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SUBJECT Frank Terpil, Part I

**BOB EDWARDS:** Today we begin a four-part series profiling Frank Terpil, ex-CIA officer and international arms dealer. Charged with a variety of crimes, including an assassination conspiracy and running a terrorist training school, Terpil faces a 53-year prison sentence. He's been a fugitive for the past three years.

Three months ago, reporter Jim Hogan got a telephone call from Terpil. He was still hiding and wanted to talk. The two had met earlier when Hogan was working on a television documentary about Terpil and his partner Edwin P. Wilson. But right after the TV taping, Terpil disappeared. His wife said he'd been kidnapped.

Terpil now spends his time in Eastern Europe and the Caribbean. He arranged a meeting with Hogan, and these interviews appear in Penthouse magazine this month. The interviews are also part of this report from Jim Hogan.

**JIM HOGAN:** Three years ago Frank Terpil, an arms dealer and former CIA officer, was having coffee with clients in a New York City hotel. Suddenly the doors burst open, the police rushed in with shotguns, and his clients revealed themselves to be undercover police. Terpil was indicted on charges of unlawfully conspiring to sell ten thousand submachine guns and charged with providing samples of his wares to undercover detectives.

While comfortable in dealing with Third World dictators, such as Libya's Qaddafi and Uganda's Amin, Terpil feared the

judgment of 12 average citizens. Released on bail, he awaited the trial for months, his nervousness mounting. Some three days before the trial was to begin, he sought reassurance from his attorneys.

FRANK TERPIL: Even my own lawyers told me, "Now we've got a problem. Definitely, when you show up tomorrow," which was September 5th, said, "show up on Monday, they're going to incarcerate you. You are not going to be released on further bail. And we're going to have to take it from there."

So it seemed to me it was a one-act play at that point.

HOGAN: Terpil fled the United States on a stolen passport, leaving his wife, his children, his home, a small office building, and a multimillion-dollar income tax lien behind. Finding haven in Damascus and then in Beirut, he set about rebuilding his life. He purchased a restaurant near the American Embassy and was preparing for its grand opening when Syrian intelligence agents put guns to his head and forced him into a waiting Mercedes. The fugitive had been kidnapped, taken back to Damascus. He found a dungeon awaiting him.

TERPIL: The initial accusation, of course, was that I was a spy for the CIA. Then they thought I was a spy for Mosad. Then they went back and they questioned me, or attempted to question me about my travels in the Middle East, why I was always there.

So, what they tried to do was really fabricate a case that I was a CIA agent.

HOGAN: Which is not true.

TERPIL: It's not true. But the more I denied it, the more they were convinced that that had been the case.

HOGAN: While the prison conditions were harsh, and Terpil claimed that he was tortured, he later joked that the most upsetting thing of all was that his jailers had had the temerity to confiscate his Rolex wristwatch.

TERPIL: That was my -- that was the heartbreaking thing. They stripped me of my Rolex, which denied me -- because of the conditions of the prison, I didn't know what time it was, what day it was, how long I was there. I attempted to keep track of time by counting the meals.

HOGAN: In fact, he had been in prison for exactly six months when, as suddenly as he had been seized, he was released.

Blindfolded, he was driven from Damascus and pushed out of a moving car on the road to Beirut.

✓ TERPIL: I probably looked like a thinner version of Howard Hughes, but a filthier version at the point. Because at that time, I had not had a shower since late December.

Yeah. I went from size 44 waist to 32.

✓ HOGAN: It was late May 1982. No sooner had Terpil settled into his apartment in Beirut than, as he explained with tongue-in-cheek:

✓ TERPIL: The hell-inspired Zionists who sought to destroy world tranquillity broke my bubble in Beirut with their artillery.

HOGAN: The Israeli invasion had a silver lining, however. At least it did from Frank Terpil's point of view.

✓ TERPIL: The initial reaction, believe it or not, was one of relief, one of elation, because very few people leave Syrian prisons alive, and those that do have a high morality rate on the street. I had anticipated it would only be a matter of time before the Syrians would come down with one of their assassination squads and attempt to get me again.

The Syrians were busy trying to fight the Israelis, or actually trying to preserve themselves. They weren't worried about me at this time.

HOGAN: Hunted by more sides than one, the fugitive gun-runner was caught in the crossfire between East and West Beirut. Car-bombs exploded in the streets beneath his penthouse apartment, while artillery shells demolished buildings nearby. It was a vicious battle. And according to Terpil, it was also a cynical experiment.

✓ TERPIL: Beirut was a testing ground for live experiments on the latest developments of U.S. ordnance. For instance, the vacuum bomb, which they felt was a major breakthrough in bombs.

✓ I'll give you an example of what a vacuum bomb is. A vacuum is an ordnance device dropped from an aircraft which explodes above the target. The causing air rush implodes --implodes the building or the target, causing no damage to the surrounding area, but killing everything within that building.

✓ They killed 283 people, mainly to prove that the vacuum bomb was a feasible weapon.

And now, what differentiates myself from the Pentagon sales office, except they've got access to much more material than I do? My material was basically on a one-to-one basis. Their material was in mega-units

HOGAN: He had escaped from the U.S. and, he suspected, from a Syrian assassination squad. But how did he escape the Israelis in Beirut?

TERPIL: The PLO. I had the fighter's uniform. I had my kaffiyeh, my uniform. I had my AK. I looked like a -- sunglasses, of course.

HOGAN: Had your Rolex?

TERPIL: My Rolex was -- I had my uniform buttoned down over the Rolex. Not too many PLO were wearing Rolexes that day.

HOGAN: Blending into the ranks of the PLO, Terpil managed his escape from Beirut under the eyes of the U.S. Marines, taking a freighter from the port and eventually finding his way to a tranquil beach in the Caribbean. There, he talked about his life as a fugitive and his need to carry a gun.

TERPIL: It's not really -- it's not a cowboy atmosphere. I'm not a cowboy. But I'm not going back. I'm not going back and negotiate a 53-year sentence.

HOGAN: In speaking with Terpil, it occurred to me that the former CIA communications technician had finally become the spook that he'd always imagined. In earlier years, he had prided himself on his respectability, while at the same time devouring the novels of Robert Ludlum and John LeCarre.

Today, Terpil is the central character in a real-life pulp novel of his own making. And as he is the first to admit, it's a dangerous book to be in.

EDWARDS: Tomorrow, a report on how Frank Terpil sold the skills he learned as a CIA officer.