



Cocaine planes make a "Bogotá Connection"

Posted by **Bill Conroy** (</users/bill-conroy>) - April 11, 2008 at 8:18 pm

Federal Aviation Administration records obtained recently by Narco News offer some razor sharp evidence that a fat line of connections in the ongoing cocaine plane mystery leads right back to the nose of the U.S. government.

At the time a Gulfstream II jet, packed with nearly four tons of cocaine, crashed in Mexico’s Yucatan on Sept. 24 of last year, the owners of that jet were Clyde O’Connor and Greg Smith — both pilots who hail from Florida.

Both men have since vanished like vapor in the wake of that ill-fated Gulfstream II’s misadventure, but the paper trail has now caught up to them. The Gulfsteam II jet (with the tail number N987SA) has been linked to past use in the CIA’s terrorist rendition program, according to **media reports** (<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/20104.html>) and an investigation by the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**. (<http://www.narconews.com/Issue48/article2941.html>)

And now, via FAA and other documents obtained by Narco News, both Smith and O’Connor have been connected to yet another jet that has been used by U.S. government agencies (including the DEA, FBI and CIA) to advance covert operations targeting Latin America.

That jet is a Hawker business-class cruiser with the tail number N230TS. FAA records show that between Feb. 9, 2001, and June 16, 2005, Clyde O’Connor bought and sold this Hawker jet a total of five times through a series of three companies in which he is listed as an officer or “member.” In other words, O’Connor was essentially moving the Hawker jet back and forth between companies he controlled, according to the FAA records.

Those companies are the following:

Shewcon LLC of Miami, Fla.; Edax Investment Corp. of Nassau, Bahamas; and Core Investments of Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. (See link to the FAA records **here**. (</userfiles/70/FAArecords.PDF>))

This is the same Clyde O’Connor who, according to a **bill of sale**, (<http://www.narconews.com/docs/donnablue-sale.pdf>) was listed along with Greg Smith as the owner of the Gulfstream II cocaine jet when it crashed in Mexico in late September 2007.

The Bogotá Connection

The man at the center of this latest intrigue over the cocaine planes is a known CIA asset named Baruch Vega.

Pleadings (/userfiles/70/Judge_s.ruling.pdf) filed as part of a DEA agent’s wrongful termination case brought before the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board in 2004 describe Vega as a “FCI-CI or Foreign Counterintelligence Service Confidential Informant, who had been brought in by the CIA.”

Vega claims that between 1997 and 2000 an individual named Greg Smith — the same Greg Smith listed on the bill of sale for the Gulfsteam II — was brought in by the FBI to pilot some 25 to 30 flights between Florida and Latin America as part of a U.S. government-sanctioned operation targeting Colombian narco-traffickers. Vega played a key role in that operation, which involved the DEA and FBI as well as the CIA — all using Vega as their common asset.

Vega also concedes that he is not really certain whom Smith worked for at the time, despite the FBI introduction. “He could have been working with CIA or U.S. Customs. I don’t really know,” Vega says.

In a **lawsuit** (</story/2007/9/24/0627/84519>) Vega filed in September last year in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims in Washington, D.C., he claims that the U.S. government owes him \$28.5 million for the services he provided as part of that U.S.-government-sanctioned operation, which helped the U.S. government net 114 Colombian narco-trafficking targets.

From Vega’s lawsuit, filed on Sept. 21:

About Bill Conroy Biography:

Narcosphere@aol.com
(<mailto:Narcosphere@aol.com>)

Personal Website: (</>)
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About Bill Conroy

Biography

Narcosphere@aol.com
(<mailto:Narcosphere@aol.com>)

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In or about 1996 and 1997, [Vega] became a documented confidential informant for the United States of America, specifically, two federal law enforcement agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") and later, for the Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA").

... Mr. Vega was not a traditional informant and his methodology was anything but parochial. Mr. Vega engineered a plan/program that proved to be innovative and very successful.

Mr. Vega would play and later, in fact did play, the role of an intermediary (or broker) between Colombian drug traffickers, some then unknown (and thus, unidentified) to U.S. law enforcement, others already identified (by their real names or nicknames as "suspects") by U.S. law enforcement and, others already indicted, for drug trafficking and/or money laundering charges in various federal districts across the United States of America.

Vega’s plan, as explained in his pleadings, involved what might best be described as an elaborate U.S. government-sanctioned extortion scheme. Vega, “at great danger to himself,” approached Colombian narco-traffickers and convinced them to “negotiate their criminal exposure” with the U.S. government rather than waiting to be indicted, arrested and extradited, Vega claims in his litigation.

Vega leased the Hawker jet (tail number N230TS) used for these narco-trafficker recruiting missions through Smith’s Florida-based company, called Aero Group Jets, according to the MSPB pleadings.

However, Vega ran into a problem in the course of his work in Latin America. He and a Florida team of DEA agents involved in the operation uncovered a pattern of corruption in the U.S. Embassy in Colombia.

This corruption, since dubbed the **Bogotá Connection**, (<http://www.narconews.com/bogota>) was revealed in a series of government documents uncovered previously by Narco News, including an internal U.S. Justice Department document known as the **Kent memo**, (<http://www.narconews.com/docs/ThomasKentMemo.pdf>) which advances detailed allegations of a criminal conspiracy involving corrupt U.S. law enforcers who operated in league with corrupt Colombian police, key Colombian narco-traffickers and paramilitary groups.

After Vega and the Florida DEA agents reported this alleged corruption in early 2000, they became the targets of a criminal investigation themselves (prompted by **charges made by the top DEA agent in Bogotá** (<http://www.narconews.com/Issue40/article1662.html>) at the time) and the alleged corruption in the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá was subsequently covered up, according to the Kent memo and DEA sources.

Vega was arrested in late March 2000 and spent 52 days in jail before he was released. The criminal investigation against him and the Florida agents was eventually dropped for lack of evidence. However, Vega was later subjected to an IRS investigation, which resulted in a misdemeanor charge for failing to file his 1998 tax return on time. In the course of the ordeal, Vega was outed as a CIA asset.

Paper shuffle

In late 1999, Vega made an offer to purchase the Hawker jet from its owner, a Florida company called Lonestar Aviation Inc. Smith, through Aero Group Jets, served only as a chartering service for the jet, but did not hold the title to the aircraft, Vega says.

However, about a month prior to his arrest, and while he was flying in the Hawker on missions for the U.S. government, Vega alleges the jet was essentially stolen out from under him, despite some \$200,000 he claims had been deposited toward the lease/purchase deal.

Documents filed with the FAA include both a lease/purchase contract for the Hawker, allegedly signed by Vega, as well as a lease termination agreement, also allegedly signed by Vega and dated Feb. 9, 2001. Vega insists he never signed either of those documents and alleges those documents contain forged signatures.

At the request of Narco News, two federal law enforcement veterans with experience in examining handwriting — though neither of them handwriting experts — reviewed the signatures on the FAA documents, as well as Vega’s signature on the original “offer to purchase” document, which Vega provided to Narco News and which he says contains his real signature.

One of the law enforcers concluded that all of the signatures likely belonged to Vega while the other law enforcer concluded that the signatures on the FAA documents appeared to be penned by an individual (or individuals) other than Vega.

As a result, absent expert analysis, you, kind reader, will have to make your own determination as to Vega's veracity on this matter. The signatures can be found at this

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[link \[FAA documents with Vega’s signature\] \(/userfiles/70/SignaturesFAA.PDF\)](#) and at this [link \[the “offer to purchase” document with Vega’s verified signature\]. \(/userfiles/70/OffertoPurchase.pdf\)](#)

Vega clams that after he was released from jail in the summer of 2000, he attempted to catch up with the Hawker jet, hoping to clean up the loose ends on the lease/purchase deal. However, he alleges that an FBI agent contacted him and ordered him to “stay away” from the Hawker. Vega says he had little choice but to comply at that time since he was still in the scopes of a criminal investigation.

Vega contends he had no knowledge of what happened to the jet after that point, until Narco News contacted him with the information contained in the FAA documents.

The importance of this small matter of signatures boils down to whether Vega was an active participant in moving the Hawker jet to O’Connor’s various and apparent shell companies, or whether he is, as he claims, a victim of some larger conspiracy.

“This is too coincidental for all these same players to be involved in this [the Hawker and the Gulfstream II jets],” Vega says.

More coincidences

Smith and his partner O’Connor purchased the Gulfstream II jet, according to FAA records and the bill of sale, about a week before its cocaine payload unexpectedly hit the ground in Mexico’s Yucatan last fall. The seller was a Florida company called Donna Blue Aircraft Inc. — which is owned by two Brazilians, one of whom is Joao Malago, who also is a business partner in a company called **Atlantic Alcohol** (<http://www.narconews.com/Issue50/article3011.html>) with an individual named Larry Peters, owner of Florida-based Skyway Aircraft Inc.

Atlantic Alcohol, which has operations in Brazil, the British West Indies and the Dominican Republic, is based at 341 8th Ave. Southeast in St. Petersburg, Fla., according to Dun & Bradstreet, a popular business research service. That’s the same address listed on the Web site for Larry Peters’ **Skyway Aircraft Inc.** (<http://www.skywayaircraft.com>)

Skyway Aircraft Inc. sold a Beech 200 aircraft to a Venezuelan purchaser in October 2004, about a month before it was **apprehended in a Nicaraguan cotton field** (<http://www.narconews.com/Issue49/article2989.html>) linked to a payload of some 1,100 kilos of cocaine. The Beech 200 was found in Nicaragua bearing a false tail number (N168D), which FAA records show is registered to a North Carolina company called Devon Holding and Leasing Inc.

According to press reports and an investigation conducted by the **European Parliament** (</userfiles/70/WorkingPaper.pdf>) into the CIA’s terrorist rendition program, Devon Holding is a CIA shell company and N168D is a tail number to a **CIA aircraft.** (<http://cryptome.org/cia-plane-nc.htm>)

In addition, Skyway Aircraft Inc. in December 2006 sold a Cessna Conquest II aircraft to a Venezuelan purchaser allegedly linked to a drug trafficking organization, according to a **pending criminal case** (</userfiles/70/020508benavides.pdf>) filed in October 2007 in federal court in Miami. Between October 2003 and January 2008, a total of **nine aircraft** (</userfiles/70/Skyway.FAA.pdf>) were registered to Skyway Aircraft Inc. just prior to being exported to Venezuelan purchasers, including the Beech 200 and Conquest II, FAA records show.

Information on where the Hawker jet was during the four years that O’Connor’s various companies owned it was not available. However, in June 2005, O’Connor’s Core Investments sold the Hawker to a company called Dodson International Parts Inc. of Rantoul, Kansas, **FAA records show.** (</userfiles/70/Dodson.PDF>)

Dodson emerged from a Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization in December 2004, **court records show,** (</userfiles/70/DodsonInternational.decree.pdf>) and lists as one of its affiliates a company called Dodson Aviation. The president of both companies is Robert L. Dodson Jr., according to the **bankruptcy court records.** (</userfiles/70/DodsonInternational.bankruptcy1.pdf>)

Dodson Aviation made headlines back in 2004 in relation to another jet that it sold to some African purchasers.

The **Kansas City Star** (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2004/040311-seized-plane.htm>) reported at the time:

A Rantoul, Kan., firm says it faxed to the American Embassy in South Africa on Wednesday sale documents for an airliner seized by Zimbabwe authorities claiming it ferried mercenaries.

The nearly 40-year-old plane was seized by President Robert Mugabe's forces on Sunday. The government says that instead of carrying just a crew of seven as claimed, the plane had 64 persons aboard along with supplies that might be

construed as military material.

A tail number from the plane suggested that it was registered in the United States to Dodson Aviation in Rantoul. The company, however, said the federal registry is lagging behind its sale of the Boeing 727-100 turbo jet.

Company director Robert Dodson Sr. said the sale was completed March 1, after weeks of negotiations with Logo Logistics Co., a firm he believed to be a South African diamond mining company.

It’s worth noting what the online investigative publication **TalkingPointsMemo** (<http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/002678.php>) had to say about Dodson’s plane mishap at the time:

If you've been reading the news the last few days you may have noticed this odd and somewhat mysterious story of a US-registered cargo plane loaded with 64 "mercernaries" and various military equipment which was impounded Sunday night at Harare International Airport in Zimbabwe "after its owners had made a false declaration of its cargo and crew."

When asked about it on Monday, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said "We have no indication this aircraft is connected to the U.S. government."

The comment from the State Department is quite revealing, since it appears this whole cocaine planes mystery might well be a simple case of planes flying quite purposefully with “no indication.”

Stay tuned

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Submitted on April 13th, 2008 by Don Henry Ford Jr. (/users/don-henry-ford-jr)

the more they stay the same.

You are to commended for all your hard work, Bill.

Reply (/Comment/Reply/2142/2169)

The comment from the State (/notebook/bill-conroy/2008/04/cocaine-planes-make-a-bogot%C3%A1-connection#comment-15643)

Submitted on September 28th, 2008 by Sohbet (http://www.bolcasohbet.net) (not verified)

The comment from the State Department is quite revealing, since it appears this whole cocaine planes mystery might well be a simple case of planes flying quite purposefully with “no indication.”

Reply (/Comment/Reply/2142/15643)

I could have bet that the (/notebook/bill-conroy/2008/04/cocaine-planes-make-a-bogot%C3%A1-connection#comment-18972)

Submitted on October 26th, 2008 by Drug Detox (http://chronicchicktalk.com/2008/09/29/helping-a-parent-recover-from-addiction/) (not verified)

I could have bet that the mysterious cocaine planes have a link to the government. Think about the fact that things haven't changed much lately, at least not for better, with the drug dealing. It's obvious that government doesn't really want to do something about it because they earn some money from elling cocaine.

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