

This article was originally written for publication in the *Washington Post*. After clearing the legal department for inaccurate statements and scheduled for press, *Washington Post* Managing Editor Bob Kaiser killed the article without explanation. This story is an investigative report into events that haunt the activities of three presidents: Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. Included beneath the following article is Arkansas Drug Exposé Misses The *Post* by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *The London Sunday Telegraph*, 1/29/95.

The Crimes of Mena

by Sally Denton and Roger Morris

July 1995

Penthouse

Barry Seal -- gunrunner, drug trafficker, and covert C.I.A. operative extraordinaire -- is hardly a familiar name in American politics. But nine years after he was murdered in a hail of bullets by Medellin cartel hit men outside a Salvation Army shelter in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, he has come back to haunt the reputations of three American presidents.

Seal's legacy includes more than 2,000 newly discovered documents that now verify and quantify much of what previously had been only suspicion, conjecture, and legend. The documents confirm that from 1981 to his brutal death in 1986, Barry Seal carried on one of the most lucrative, extensive, and brazen operations in the history of the international drug trade, and that he did it with the evident complicity, if not collusion, of elements of the United States government, apparently with the acquiescence of Ronald Reagan's administration, impunity from any subsequent exposure by George Bush's administration, and under the usually acute political nose of then Arkansas governor Bill Clinton.

The newly unearthed papers show the real Seal as far more impressive and well-connected than the character played by Dennis Hopper in a made-for-TV movie some years ago, loosely based on the smuggler's life. The film portrayed the pudgy pilot as a hapless victim, caught in a cross fire between bungling but benign government agencies and Latin drug lords. The truth sprinkled through the documents is a richer -- and altogether more sinister -- matter of national and individual corruption. It is a tale of massive, socially devastating crime, of what seems to have been an official cover-up to match, and, not least, of the strange reluctance of so-called mainstream American journalism to come to grips with the phenomenon and its ominous implications -- even when the documentary evidence had appeared.

The trail winds back to another slightly bruited but obscure name -- a small place in western Arkansas called Mena.

Of the many stories emerging from the Arkansas of the 1980s that was crucible to the Clinton presidency, none has been more elusive than the charges surrounding Mena. Nestled in the dense pine and hardwood forests of the Oachita Mountains, some 160 miles west of Little Rock, once thought a refuge for nineteenth-century border outlaws and even a hotbed of Depression-era anarchists, the tiny town has been the locale for persistent reports of drug smuggling, gunrunning, and money laundering tracing to the early eighties, when Seal based

his aircraft at Mena's Intermountain Regional Airport.

From first accounts circulating locally in Arkansas, the story surfaced nationally as early as 1989 in a *Penthouse* article called "Snowbound," written by the investigative reporter John Cummings, and in a Jack Anderson column, but was never advanced at the time by other media. Few reporters covering Clinton in the 1992 campaign missed hearing at least something about Mena. But it was obviously a serious and demanding subject -- the specter of vast drug smuggling with CIA involvement -- and none of the major media pursued it seriously. During 1992, the story was kept alive by Sarah McClendon, *The Nation*, and *The Village Voice*.

Then, after Clinton became president, Mena began to reappear. Over the past year, *CBS News* and *The Wall Street Journal* have reported the original, unquieted charges surrounding Mena, including the shadow of some CIA (or "national security") involvement in the gun and drug traffic, and the apparent failure of then governor Clinton to pursue evidence of such international crime so close to home.

"Seal was smuggling drugs and kept his planes at Mena," *The Wall Street Journal* reported in 1994. "He also acted as an agent for the DEA. In one of these missions, he flew the plane that produced photographs of Sandinistas loading drugs in Nicaragua. He was killed by a drug gang [Medellin cartel hit men] in Baton Rouge. The cargo plane he flew was the same one later flown by Eugene Hasenfus when he was shot down over Nicaragua with a load of contra supplies.

In a mix of wild rumor and random fact, Mena has also been a topic of ubiquitous anti-Clinton diatribes circulated by right-wing extremists -- an irony in that the Mena operation was the apparent brainchild of the two previous and Republican administrations.

Still, most of the larger American media have continued to ignore, if not ridicule, the Mena accusations. Finding no conspiracy in the Oachitas last July, a *Washington Post* reporter typically scoffed at the "alleged dark deeds," contrasting Mena with an image as "Clandestination, Arkansas . . . Cloak and Dagger Capital of America." Noting that *The New York Times* had "mentioned Mena primarily as the headquarters of the American Rock Garden Society," the *Columbia Journalism Review* in a recent issue dismissed "the conspiracy theories" as of "dubious relevance."

A former Little Rock businessman, Terry Reed, has coauthored with John Cummings a highly controversial book, *Compromised: Clinton, Bush, and the C.I.A.*, which describes a number of covert activities around Mena, including a CIA operation to train pilots and troops for the Nicaraguan Contras, and the collusion of local officials. Both the book and its authors were greeted with derision.

Now, however, a new mass of documentary evidence has come to light regarding just such "dark deeds" -- previously private and secret records that substantiate as never before some of the worst and most portentous suspicions about what went on at Mena, Arkansas, a decade ago.

Given the scope and implications of the Mena story, it may be easy to understand the

media's initial skepticism and reluctance. But it was never so easy to dismiss the testimony and suspicions of some of those close to the matter: Internal Revenue Service Agent Bill Duncan, Arkansas State Police investigator Russell Welch, Arkansas Attorney General J. Winston Bryant, Congressman Bill Alexander, and various other local law-enforcement officials and citizens.

All of these people were convinced by the late eighties that there existed what Bryant termed "credible evidence" of the most serious criminal activity involving Mena between 1981 and 1986. They also believed that the crimes were committed with the acquiescence, if not the complicity, of elements of the US government. But they couldn't seem to get the national media to pay attention.

During the 1992 campaign, outside advisers and aides urged former California governor Jerry Brown to raise the Mena issue against Clinton -- at least to ask why the Arkansas governor had not done more about such serious international crime so close to home. But Brown, too, backed away from the subject. "I'll raise it if the major media break it first," he told aides. "The media will do it, Governor," one of them replied in frustration, "if only you'll raise it."

Mena's obscure airport was thought by the IRS, the FBI, US Customs, and the Arkansas State Police to be a base for Adler Berriman "Barry" Seal, a self-confessed, convicted smuggler whose operations had been linked to the intelligence community. Duncan and Welch both spent years building cases against Seal and others for drug smuggling and money laundering around Mena, only to see their own law-enforcement careers damaged in the process.

What evidence they gathered, they have said in testimony and other public statements, was not sufficiently pursued by the then US attorney for the region, J. Michael Fitzhugh, or by the IRS, Arkansas State Police, and other agencies. Duncan, testifying before the joint investigation by the Arkansas state attorney general's office and the United States Congress in June 1991, said that 29 federal indictments drafted in a Mena-based money-laundering scheme had gone unexplored. Fitzhugh, responding at the time to Duncan's charges, said, "This office has not slowed up any investigation . . . [and] has never been under any pressure in any investigation."

By 1992, to Duncan's and Welch's mounting dismay, several other official inquiries into the alleged Mena connection were similarly ineffectual or were stifled altogether, furthering their suspicions of government collusion and cover-up. In his testimony before Congress, Duncan said the IRS "withdrew support for the operations" and further directed him to "withhold information from Congress and perjure myself."

Duncan later testified that he had never before experienced "anything remotely akin to this type of interference. . . . Alarms were going off," he continued, "and as soon as Mr. Fitzhugh got involved, he was more aggressive in not allowing the subpoenas and in interfering in the investigative process."

State policeman Russell Welch felt he was "probably the most knowledgeable person" regarding the activities at Mena, yet he was not initially subpoenaed to testify before the

grand jury. Welch testified later that the only reason he was ultimately subpoenaed at all was because one of the grand jurors was from Mena and "told the others that if they wanted to know something about the Mena airport, they ought to ask that guy [Welch] out there in the hall."

State Attorney General Bryant, in a 1991 letter to the office of Lawrence Walsh, the independent counsel in the Iran-Contra investigation, wondered "why no one was prosecuted in Arkansas despite a mountain of evidence that Seal was using Arkansas as his principle staging area during the years 1982 through 1985."

What actually went on in the woods of western Arkansas? The question is still relevant for what it may reveal about certain government operations during the time that Reagan and Bush were in the White House and Clinton was governor of Arkansas.

In a mass of startling new documentation -- the more than 2,000 papers gathered by the authors from private and law-enforcement sources in a year-long nationwide search -- answers are found and serious questions are posed.

These newly unearthed documents -- the veritable private papers of Barry Seal -- substantiate at least part of what went on at Mena.

What might be called the Seal archive dates back to 1981, when Seal began his operations at the Intermountain Regional Airport in Mena. The archive, all of it now in our possession, continues beyond February 1986, when Seal was murdered by Colombian assassins after he had testified in federal court in Las Vegas, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami for the US government against leaders of the Medellin drug cartel.

The papers include such seemingly innocuous material as Seal's bank and telephone records; negotiable instruments, promissory notes, and invoices; personal correspondence address and appointment books; bills of sale for aircraft and boats; aircraft registration, and modification work orders.

In addition, the archive also contains personal diaries; handwritten to-do lists and other private notes; secretly tape-recorded conversations; and cryptographic keys and legends for codes used in the Seal operation.

Finally, there are extensive official records: federal investigative and surveillance reports, accounting assessments by the IRS and the DEA, and court proceedings not previously reported in the press -- testimony as well as confidential pre-sentencing memoranda in federal narcotics-trafficking trials in Florida and Nevada -- numerous depositions, and other sworn statements.

The archive paints a vivid portrait not only of a major criminal conspiracy around Mena, but also of the unmistakable shadow of government complicity. Among the new revelations:

Mena, from 1981 to 1985, was indeed one of the centers for international smuggling traffic. According to official IRS and DEA calculations, sworn court testimony, and other corroborative records, the traffic amounted to thousands of kilos of cocaine and heroin and

literally hundreds of millions of dollars in drug profits. According to a 1986 letter from the Louisiana attorney general to then US attorney general Edwin Meese, Seal "smuggled between \$3 billion and \$5 billion of drugs into the US"

Seal himself spent considerable sums to land, base, maintain, and specially equip or refit his aircraft for smuggling. According to personal and business records, he had extensive associations at Mena and in Little Rock, and was in nearly constant telephone contact with Mena when he was not there himself. Phone records indicate Seal made repeated calls to Mena the day before his murder. This was long after Seal, according to his own testimony, was working as an \$800,000-a-year informant for the federal government.

A former member of the Army Special Forces, Seal had ties to the Central Intelligence Agency dating to the early 1970s. He had confided to relatives and others, according to their sworn statements, that he was a CIA operative before and during the period when he established his operations at Mena. In one statement to Louisiana State Police, a Seal relative said, "Barry was into gunrunning and drug smuggling in Central and South America . . . and he had done some time in El Salvadore [sic]." Another then added, "It was true, but at the time Barry was working for the CIA."

In a posthumous jeopardy-assessment case against Seal -- also documented in the archive -- the IRS determined that money earned by Seal between 1984 and 1986 was not illegal because of his "CIA-DEA employment." The only public official acknowledgment of Seal's relationship to the CIA has been in court and congressional testimony, and in various published accounts describing the CIA's installation of cameras in Seal's C-123K transport plane, used in a highly celebrated 1984 sting operation against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

Robert Joura, the assistant special agent in charge of the DEA's Houston office and the agent who coordinated Seal's undercover work, told *The Washington Post* last year that Seal was enlisted by the CIA for one sensitive mission -- providing photographic evidence that the Sandinistas were letting cocaine from Colombia move through Nicaragua. A spokesman for then Senate candidate Oliver North told *The Post* that North had been kept aware of Seal's work through "intelligence sources."

Federal Aviation Administration registration records contained in the archive confirm that aircraft identified by federal and state narcotics agents as in the Seal smuggling operation were previously owned by Air America, Inc., widely reported to have been a CIA proprietary company. Emile Camp, one of Seal's pilots and a witness to some of his most significant dealings, was killed on a mountainside near Mena in 1985 in the unexplained crash of one of those planes that had once belonged to Air America.

According to still other Seal records, at least some of the aircraft in his smuggling fleet, which included a Lear jet, helicopters, and former US military transports, were also outfitted with avionics and other equipment by yet another company in turn linked to Air America.

Among the aircraft flown in and out of Mena was Seal's C-123K cargo plane, christened Fat Lady. The records show that Fat Lady, serial number 54-0679, was sold by Seal months before his death. According to other files, the plane soon found its way to a phantom

company of what became known in the Iran-Contra scandal as "the Enterprise," the CIA-related secret entity managed by Oliver North and others to smuggle illegal weapons to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels. According to former DEA agent Celerino Castillo and others, the aircraft was allegedly involved in a return traffic in cocaine, profits from which were then used to finance more clandestine gunrunning.

F.A.A. records show that in October 1986, the same Fat Lady was shot down over Nicaragua with a load of arms destined for the Contras. Documents found on board the aircraft and seized by the Sandinistas included logs linking the plane with Area 51 -- the nation's top-secret nuclear-weapons facility at the Nevada Test Site. The doomed aircraft was co-piloted by Wallace Blaine "Buzz" Sawyer, a native of western Arkansas, who died in the crash. The admissions of the surviving crew member, Eugene Hasenfus, began a public unraveling of the Iran-Contra episode.

An Arkansas gun manufacturer testified in 1993 in federal court in Fayetteville that the CIA contracted with him to build 250 automatic pistols for the Mena operation. William Holmes testified that he had been introduced to Seal in Mena by a CIA operative, and that he then sold weapons to Seal. Even though he was given a Department of Defense purchase order for guns fitted with silencers, Holmes testified that he was never paid the \$140,000 the government owed him. "After the Hasenfus plane was shot down," Holmes said, "you couldn't find a soul around Mena."

Meanwhile, there was still more evidence that Seal's massive smuggling operation based in Arkansas had been part of a CIA operation, and that the crimes were continuing well after Seal's murder. In 1991 sworn testimony to both Congressman Alexander and Attorney General Bryant, state police investigator Welch recorded that in 1987 he had documented "new activity at the [Mena] airport with the appearance of . . . an Australian business [a company linked with the CIA], and C-130s had appeared. . . ."

At the same time, according to Welch, two FBI agents officially informed him that the CIA "had something going on at the Mena Airport involving Southern Air Transport [another company linked with the CIA] . . . and they didn't want us [the Arkansas State Police] to screw it up like we had the last one."

The hundreds of millions in profits generated by the Seal trafficking via Mena and other outposts resulted in extraordinary banking and business practices in apparent efforts to launder or disperse the vast amounts of illicit money in Arkansas and elsewhere. Seal's financial records show from the early eighties, for example, instances of daily deposits of \$50,000 or more, and extensive use of an offshore foreign bank in the Caribbean, as well as financial institutions in Arkansas and Florida.

According to IRS criminal investigator Duncan, secretaries at the Mena Airport told him that when Seal flew into Mena, "there would be stacks of cash to be taken to the bank and laundered." One secretary told him that she was ordered to obtain numerous cashier's checks, each in an amount just under \$10,000, at various banks in Mena and surrounding communities, to avoid filing the federal Currency Transaction Reports required for all bank transactions that exceed that limit.

Bank tellers testified before a federal grand jury that in November 1982, a Mena airport employee carried a suitcase containing more than \$70,000 into a bank. "The bank officer went down the teller lines handing out the stacks of \$1,000 bills and got the cashier's checks."

Law-enforcement sources confirmed that hundreds of thousands of dollars were laundered from 1981 to 1983 just in a few small banks near Mena, and that millions more from Seal's operation were laundered elsewhere in Arkansas and the nation.

Spanish-language documents in Seal's possession at the time of his murder also indicate that he had accounts throughout Central America and was planning to set up his own bank in the Caribbean.

Additionally, Seal's files suggest a grandiose scheme for building an empire. Papers in his office at the time of his death include references to dozens of companies, all of which had names that began with Royale. Among them: Royale Sports, Royale Television Network, Royale Liquors, Royale Casino, S.A., Royale Pharmaceuticals, Royale Arabians, Royale Seafood, Royale Security, Royale Resorts . . . and on and on.

Seal was scarcely alone in his extensive smuggling operation based in Mena from 1981 to 1986, commonly described in both federal and state law-enforcement files as one of the largest drug-trafficking operations in the United States at the time, if not in the history of the drug trade. Documents show Seal confiding on one occasion that he was "only the transport," pointing to an extensive network of narcotics distribution and finance in Arkansas and other states. After drugs were smuggled across the border, the duffel bags of cocaine would be retrieved by helicopters and dropped onto flatbed trucks destined for various American cities.

In recognition of Seal's significance in the drug trade, government prosecutors made him their chief witness in various cases, including a 1985 Miami trial in absentia of Medellín drug lords; in another 1985 trial of what federal officials regarded as the largest narcotics-trafficking case to date in Las Vegas; and in still a third prosecution of corrupt officials in the Turks and Caicos Islands. At the same time, court records and other documents reveal a studied indifference by government prosecutors to Seal's earlier and ongoing operations at Mena.

In the end, the Seal documents are vindication for dedicated officials in Arkansas like agents Duncan and Welch and local citizens' groups like the Arkansas Committee, whose own evidence and charges take on new gravity -- and also for *The Nation*, *The Village Voice*, the Association of National Security Alumni, the venerable Washington journalists Sarah McClendon and Jack Anderson, Arkansas reporters Rodney Bowers and Mara Leveritt, and others who kept an all-too-authentic story alive amid wider indifference.

But now the larger implications of the newly exposed evidence seem as disturbing as the criminal enormity of his silhouettes. Like his modern freebooter's life, Seal's documents leave the political and legal landscape littered with stark questions.

What, for example, happened to some nine different official investigations into Mena after

1987, 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?

Officials repeatedly invoked national security to quash most of the investigations. Court documents do show clearly that the CIA and the DEA employed Seal during 1984 and 1985 for the Reagan administration's celebrated sting attempt to implicate the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime in cocaine trafficking.

According to a December 1988 Senate Foreign Relations Committee report, "cases were dropped. The apparent reason was that the prosecution might have revealed national-security information, even though all of the crimes which were the focus of the investigation occurred before Seal became a federal informant."

Tax records show that, having assessed Seal posthumously for some \$86 million in back taxes on his earnings from Mena and elsewhere between 1981 and 1983, even the IRS forgave the taxes on hundreds of millions in known drug and gun profits over the ensuing two-year period when Seal was officially admitted to be employed by the government.

To follow the IRS logic, what of the years, crimes, and profits at Mena in the early eighties, before Barry Seal became an acknowledged federal operative, as well as the subsequently reported drug-trafficking activities at Mena even after his murder -- crimes far removed from his admitted cooperation as government informant and witness?

"Joe [name deleted] works for Seal and cannot be touched because Seal works for the CIA," a Customs official said in an Arkansas investigation into drug trafficking during the early eighties. "A CIA or DEA operation is taking place at the Mena airport," an FBI telex advised the Arkansas State Police in August 1987, 18 months after Seal's murder. Welch later testified that a Customs agent told him, "Look, we've been told not to touch anything that has Barry Seal's name on it, just to let it go."

The London Sunday Telegraph recently reported new evidence, including a secret code number, that Seal was also working as an operative of the Defense Intelligence Agency during the period of the gunrunning and drug smuggling.

Perhaps most telling is what is so visibly missing from the voluminous files. In thousands of pages reflecting a man of meticulous organization and planning, Barry Seal seems to have felt singularly and utterly secure -- if not somehow invulnerable -- at least in the ceaseless air transport and delivery into the United States of tons of cocaine for more than five years. In a 1986 letter to the DEA, the commander and deputy commander of narcotics for the Louisiana State Police say that Seal "was being given apparent free rein to import drugs in conjunction with DEA investigations with so little restraint and control on his actions as to allow him the opportunity to import drugs for himself should he have been so disposed."

Seal's personal videotapes, in the authors' possession, show one scene in which he used US Army paratroop equipment, as well as militarylike precision, in his drug-transporting operation. Then, in the middle of the afternoon after a number of dry runs, one of his airplanes dropped a load of several duffel bags attached to a parachute. Within seconds, the

cargo sitting on the remote grass landing strip was retrieved by Seal and loaded onto a helicopter that had followed the low-flying aircraft. "This is the first daylight cocaine drop in the history of the state of Louisiana," Seal narrates on the tape. If the duffel bags seen in the smuggler's home movies were filled with cocaine -- as Seal himself states on tape -- that single load would have been worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Perhaps the videos were not of an actual cocaine drop, but merely the drug trafficker's training video for his smuggling organization, or even a test maneuver. Regardless, the films show a remarkable, fearless invincibility. Barry Seal was not expecting apprehension.

His most personal papers show him all but unconcerned about the very flights and drops that would indeed have been protected or "fixed," according to law-enforcement sources, by the collusion of US intelligence.

In an interview with agent Duncan, Seal brazenly "admitted that he had been a drug smuggler."

If the Seal documents show anything, an attentive reader might conclude, it is that ominous implication of some official sanction. Over the entire episode looms the unmistakable shape of government collaboration in vast drug trafficking and gunrunning, and in a decade-long cover-up of criminality.

Government investigators apparently had no doubt about the magnitude of those crimes. According to Customs sources, Seal's operations at Mena and other bases were involved in the export of guns to Bolivia, Argentina, Peru, and Brazil, as well as to the Contras, and the importation of cocaine from Colombia to be sold in New York, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, and other cities, as well as in Arkansas itself.

Duncan and his colleagues knew that Seal's modus operandi included dumping most of the drugs in other southern states, so that what Arkansas agents witnessed in Mena was but a tiny fragment of an operation staggering in its magnitude. Yet none of the putative inquiries seems to have made a serious effort to gather even a fraction of the available Seal documents now assembled and studied by the authors.

Finally, of course, there are somber questions about then governor Clinton's own role vis-a-vis the crimes of Mena.

Clinton has acknowledged learning officially about Mena only in April 1988, though a state police investigation had been in progress for several years. As the state's chief executive, Clinton often claimed to be fully abreast of such inquiries. In his one public statement on the matter as governor, in September 1991 he spoke of that investigation finding "linkages to the federal government," and "all kinds of questions about whether he [Seal] had any links to the CIA . . . and if that backed into the Iran-Contra deal."

But then Clinton did not offer further support for any inquiry, "despite the fact," as Bill Plante and Michael Singer of *CBS News* have written, "that a Republican administration was apparently sponsoring a Contra-aid operation in his state and protecting a smuggling ring that flew tons of cocaine through Arkansas."

As recently as March 1995, Arkansas state trooper Larry Patterson testified under oath, according to *The London Sunday Telegraph*, that he and other officers "discussed repeatedly in Clinton's presence" the "large quantities of drugs being flown into the Mena airport, large quantities of money, large quantities of guns," indicating that Clinton may have known much more about Seal's activities than he has admitted.

Moreover, what of the hundreds of millions generated by Seal's Mena contraband? The Seal records reveal his dealings with at least one major Little Rock bank. How much drug money from him or his associates made its way into criminal laundering in Arkansas's notoriously freewheeling financial institutions and bond houses, some of which are reportedly under investigation by the Whitewater special prosecutor for just such large, unaccountable infusions of cash and unexplained transactions?

"The state offers an enticing climate for traffickers," IRS agents had concluded by the end of the eighties, documenting a "major increase" in the amount of large cash and bank transactions in Arkansas after 1985, despite a struggling local economy.

Meanwhile, prominent backers of Clinton's over the same years -- including bond broker and convicted drug dealer Dan Lasater and chicken tycoon Don Tyson -- have themselves been subjects of extensive investigative and surveillance files by the DEA or the FBI similar to those relating to Seal, including allegations of illegal drug activity that Tyson has recently acknowledged publicly and denounced as "totally false." "This may be the first president in history with such close buddies who have NADDIS numbers," says one concerned law-enforcement official, referring to the Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Intelligence System numbers assigned those under protracted investigation for possible drug crimes.

The Seal documents are still more proof that for Clinton, the Arkansas of the eighties and the company he kept there will not soon disappear as a political or even constitutional liability.

"I've always felt we never got the whole story there," Clinton said in 1991.

Indeed. But as president of the United States, he need no longer wonder -- and neither should the nation. On the basis of the Seal documents (copies of which are being given to the Whitewater special prosecutor in any case), the president should ask immediately for a full report on the matter from the CIA, the DEA, the FBI, the Justice Department, and other relevant agencies of his own administration -- including the long-buried evidence gathered by IRS agent Duncan and Arkansas state police investigator Welch. President Clinton should also offer full executive-branch cooperation with a reopened congressional inquiry, and expose the subject fully for what it says of both the American past and future.

Seal saw himself as a patriot to the end. He had dictated his own epitaph for his grave in Baton Rouge: "A rebel adventurer the likes of whom in previous days made America great." In a sense his documents may now render that claim less ironic than it seems.

The tons of drugs that Seal and his associates brought into the country, officials agree, affected tens of thousands of lives at the least, and exacted an incalculable toll on American society. And for the three presidents, the enduring questions of political scandal are once again apt: What did they know about Mena? When did they know it? Why didn't they do

anything to stop it?

The crimes of Mena were real. That much is now documented beyond doubt. The only remaining issues are how far they extended, and who was responsible.

Arkansas Drug Exposé Misses *The Post*

by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in Washington

29 January 1995

The London Sunday Telegraph

It might almost be called *The Greatest Story Never Told*. The article was typeset and scheduled to run in today's edition of *The Washington Post*.

It had the enthusiastic backing of the editors and staff of the Sunday Outlook section, where it was to appear after eleven weeks of soul-searching and debate.

Lawyers had gone through the text line by line. Supporting documents had been examined with meticulous care. The artwork and illustrations had been completed. The contract with the authors had been signed. Leonard Downie, the executive editor of the newspaper, had given his final assent.

But on Thursday morning the piece was cancelled. It had been delayed before -- so often, in fact, that its non-appearance was becoming the talk of Washington -- but this time the authors were convinced that the story was doomed and would never make it into the pages of what is arguably the world's most powerful political newspaper. They have withdrawn it in disgust, accusing the Post of a cover-up of the biggest scandal in American history.

In stark contrast, the managing editor, Robert Kaiser, left a message on my answering machine saying that there was really nothing to "this non-existent story". In a subsequent conversation, he dismissed the article as a reprise of rumours and allegations. "I am confident that it doesn't have any great new revelations," he said.

Others are less confident. A copy of the article passed to *The Sunday Telegraph* -- not, it should be stressed, by its authors -- appears to be absolutely explosive.

Based on an archive of more than 2,000 documents, it says that western Arkansas was a centre of international drug smuggling in the early 1980s -- perhaps even the headquarters of the biggest drug trafficking operation in history. It asks whether hundreds of millions of dollars in profits made their way "into criminal laundering in Arkansas's notoriously

free-wheeling financial institutions and bond houses."

The activities were mixed up with a US intelligence operation at the Mena airport in Arkansas that was smuggling weapons to the Nicaraguan Contras.

Bill Clinton is not specifically accused of involvement, but he was Governor of Arkansas at the time. The piece also notes that some of his prominent backers had been the subject of extensive investigation by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the FBI, and had been assigned files in NADDIS -- the Narcotics & Dangerous Drugs Intelligence System.

The article makes clear that the alleged scandal is not confined to the activities of the Arkansas political machine and Mr. Clinton. It embraces the highest levels of the federal government over several years.

"For three Presidents of both parties -- Messrs. Reagan, Bush and Clinton -- the old enduring questions of political scandal are once again apt," the article concludes. "What did they know about Mena? When did they know it? Why didn't they do anything to stop it?"

It is clear that *The Washington Post* took the article extremely seriously. It was to be run at full length -- roughly 4,000 words, taking up several pages in an almost unprecedented spread across the Sunday Outlook section.

The authors, Dr. Roger Morris and Sally Denton, were told that they were being offered the highest fee ever paid for a contribution to Outlook. They are veteran investigators with established reputations. Morris worked for the National Security Council staff at the White House during the Johnson and Nixon Administrations. He has taught at Harvard and has written a series of acclaimed books on foreign policy.

Denton is the former head of news agency *UPI*'s special investigative unit, and is the author of the *Bluegrass Conspiracy*, which exposed the involvement of Kentucky political and law enforcement figures in an international arms and drug smuggling ring.

Their research is concentrated on the activities of Barry Seal, a legendary smuggler who operated from a company called Rich Mountain Aviation in the Ouachita Mountains west of Little Rock.

They have his bank and telephone records, invoices, appointment books, handwritten notes, personal diaries and secretly-recorded conversations, as well as extensive police records and surveillance reports.

Among other allegations they make are:

- Seal was using his fleet of aircraft to export weapons to Bolivia, Argentina and Brazil in addition to the Nicaraguan Contras.
- The planes were carrying cocaine back up to Arkansas on the return journey for sale in New York, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis and other cities.
- Seal had ties to the CIA and felt that he could smuggle with impunity.
- Nine separate attempts to investigate Mena, by both state and federal authorities, were

stymied.

"Over the entire episode looms the unmistakable dark shape of US government complicity in vast drug trafficking and gun-running," the article says.

The broad picture is not new to readers of *The Sunday Telegraph*, which published a story making some of the same points on October 9th last year. ["Smugglers Linked to Contra Arms Deals," by Evans-Pritchard]. The *Wall Street Journal* has also done original reporting on the subject.

Morris and Denton have added fresh evidence but the real political importance of the piece is the fact that it was going to run in *The Washington Post*. The *Post* still sets the agenda in Washington and guides many US press and TV reporters on what they are supposed to think.

Up to now, the *Post* has conducted no more than desultory investigation of the Mena affair and its reporters have persistently treated it as a ludicrous conspiracy theory.

The treatment of the article by Morris and Denton will fuel claims from both Left and Right that *The Washington Post* is engaged in active suppression of the news to protect either Clinton or the CIA or both.

"It's down to naked politics now," Morris told *The Sunday Telegraph*. "We've jumped through every hoop. We've given them everything they've asked for. They can't say the story's not credible now."

In the end the Mena story is going to come out, with the courts doing the work of the press. A lawsuit in Arkansas is being used to determine the role of both Clinton and the US federal government in dirty tricks linked to Mena.

The case has already reached a crucial phase. A high-powered team of lawyers has issued subpoenas to key witnesses who will be compelled to testify under oath. Sworn depositions will rain down like confetti over the next few months.

And if the great American newspapers do not want to cover it, the radio talk shows certainly will.

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