

Agent Exposes Secret Mission

It was in March that *CAIB* first heard from Scott Barnes—a former police informer, undercover cop, drug enforcement agent, and military policeman. Barnes, only 28, had spent the last nine years in such marginal work, from the time he was still in high school in Redondo Beach, California, near Los Angeles. Now he had a shocking, almost unbelievable, tale to tell. He had given his story, he said, to ABC-TV and to Jack Anderson but neither had used it. After waiting weeks, on the advice of “a friend at the Pentagon” he contacted *CovertAction*.

Barnes said that in October and November 1981 he was one of a team of six Americans who were sent into Laos from Thailand by the CIA. Their mission, they thought, was to locate and if possible rescue American prisoners of war held since the final days of the Vietnam War. This mission, Barnes said, had the cooperation of a Member of Congress, was coordinated by a former war hero now working undercover for the CIA, and was directed by the CIA Chief of Station in Bangkok and his predecessor, now living in Vienna, Virginia.

As Barnes described it, the team did locate two “Caucasians,” apparently Americans captured in Laos. But they appeared “recently” captured. Moreover, after the team reported their find, noting that rescue seemed difficult, they were ordered to try to kill the two captives. The team refused, disbanded the mission, and returned to the U.S. They never intended to discuss what had really happened. But the only explanation for the incredible orders, Barnes thought, was that the Americans were involved in planting false evidence of the use of yellow rain. The government was afraid the Laotians would exploit this, perhaps in a show trial.

Barnes would not have spoken out at all, he says, but for the fact that the coordinator of the mission, James “Bo” Gritz, a former Green Beret Colonel, started giving newspaper interviews in December and January, telling a very different story from what Barnes says was the truth. Barnes then decided to approach ABC—some six weeks before he called *CAIB*.

CAIB interviewed Barnes several times, at length. A transcript of a recording of one interview was prepared and, with a press release from *CAIB*, circulated to the media in April. We found it very puzzling, to say the least, that the media had not carried Barnes’s story. Even if they could not prove it, even if they did not believe it, the allegations alone would be news. We later learned that the media insisted they needed more “confirmation,” which did not stop them from running with the Libyan “hit squad” fabrication, nor prevent them from playing up Bo Gritz’s side of the story.

CAIB’s widely distributed press release moved a number of journalists to contact the key figures in Barnes’s tale, as well as Pentagon and CIA sources. Most denied a lot that Barnes had to say; almost all denied the key assertions—that the mission was official, that Americans did go into Laos, and most importantly that there were assassination orders from the CIA in Virginia. But the denials were not consistent. One person, for example, denied that the mission had used phony cards identifying the team as Congressional aides; another said there was such a mission but it did not go into Laos; another said the mission did go into Laos, but it was a privately sponsored, not a CIA, operation. Bo Gritz at first denied knowing Barnes, denied giving him any support, denied meeting with him and exiled Lao General Vang Pao at a Congressman’s office, all denials he later retracted. Daniel Arnold, the former CIA Chief in Bangkok—now president of Tashkent Associates in Vienna—denied any role in such a mission. As he told a *Daily World* reporter, “Because I was a former CIA officer people seem to think we are an unscrupulous bunch of rogues who would undertake such a monstrous plot . . .” But Arnold did not deny his former high Agency position, nor did he deny that he forwarded messages from Lao rebels in Thailand to Vang Pao, now living in Montana, messages brought to him by Barnes.

Arnold’s name was in the news in May when stories surfaced that career diplomat Morton Abramowitz had been blocked from accepting the offer of Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. One of those “widely reported to be involved,” according to the *Washington Post*, was Arnold, “who was CIA station chief in Bangkok for about a year during Abramowitz’s tenure as ambassador.” Arnold denied any friction while the two were both posted to Bangkok, but said they “quarreled in late 1980 over his return to Bangkok as a private consultant after retiring from the CIA.” Arnold, in fact, is now a registered, paid agent for the Thai government.

Kevin Cody, editor of the *Easy Rider* in Hermosa Beach, California, took the *CAIB* press release seriously. His paper covers the district represented by conservative Republican Robert Dornan—the Congressman named by Barnes. Cody interviewed most of the key people and published a lengthy article, which he has given *CAIB* permission to reprint. As he notes, no one, despite all the denials, has been able to show that Scott Barnes is lying. Week by week more of Barnes’s narrative is confirmed.

Early on we received a telephone call from “John,” who confirmed all of Barnes’s story, but who said he was afraid to go public. John—possibly John Akins, who Barnes says was one of the six on his mission—has never called back.

Shortly before going to press we received a Mailgram from Vienna, Virginia, from a name not listed by the telephone company at that address, advising us that we would never understand completely what "TF157-Bohica" was all about. "Operation Bohica" was the codename Barnes said was given to the mission. But the reference to Task Force 157, the secret Navy-CIA cover operation for which fugitive Edwin Wilson worked, was a new piece in the puzzle.

And most surprising of all has been the mysterious death of Jerry Daniels in Bangkok, described below. Daniels, who worked with Lao exiles and rebels, expressed his disbelief to journalists of the yellow rain evidence touted so much by the State Department. His mysterious death—

not, apparently, the first such strange demise at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok—adds credence to the can of worms which Barnes seems to have opened. Moreover, as we began to hear about the Daniels case at *CAIB* we received a telephone threat, to "stay away from the Daniels investigation."

We are convinced that only the tip of the iceberg has been exposed at this time. We hope that these articles will generate further investigations and that more people with first hand information will come forward. What follows are: Excerpts from *CAIB*'s interview with Scott Barnes; Kevin Cody's *Easy Rider* article; and Ellen Ray's article on the Jerry Daniels case.

Excerpts from CAIB- Scott Barnes Interview

March 28, 1982

I was over in Hawaii to visit a friend who was sick. An ex-SOG [Secret Operating Group] operator got in touch with me about this proposal, which we all thought was a rescue proposal. Bo Gritz got in touch with me through the SOG guys who had told him that I knew Vang Pao. Bo Gritz was under cover, pretending to work for Hughes. He said that he was involved in Operation Velvet Hammer and that the government came in and asked him to publicly step down so they could secretly go in there [Laos] and try to verify via SR-71 photos and some reconnaissance groups, and so he did that in June of eighty-one, and then General Aaron out of the Pentagon has asked him to prepare for an "invasion into Laos."

An invasion by whom?

An invasion by American special forces. And he said it would be a three-team crossing, and he had ordered some very sophisticated weapons, contacts, and he asked for a meeting with General Vang Pao, so I arranged that, and he asked for a meeting with Congressman Bob Dornan [Rep.-Calif.] and I arranged that.

Bo wanted these meetings, because the Agency figured it'd be a good cover to use Congressman Dornan. We had some phony business cards made up with our names, that we were staff aides to Congressman Dornan. That way,

while down there, we could claim political asylum if we got caught at any of the cross-border checks.

Did Dornan know all about this?

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

And he cooperated with it?

Oh, absolutely. He set up a meeting with General David Jones, and was conferring with General Jones and President Reagan on the matter.

Do you know if other Members of Congress knew about it?

No others. Nobody else knew. Nobody. We dubbed it Operation Bohica. And then in October he arranged for some Agency aides to come out and some Green Berets, and we met in Westchester [California].

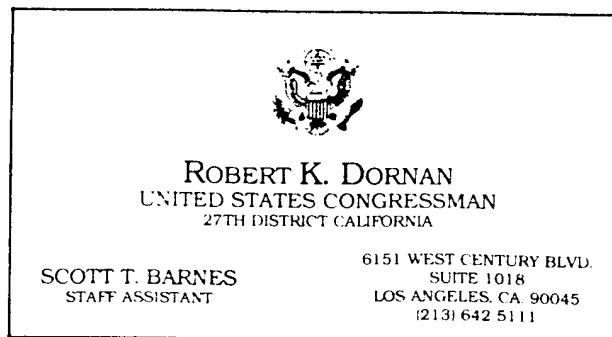
How many people were there when you met?

There were six, six Americans, and there were four others that were shadowing us to make sure we weren't followed or we didn't back out, and I never met them. I don't know who they were.

The six, were they all former Green Berets?

All but one. One was out of Ft. Meade, Maryland. He was an intelligence analyst. So then Bo said that we got the approval from the Agency to go ahead, and he said about two days' planning. He'd gotten some phony business cards made, and we were to use a Telex in the Department of Energy communications center in Washington, DC, to send overseas Telexes via a code. That way, foreign agents intercepting information would not suspect that we used a DOE Telex. We met with the station chief for the CIA at the United States Embassy in Bangkok. Prior to that I had been down at the Embassy and had met with an Agency pilot, helicopter pilot. I was at the Embassy in June to prepare the future operation of October, November. And I met with DIA people, and then I touched bases with some foreign types of agents that were helping us out through General Vang Pao.

Did Vang Pao ever leave Montana for any of these



things, or were people just in touch by phone?

No, I brought him down to California and brought him into Congressman Dornan's office, and had some meetings where he actually signed in on Congressman Dornan's personal ledger, along with Bo Gritz, myself, and another foreign intelligence agent. Then later on the Congressman's aide called me, and said, "Gosh, I made a mistake. I didn't want any of you guys to sign in in my office." So he sent me the ledger in the mail, so I would see that it was the original, so I would destroy it. However, the way politics works, I didn't destroy it, I kept it.

You said there was a foreign intelligence person with you?

Yes. We were cooperating with another country's agent. I think he was out of China. We were trying to work something out with the Chinese people.

Taiwan or People's Republic?

People's Republic. They were going to "slap the hand of Vietnam" while a lot of guerrilla activity was going on, in Mahaxai, Gnommerat, the Mugia Pass, and Nape in Laos. Well, when we were down there the second time, we equipped a team of indigenous to take a team across the river [the Mekong] and verified that there were some Caucasians, known or unknown that they were Americans, but it was obvious that they were probably Americans.

This was across the river from where to where?

We went across at Ban Pheng, Thailand, straight across 47 km. roughly to Mahaxai, just a little bit to the west of Mahaxai.

This is in Laos?



Barnes with a Lao guerrilla at camp in Ban Phang, Thailand.

Right. We verified that there were Caucasians and sent a Telex.

How many were there?

Two Caucasians.

And when you say verified, you mean somebody actually got to see them?

Yes. We had some 30-odd indigenous forces with us. And then Daniel Arnold, the former station chief for the CIA in Bangkok sent some communications and we got the message that Bo Gritz was cut off, no longer to send messages to him and no longer to trust him.

He was not with you on the mission?

No, no. He stayed in the United States. So then the Chief of Station from the U.S. Embassy brought up a coded message through some of his agents from Nakhon Phanom and we put that together with a Telex message we got back from Langley, Virginia, telling us in essence if these are in fact Americans, assassinate them. And we got in an argument, and split, and went our ways.

Did you all go back to the base in Thailand where you started out from?

Yes. We all went back to Bangkok, and one of the guys, intelligence guys, decided to go and be debriefed prior to returning to the United States. Two of the Green Berets decided that they were going to go to Hawaii and lay low for about a week before returning to the mainland, and then they were going to disappear. And the other guy decided that in the meantime he was going to go to Japan and then filter on back to the United States via Canada.

Was everybody traveling under their own individual covers at that point?

Yes. We all decided to disband quickly.

So far as you know, everybody got back their own separate ways?

Yeah, as far as I know. I only talked to one of them some time ago, and he said, "Forget we ever went, forget we ever talked to anybody."

Did you ever learn or suspect what it was that the Americans who were captured in Laos might have known or what it was they didn't want the Laotians to find out?

Two things. One is that possibly the United States was involved in getting chemical warfare, biological stuff over there.

You mean they might have been planting yellow rain stuff?

Right. That was one of the suspicions that was discussed over there. The other one was that these "guys" might have been involved in a secret operation as late as '79 or '80 and got captured. And could tell some pretty horrendous stories about what was really going on if they were forced to. And it was best that they not ever come back.

But did they have any way or reason to believe that whatever it was that they knew they would not already have revealed?

Not that I know of. They had a previous operation that had been scouting the area and setting up booby traps and stuff and there's no way of really telling except for nothing ever came out through international channels.

The area where the Americans were being held, do you know if that was anywhere near the region where evidence of yellow rain was supposedly being found?

Oh yes. It was right in that area. About which Haig himself made the accusation last year.

But you never found out any more to confirm that that is what it was?

No, I never did, I just decided it was best to leave as soon as possible.

Did you ever hear from anyone else from the mission?

The only person I heard from was John. ["John" also spoke by phone with CAIB and confirmed all of Barnes's story, but refused to say where he was. John said he wanted Barnes's story to come out, because he was frightened, and had heard that two of the members of the mission had met untimely deaths, one in Libya and one in Guatemala.]

How did he know how to reach you?

Well, I left a number for him that I would be at for a week, and we contacted each other and decided that for better or worse it was best we never say anything happened, and we'll keep a close eye on the local newspapers. And next thing we know, Bo Gritz is going all over the country talking.

Do you know why Bo started talking; do you have any idea?

Yes. We think it is because he was supposed to come back as a full bird colonel and was supposed to work out of DIA Section 7B as a full bird, and was turned down. I think as an insurance policy he decided to start talking. Because he got pressure from the Secret Service about the Middle East connection.

You mean he came under pressure for things unrelated to Laos?

Right.

What kind of stuff was that?

About some Special Forces guys going to Chad and Sudan, and a couple of guys he had sent down to El Salvador to start doing some training, and allegedly the United States wasn't doing any of this stuff. He was trying to get teams together for the Company to send to obscure places in El Salvador, recruiting some of the old people. I think one of the guys from our mission is there.

But this is stuff he was doing as a government employee?

Right.

This was not free lance stuff?

Right.

Who was he working for, was that CIA?

This was under the direction of the Agency. Matter of fact, I'll give you their extension number back at Langley, if you want it.

How did you have these numbers for him, and that information?

Well, he knew that I was really tight with General Vang Pao, and so he said that if anything ever happens, call area code 202, 351-1100, and ask for extension 6145. That's supposedly called CDO, which is apparently where John Stein was in charge of covert defense operations.

Did you ever call him there?

I did once.

After this mission?

Yes. The day I got back to the United States I called, asked for the extension, and that time gave the code name Bohica, and next thing the guy says okay, give me your number and let me secure a line. And he called back. He said, "Forget this thing ever existed."

But did you ask him about the bottom line, we didn't know we were going to be told to kill anybody?

Right. I asked him that and said, "You know we were all

surprised about the very sophisticated weapons that were provided," and he just said, "You don't know anything, you didn't hear anything, nobody knows anything, this number doesn't exist. Just take the money and go have a good time." And Daniel Arnold, he was a major figure in this operation. He allegedly is retired from the Agency, and he's running a private company, International Research Associates, area code 703, 938-1868, in Vienna. [The other company on the business card is Tashkent Associates.] I also have the business card that Dan sent me thanking me for a letter, a secret letter I picked up down there to be delivered to the authorities back here in the United States.

A letter you picked up where?

From Laos.

So there were other things besides looking for the Americans?

I was supposed to pick up a letter and contact some foreign indigenous agents that had been working with the Hmong previously, on chemical warfare operations.

Do you know what those things were?

They kept that real hush hush.

You never knew whether they were planting evidence?

No, it was pretty much speculated though, and we sat down one day with one of them and I brought back one of the letters and decided to make a copy of it, and keep it, which I did.

How did the journalists get in touch with you?

I got a call from a couple of guys out of the Pentagon that knew all about this that I had been dealing with, and they said, "Look, we know we were duped, this whole thing was wrong, and we're going to give you some names of people, numbers to contact and don't tell them you heard from us in the Pentagon," and I'm not going to tell anybody who they were, so they can feel safe.

Were they making the point that they thought this was a rescue mission?

They themselves all thought and Deputy Inman of the CIA, he himself thought, it was a rescue mission too, he said. He said, if this was true, that we were going to assassinate people, it had to be renegades. He said it might be people like Wilson and Terpil or Agee or Marchetti or agents like that who are no good any more. He said maybe they tried to take it on their own and just end the problem, but he would never admit it.

How could he say that? You got a telegram from Langley.

. Oh, we got all kinds of Telexes.

But they couldn't very well have been from anybody like Marchetti or Agee?

Oh I know. But he was using their names as former agents being renegades, who could have used Agency communications or Agency funding to do their own secret operation.

Did you actually speak with him personally?

No. Ted Koppel did, and related that back.

But how does he justify or explain the fact that the instructions came from Langley?

He says, "Prove it." And we said, "Okay, let's go to the Department of Energy, communications center, and see all the Telexes from this date to this date under Subject Bohica." And then he flipped his head and said, "How did you guys know about Subject Bohica?" And he says that due to national security, nothing can be discussed.

You mean Koppel mentioned the name of the operation to Inman?

Yeah, then he just flipped out. He said there's a law coming to pass, if you guys start revealing agents' names you're going to be tried and prosecuted, criminally.

Basically, everybody who seems to have known anything about it is taking the position that they all thought it was an operation to rescue someone, not to kill someone?

Right.

And yet the coded messages came both from Langley and from the Chief of Station.

Right. At the U.S. Embassy.

Has anybody said to you that they've been in touch with him?

One of the guys said that he didn't know. All he was doing was taking part of the secret message and delivering it to the appropriate people. He said, "I don't know what was in it. It came over in," I think he told me, "an ERKS 53 computer."

So he was passing a message but he didn't know what it was?

Right. He said the message came from Langley to Bangkok and then he just forwarded it on from Bangkok. No, he didn't say Langley, he said Virginia.

How did you receive communications when you were in the field in Laos, by radio?

No. We took in an awful lot of radios and other equipment that Uncle Sam provided, but we didn't communicate across the river. We came across and went down to Nakhon Phanom and sent messages via Telex to the Rajah Motel in Bangkok to the Department of Energy, Com. center, Washington, DC, Attn: Subject Bohica. The following purchase items are necessary, C7, A11, and so on.

And then the messages would come back the same way?

Right.

They'd go from DOE, Washington directly to the Rajah Motel?

Right.

And then you had somebody who would pick them up there?

Right. And then filter them up to the guys at Nakhon Phanom.

And then go back across the river?

Right.

So when you were all together and got the message that was telling you that these people couldn't be rescued, to bump them off, you were back inside the Thailand side of the border then?

Right. We were back in Nakhon Phanom. Because when they told us that the Huey pilot, all of a sudden the government pulled him out of Thailand and sent back on orders to the United States, we starting getting rather suspicious. You know we had all things set up and everything was squared away, and then all of a sudden . . .

When you say all set up, you mean all set up for a rescue attempt?

Right.

Then what sort of a plan was supposed to be involved if you were killing the people instead of rescuing them? You still needed a helicopter, didn't you?

No, because they were going to go in via indigenous and if we couldn't accomplish it, then we had large sums of money and were able to purchase medicine and stuff in



Scott Barnes in Thailand.

Thailand to give to certain indigenous. One of them would carry out any orders, no matter what they were. If we couldn't accomplish it, we had to abort, then the stuff was supposed to be up to him and he would accomplish it. As far as I know, he may have accomplished it.

You never got any details from there once you left?

No. Once we left, I cut communications. I talked to General Vang Pao about three or four weeks ago, and he just said, "The thing for us to do right now is just, we never knew each other."

Have you offered to go testify before the Intelligence Committee?

Yes. I told them, I said, "Hey put me on another government polygraph exam. You guys hired the world's best one, you sent me to a shrink, I got photos, I'll bring you documentation." And he said, "But you don't understand, Scott. You don't understand what you're saying." I said, "Yeah, I know." He said, "There are a lot of problems in the Middle East, in international conflicts; we went across a sovereign nation's border. In other words we engaged in an act of war." And I said, "I know that, and it was wrong, because I wouldn't have said anything if we were going to rescue, but when I found out what the truth was, I think it's wrong." And he said, "So do I." I said, "Let's have a Senate hearing," and he said, "We're having hearings but they're secret. We don't want the public to know." I said, "I think that's wrong. Why don't you guys want the truth out?" ●