doing; there’s a bigger picture here; I’m working for the CIA; I know the director of the CIA in Los Angeles; money from drug sales were used to purchase guns to get to the Contra rebels in a covert manner.” The deputy also heard Lister refer the officers to a contact named something like “Wheatly” or “Whitley.” But, again, the sheriff’s report dismisses the deputy’s recollections—because no one else recalled hearing these exact statements by Lister.

The pitfalls of focussing attention exclusively on the CIA, are indicated by the following, very revealing item in the sheriff’s report:

“In a November 7, 1996 interview of A.U.S.A. [Assistant United States Attorney] L.J. O’Neale, he was asked if he would query the Defense Intelligence Agency (D.I.A.) to ascertain if Ronald Lister or Scott Weekly had a relationship with that agency. He immediately said, ‘No.’ He was asked why, and he replied he was dealing with a specific allegation that the C.I.A. was involved in cocaine distribution. He was not investigating the D.I.A.’s involvement, so he was not going to do the query.”

Nevertheless, the report adds that O’Neale “told investigators that Scott Weekly has made statements to Bo Gritz that he (Weekly) has worked for the D.I.A.” O’Neale, who prosecuted “Freeway” Ricky Ross, and who let Blandón out of jail after 28 months, just happens to be the same prosecutor who prosecuted special forces veteran Col. “Bo” Gritz on spurious charges in 1987, after Gritz refused to keep quiet about his findings that U.S. officials were involved in the drug traffic in Southeast Asia.

### 32 intelligence agencies

Lister, a former policeman, and an admitted drug dealer and cocaine addict, was interviewed by sheriff’s investigators in the course of their preparation of the report, and he was asked about his handwritten notation referring to “DIA sub-contractor Scott Weekly.” The sheriff’s report states the following:

“Lister first explained that ‘DIA’ did not refer to the Defense Intelligence Agency. He said he could not immediately remember what he was referring to when he wrote the term ‘DIA sub-contractor.’ He said he often met with Scott Weekly because Weekly was very knowledgeable in the area of commercially-available military-related systems. . . . When asked if Weekly was an arms dealer, he seemed to get somewhat upset and stated, ‘I can’t believe that, that’s horrible. I’ve never known him to be an arms dealer.’

“In a later interview Lister stated, ‘Hey listen. I know

exactly now—you know I thought about it—you know that DIA sh—t? Okay—that’s my abbreviation for ‘deals in arms.’ ”

Lister himself denies that he told the deputies that he worked for the CIA, but he said that the deputies were discussing whether or not he was CIA, and that one deputy, after seeing the materials that Lister had in his house, said to him, “Man, you’ve gotta be CIA.”

The sheriff’s report then continues as follows:

“Lister did display some knowledge of the U.S. intelligence community during the interview with investigators. He said that if he were affiliated with an organization like the CIA, he wouldn’t talk about it. He went on to say, ‘You’ve got to remember, there’s 32 intelligence agencies out there. The CIA is just one of them.’ He mentioned the National Security Council and the National Reconnaissance Office as examples.”

## ‘L.A. Weekly’ draws the link to Bush, NSC

New information has surfaced which “provides important details that illuminate possible links between U.S. intelligence and the shadowy network alleged to have sold drugs in Los Angeles to finance the illicit Contra war in Nicaragua,” writes Nick Schou in the Dec. 20-26, 1996 issue of the *L.A. Weekly*.

Schou writes that the Los Angeles sheriff’s report shows that Ronald Lister had a much more important role in the Blandón drug ring than previously known, and that it confirmed Lister’s connection to “an active participant in the murky underworld of Reagan-era covert operations . . . David Scott Weekly.”

“While Lister was laundering money for the Blandon ring and pitching ‘security’ contracts to the Salvadoran military,” Schou writes, “Weekly was carrying out covert operations being directed through the Vice President Bush-headed National Security Council.”

Among these covert operations was one conducted with Bo Gritz, which involved training of Afghan mujahideen on U.S. Bureau of Land Management property in Nevada. They were paid through Albert Hakim’s Stanford Technology company, part of the NSC operation run by Iran-Contra operatives Oliver North and Richard Secord. Schou writes that the Afghan project was cut short when Gritz and Weekly were summoned to a White House meeting in 1986 by NSC official Tom Harvey, who used Bush’s name in asking them to undertake a new mission in Southeast Asia.

## Some questions not asked

David Scott Weekly was also interviewed by Los Angeles Sheriff's Department investigators in preparation for their report, but the investigators allowed Weekly to dance around their questions, while never asking him the crucial question: whether or not he was a contract agent for the DIA. Following are a few excerpts from the section on Scott Weekly:

"Weekly admitted that he knew Ronald Lister. . . . He was asked if they had met in the military. At first Weekly said no, but then added, 'Well, it depends on whose service—and for what.'

"Weekly agreed that it would be ridiculous for us to ask him if he had ever been in the CIA, because there would be no way for us to confirm his statement. He also agreed that if he was in the CIA he wouldn't tell us anyway. . . .

"Weekly was asked if he knew what the DIA is. After a pause he replied, 'yes.' . . .

"Weekly was asked what items would be dealt with by a DIA subcontractor (vendor). He said, 'Everything from paper, pencils, radios, whatever it is those guys deal with.' Weekly said the other level of DIA subcontractor would be a 'Black operative. Of which they (DIA) have very few.'

"Weekly was told that in old documentation from that period, he (Weekly) had been identified as being a DIA subcontractor. Weekly laughed and said, 'Okay.' He then said, 'Let me put it this way—there is not one ounce of love lost between the DIA and me. It is even more aggressive than that. It's beyond the flashpoint between me and they. It's a non-subject—that's as much as I'm going to say about it. As far as I'm concerned, I wouldn't piss on them if their face was on fire.' "

Incredibly, the investigators never asked Weekly directly if he was a contractor for the DIA, or any other government intelligence agency.

The truth of the matter is, that at the same time that Lister was throwing around Weekly's name during the 1986 drug raid, Weekly and Gritz were being deployed to Southeast Asia by a George Bush-linked operative in the National Security Council. Gritz says that Weekly was working for him; and Gritz says that he had been being deployed by the DIA and the Intelligence Support Activity (nominally an Army unit, but which worked directly for the NSC). There is no indication whatsoever that Gritz had any connection with the Blandón ring, but Lister describes Weekly as a business associate and friend.

## CIA inspector says he'll tell the whole story

CIA Inspector General Frederick Hitz, who is conducting an internal investigation regarding allegations of CIA involvement in Contra drug-trafficking, said on Dec. 10 that if the trail he is investigating leads outside the CIA, he will state this in his report.

Hitz's assurance came in response to a question from this reporter, who commented that the CIA often gets blamed for things that are done by other people, and noted that, in regard to the Contra/cocaine allegations, "everyone is saying 'CIA, CIA,' but in fact, much of that, the Contra support operation, was being run out of the White House, out of the NSC, the Office of the vice president, and private contractors."

"If the trail on this drug question dead-ends within the Agency, but leads outside," Hitz was asked, "does your investigation encompass that, and will you follow that trail?"

Hitz responded by saying, "We're going to be absolutely explicit about what it is that we find and we don't find. So, if there should be a trail outside CIA that we encounter, we will state that in our own report, recognizing that we probably don't have the mandate to take it in certain areas."

"I welcome the fact that the Department of Justice inspector general is ready to embark on this task along

with us," Hitz continued, "because he has jurisdiction over Drug Enforcement Administration and over the federal prosecutors that would have had to deal with this information had it been there. And so we're going to try. We hope we're going to be able to get a pretty complete picture, and we'll just have to see where it goes.

"But your point is well taken. . . .

"All we can do it to tell the story as completely as we're permitted to do."

When Hitz was asked later to clarify his last comment, he said that he did not mean that he would be censored within the Agency, but that there may be a problem of CIA officers who are no longer serving, or who are out of the area, who may not want to talk to his investigators, and he will not have the power to force them to talk to him.

The limitations on the CIA and DOJ investigations were a focus of discussion at an Oct. 23, 1996 hearing of the Senate Intelligence Committee, at which both Hitz and Department of Justice Inspector General Michael Bromwich testified. During this hearing, it became apparent that Bromwich has a significantly broader jurisdiction than does Hitz, in that Bromwich possesses administrative subpoena power which he can use outside his department; Hitz does not.

Hitz made his comments at a conference in Washington sponsored by American Bar Association Standing Committee on Law and National Security.

—Edward Spannaus