

This is **G o o g l e**'s [cache](#) of <http://www.jillnicholson.com/plot.htm> as retrieved on Nov 5, 2005 02:37:00 GMT. **G o o g l e**'s cache is the snapshot that we took of the page as we crawled the web. The page may have changed since that time. Click here for the [current page](#) without highlighting. This cached page may reference images which are no longer available. Click here for the [cached text](#) only. To link to or bookmark this page, use the following url: <http://www.google.com/search?q=cache:NuSN67H5NioJ:www.jillnicholson.com/plot.htm+The+Plot+Thickens+%2B+O'meara&hl=en&client=safari>

*Google is neither affiliated with the authors of this page nor responsible for its content.*

These search terms have been highlighted: **plot thickens o meara**

## INSIGHT MAGAZINE

Issue Date: February 12, 2001

### The **Plot Thickens** in PROMIS Affair

By Kelly Patricia **O'Meara**

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers Sean McDade and Randy Buffam set out in January 2000 on an eight-month secret investigation in the United States. The two were attempting to determine whether Canada's law-enforcement and intelligence agencies were using an allegedly pirated software program called PROMIS that had been modified to be monitorable by shadowy interests said to have the electronic key; and, if so, whether Canada's national security had been compromised because of the suspected electronic backdoors installed in the software. Much of the Mounties' investigation focused on the reported activities and relationships of Michael Riconosciuto, a computer wizard who claimed to have modified the PROMIS software for illegal use.

A convicted felon, Riconosciuto also claimed knowledge of a compendium of suspicious characters and activities that include: cArms development for an alleged joint venture between the Cabazon Indians of Indio, Calif., and the Wackenhut Corp.; cA former high-ranking Justice Department attorney named Mike Abbell and his alleged relationship with the Cali drug cartel; and cRiconosciuto's own activity as an undercover operative in a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) sting operation in Lebanon. Insight has followed the trail of the two RCMP investigators as they moved secretly throughout the United States collecting hard data from a variety of sources and interviewing witnesses, including Riconosciuto.

They ultimately returned to Canada to continue their still-secret national-security probe that raises troubling questions about international espionage, crime and scandalous cover-ups said to date back more than a decade. In this second installment of an exclusive four-part series, Insight focuses on Riconosciuto, on whom the RCMP investigators invested so much time, expense and effort to examine and try to confirm his shocking stories. By following the Mounties, Insight has assembled new information that sheds light on the shadowy world in which Riconosciuto operated and what the RCMP found - including long-sought computer tapes that Riconosciuto has said contain a version of PROMIS that was stolen by high-level U.S. government officials and that he then modified for illegal purposes. This was not the first time such claims had been made.

Before the RCMP got involved, a great deal of this information was provided to Congress (among others) and surfaced during a 1992 taped telephone conversation between Riconosciuto and an FBI agent at a time Riconosciuto was on trial for the manufacture and sale of methamphetamine and was attempting to trade

information to the FBI in exchange for entry to the federal Witness Protection Program. But, as so often with Riconosciuto, the stories he offered to federal agents were not confirmed or just ignored. That is, until the RCMP entered the picture last year and got a break. Helping the Mounties was Cheri Seymour, a Southern California journalist turned private detective. Years before, in January 1992, she had retrieved boxes of documents from Riconosciuto's hidden desert trailer. The Mounties spent three days copying these documents and, with the help of Seymour, returned to the trailer where yet more documents were retrieved. These combined Riconosciuto papers revealed the dark and disturbing landscape of crime, espionage and betrayal of which he had been part - one that ever since his arrest and conviction in 1992 had been labeled the fictional embellishments of a convicted felon.

Each new twist and turn of the covert investigation took the Mounties deeper into a forest of bizarre machinations as they sought to validate information which, though it had no direct connection to the alleged theft of the PROMIS software, raised astonishing questions about national security and organized crime. This is not to say the RCMP agents didn't probe the allegations that Canada's law-enforcement and intelligence services were operating a stolen version of the software developed years before by Bill and Nancy Hamilton. The Hamiltons own a company called Inslaw, and it is they who, in the early 1970s, developed a version of PROMIS for the Justice Department. At some point, they have claimed, a proprietary version of their software was stolen and a dispute arose with the government. In March 1991, just before Riconosciuto was arrested on illegal drug charges, he provided a sworn affidavit to Inslaw stating that between 1981 and 1983 he had made modifications to a pirated version of PROMIS. He told Inslaw, and subsequently Congress and federal investigators, that he did so when he was director of research for a joint venture between the Cabazon Indians and the Wackenhut Corp.

At the time, there were fewer than two dozen members of the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians. John Nichols, who is not an American Indian, was the administrator of the tribe's business affairs, which included the joint-venture partnership with Wackenhut, one of the top private security agencies in the world, run by former FBI and other intelligence specialists. The Indian reservation presented unique opportunities for secrecy, according to interviews and documents obtained by Insight. Under broad state and federal exemptions, Indian reservations enjoy status just short of being sovereign nations and are free to govern within the confines of the reservation without outside intervention. Wackenhut was one of the first corporations to take advantage of this special status. Whether the Cabazon/Wackenhut "joint venture" existed is not in question. What have been dismissed by federal investigators are Riconosciuto's claims about what went on at the reservation and the people involved.

For example, Riconosciuto has maintained that one of the projects he was involved in dealt with new munitions he and the Cabazon/Wackenhut partnership had created, not to mention a nifty new night-vision device. RCMP officers McDade and Buffam obtained a copy of a 1991 "Special Operations Report" (SOP) that was written by Gene Gilbert, an investigator for the district attorney's office in Riverside, Calif. In this report - a copy of which was given to the House Judiciary Committee in 1991 and subsequently to the Justice Department in 1993 - Gilbert describes a weapons demonstration that took place in September 1981 at the Lake Cahuilla Shooting Range in Indio, Calif. Details of who attended this test nearly 20 years ago, Riconosciuto claims, should corroborate his assertions about people he associated with involved in the alleged theft of the PROMIS software and other activities in which the RCMP officers now are probing. U.S. federal investigators dismissed the report because, they said, the document was a re-creation of 10-year-old events based on recollections Gilbert had cobbled together at the request of federal authorities.

The RCMP officers traveled to Riverside in August 2000 to see for themselves. According to a law-enforcement officer who asked not to be identified, Gilbert not only verified the information in his 1991 SOP report but allowed the Mounties to review all the contemporaneous backup in local police-department files associated with the weapons demonstration and other activities at the reservation. Insight has obtained some of these crucial 1980s police-intelligence files which Gilbert used for his 1991 SOP report. And these confirm that there was a

demonstration in 1981 consisting of tests for a new night-vision device and a firing of special semiautomatic weapons. The records show it was attended by Riconosciuto and 15 others - including two anticommunist Nicaraguan freedom fighters identified as Eden Pastora Gomez (code-named "Commander Zero") and Jose Curdel ("Commander Alpha"); John Vanderworker, a former CIA employee; Wayne Reeder, a wealthy California developer and investor in the Cabazon Reservation; Peter Zokosky, a board member of Meridian International Logistics who also was a Cabazon investor and former owner of Armtec Defense Products Inc.; and John Philip Nichols, administrator of Cabazon, to name a few.

This is not the only story that emerged as the RCMP investigated Riconosciuto's revelations. For instance, for years he had said he'd worked for the government, briefing and lecturing military brass and Pentagon officials. In a January 1992 letter obtained by Insight on Wackenhut stationery, the company's director of corporate relations, Patrick Cannan, writes that "John P. Nichols had first introduced Riconosciuto to Wackenhut (Frye, V.P. of Wackenhut, Indio, Ca., office) on a May 1981 trip to the U.S. Army installation at Dover, N.J., where Nichols, Zokosky, Frye and Riconosciuto met with Dr. Harry Fair and several of his Army associates who were the project engineers on the Railgun Project. Riconosciuto and these Army personnel conducted an extensive and highly technical 'theoretical' blackboard exercise on the Railgun and, afterward, Dr. Fair commented that he was extremely impressed with Riconosciuto's scientific and technical knowledge in this matter."

The letter goes on to state that Dr. Fair considered Riconosciuto a "potential national resource." The significance of this is that it is consistent with evidence unearthed by RCMP investigators that Riconosciuto's claims of technical and scientific expertise and access are not rantings. The RCMP investigators also discovered another link in a Riconosciuto story that had been dismissed. The permit to hold the arms demonstration in 1981 at Lake Cahuilla was obtained by Meridian Arms, a subsidiary of Meridian International Logistics, owned by Robert Booth Nichols, a self-proclaimed CIA operative and licensed arms dealer (and no relation to Cabazon administrator John Nichols). Riconosciuto for years was a partner with Booth Nichols in the Meridian Arms business and, at the time the permits were approved for the Lake Cahuilla weapons demonstration, Nichols was unaware that he was being investigated by the FBI for suspected mob-related money laundering of drug profits and for stock fraud.

Booth Nichols also served on the board of First Intercontinental Development Corp. (FIDCO), a building/construction company. Among Nichols' corporate partners at FIDCO in the 1980s were Michael McManus, then an aide to President Reagan; Robert Maheu, former chief executive officer of Howard Hughes Enterprises; and Clint Murchison Jr. of the Murchison empire based in Dallas. Riconosciuto long has maintained that Booth Nichols and FIDCO were associated with U.S. intelligence agencies and used as a cutout. Again, whereas others summarily had dismissed this claim, the RCMP investigators pursued the lead, poring over documents from the long-abandoned Riconosciuto storage and in the files of U.S. law-enforcement agencies. For example, RCMP obtained FBI wiretap summaries of telephone conversations between Nichols and another of his then-partners in FIDCO, Eugene Giaquinto, who at the same time also was president of MCA Home Entertainment Division.

The wiretap summaries reads like a who's who of alleged mob figures with close ties to the motion-picture industry. The Mounties also received substantial related information from classified internal FBI files. But, based on Insight's own sources, what the RCMP investigators were after wasn't just PROMIS but people associated with Riconosciuto and their business ties in a vast array of enterprises that include intelligence activities overseas. Somehow, this network was tied in to what the Mounties were investigating involving security lapses such as those at the Los Alamos National Laboratory last year that McDade and Buffam knew about - and shared with Seymour and others - months before the news hit U.S. newspapers. And it appeared that Riconosciuto and his cronies were in the thick of such international intrigue - especially Booth Nichols.

In response to RCMP requests to help to corroborate Riconosciuto's claims and connections to Booth Nichols,

Seymour provided McDade a January 1992 recording of a telephone conversation between Riconosciuto and an FBI agent. From this tape McDade heard Riconosciuto claim that Booth Nichols was connected to a high-ranking Justice Department official. Riconosciuto also tells the FBI agent that "the bottom line here is Bob [Nichols], Gilberto Rodriguez, Michael Abbell [who's now an attorney in Washington but then was with the Criminal Section of the Justice Department], Harold Okimoto, Jose Londono and Glen Shockley are all in bed together." Riconosciuto also details in the tape-recorded phone call specific information about an alleged meeting between Booth Nichols and Abbell.

He subsequently provided the FBI agent a handwritten note with additional information about the alleged Abbell meeting: "Bob [Nichols] handed him [Abbell] \$50,000 cash to handle an internal-affairs investigation the Department of Justice was having that would lead to extradition of [brothers] Gilberto and Miguel Rodriguez and Jose Londono. Bob said it was necessary to 'crowbar' the investigation because they were 'intelligence' people." What is significant, and of interest to the Mounties, is that Riconosciuto fingered Abbell's ties to the Cali drug cartel three years before Abbell was indicted in Miami on federal criminal charges that the former official did work on behalf of the Cali cartel and its leaders. (Abbell was convicted of money laundering in July 1998 and sentenced to seven years in prison.) Interestingly enough, once McDade returned to Canada with tapes of a dozen telephone conversations and his secret investigation began to leak in the Canadian press (albeit briefly), he mailed to Seymour a transcript of the Riconosciuto taped conversation with the FBI agent. Was this a message?

The Mounties clearly were interested in Riconosciuto's partner of nearly 20 years, Booth Nichols. This connection was strange, according to those interviewed by Insight, because Booth Nichols apparently had nothing to do with PROMIS and everything to do with other more nefarious allegations. And the Mounties also were interested in claims Riconosciuto has made about his participation in a DEA drug-sting operation in Cyprus. In one of the taped interviews Riconosciuto had with the FBI agent, he says that he was in Lebanon working on "communications protocol" for FIDCO in the Middle East to rebuild the infrastructure of two cities in Lebanon. Why the RCMP would be interested in this additional twist in the intrigue is unknown, but Insight has obtained documents that support the convicted felon's claims here as well.

A June 1983 letter from Michael McManus Jr., the Reagan assistant who also sat on the FIDCO board, to George Pender, president of FIDCO, describes the administration's support for the rebuilding of Lebanon: "Without question FIDCO seems to have a considerable role to offer, particularly in the massive financial participation being made available to the government of Lebanon." There also is a July 1983 letter to the president of Lebanon, Amin Gemayel, from Pender in which FIDCO's desire to participate in the rebuilding of Lebanon is discussed. What is interesting about this letter is that Pender advises the Lebanese president that he (Pender) "may be reached via telex 652483 RBN Assocs. LSA." And whose address is that? None other than Booth Nichols. The same Nichols who at the time was a board member of FIDCO and under investigation by the FBI for suspected drug trafficking, money laundering and connections to the mob - and the same man who obtained the permits at the Cahuilla gun range for the weapons demonstration to Nicaraguan Contra leaders and others.

The more the Mounties dug, the weirder the connections got and the more the convicted felon's stories of the bizarre underground seemed to be borne out. Besides its interest in the RCMP probe and what it was uncovering, Insight also sought - and confirmed - the details of many other Riconosciuto accounts of these intrigues. Riconosciuto has said he was involved in that DEA drug-sting operation in the Middle East while he was working on communications protocol for FIDCO. What part he played in any alleged sting operation is unknown but, based on what Riconosciuto told the FBI agent in those taped conversations, detailed information about a safe house used by the DEA in Cyprus seems accurate. According to Riconosciuto, the DEA safe house was located in Nicosia, Cyprus, and operated under the code name of Eurame Trading Ltd., which was located on Collumbra Street. "It was an apartment and it had a ham-radio station. It was ICOM," Riconosciuto said, "a

single side-band amateur radio setup. It [the apartment] was on the top floor."

There is corroboration for these details. Lester Coleman, a former contract employee with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) who was on loan to the DEA in the late 1980s, wrote a book in 1993 called *Trail of the Octopus: From Beirut to Lockerbie, Inside the DIA*. Coleman claims there to have worked out of a safe house in Cyprus at the same location Riconosciuto described and under the same name, Eurame Trading Ltd. Coleman also confirmed secret Beka Valley drug shipments and the names of the U.S. agents working undercover in Cyprus that Riconosciuto had revealed to the FBI in 1992 - a year before it was outlined in Coleman's book. Insight asked Coleman who would know about such a secret U.S. government safe house, let alone a cutout company? "I don't know," Coleman says, "unless he was there. i I have never met or talked with [Riconosciuto], so I have no idea whether he was there or not. i But what he is describing is accurate. No one would know about the ICOM radio unless they had been there and seen it," Coleman says. Again, like Riconosciuto's comments about Justice Department attorney Abbell and his connections to the Cali drug cartel, Riconosciuto knew detailed information well before the public. And he tried to tell the FBI, among others, but to no avail.

The stories then seemed too wild and woolly to be credible. But they were credible to these RCMP investigators, who spent considerable time, effort and money to prove or disprove what Riconosciuto has been saying. So clearly did this key source for their original inquiry into the alleged theft and misuse of the PROMIS software lead the RCMP afield that one must wonder why. Is it possible that the Canadian investigators focused so much interest on these associates and tales by Riconosciuto to test his credibility about allied espionage matters and PROMIS? No one is talking about what the RCMP probe ultimately was after or what was taken back to Canada, let alone McDade. However, according to RCMP spokesman Michelle Gaudet, this investigation is "ongoing within the national-security perspective." To be continued next week.

Copyright © 2001 News World Communications, Inc.