

Of Steven Seagal and Bud Culligan A Conversation with Lars Hansson

by Kenn Thomas

Q : The last time we had you in *Steamshovel* you were able to explain some of the background information concerning Gordon Novel and his connection to those photographs of J. Edgar Hoover in *flagrante delicto*.

A: I think your readers will find it quite fascinating how he re-enters the picture here.

I had been aware of Steven Seagal for about five years along with everybody else, since he entered the scene with his movie *Above The Law*. I happened to be living in Santa Barbara, actually commuting back and forth between there and Las Vegas, working with Colonel Bo Gritz. And I was very familiar with the Christic Institute lawsuit, so I was extremely impressed with that film when it came out. The director of that movie, and his most recent film, *Under Siege*, is a man by the name of Andrew Davis, who is a neighbor of mine in Santa Barbara. So I felt a fairly close tie. And I had a very good impression of Steven Seagal. I'm not that great a fan of martial arts *per se* but I felt that at least in his first film and perhaps in this last film he was trying to get a fairly decent message across.

A couple of years ago I was doing this radio program and we were talking about the JFK assassination. One of the listeners had sent some material which was released from a fellow by the name of Craig Hewlitt. I'm not saying this to endorse him or reject him, but one of the listeners had sent me this material concerning an individual by the name of Roland Bernard Culligan, or Bud Culligan for short. This was back in 1991.

I had first heard Culligan's name about a year or so before that indirectly from Fletcher Prouty. We were working on another case concerning Bob Lazar, interestingly enough, and in the course of it he had made a stray comment concerning the Culligan list. This was back in the middle of 1990. I had no idea what that was but I guessed correctly that this Culligan was potentially some sort of high-level hit man. The years go by and I get a tape of an interview that this fellow Culligan did from the East Ridge, Tennessee police department in, I believe, 1978, essentially going into some detail about his background as a US government hit man and some of these assassinations that he claimed to have performed.

I was extremely busy at the time working on a book about George Bush and covering the Noriega

trial and a few other odds and ends and didn't really have much time pursue it. But after I got back from Iraq last year, we were supposed to start putting a documentary video together but the project fell through. So I had a little bit of time on my hands. This Culligan story had intrigued me so much during that year that I made all the various arrangements and I actually flew out from Florida to New Mexico to visit with him for the first time. It was a very interesting meeting. The man is 69 years old now. He stands about 6'4". Despite the fact that he's had open heart surgery and his hair is grey and he wears a beard, he's still an extremely formidable individual and extremely coherent and articulate. I thought that if this guy isn't what he claims to be, he certainly could play the role.

Q: Could you go into more detail about what exactly he claims and what is this Culligan list that Fletcher Prouty talked about?

A: What he claims, in fact, and what he has been claiming since roughly 1978, is that he was a very high-level, executive action specialist. That he was under orders directly from the CIA and he has in court documents named his case officer as having directed him in performing over a hundred international assassinations.

I have right in front me a copy of the most recent lawsuit he has filed in Asheville, North Carolina, against the Central Intelligence Agency. It's a very lengthy file. He's basically claiming that they are responsible for, I believe, 141 felony charges that have been leveled against him from Oregon to Rhode Island, Florida to New Mexico. He claims that he had loss of recognition, loss of retirement and several million dollars in damages. It goes into great detail after that. There are number affidavits attached.

On one six-page affidavit he claims that he had killed 117 persons from 1943 to 1990, claiming that it came from the official files of the US State Department as sent to the Federal court in Albuquerque in 1985. And some of the people he lists, which is what I heard on this tape two years ago, are people who most people would recognize: Patrice Lumumba, Rafael Trujillo, Dag Hammarskold, the Diem brothers in Vietnam, Jose Fuentes in Guatemala, King Farouk and Nasser in Egypt in 1970, with quite a few in between. He claims, and there is documentation to prove, that he's been trying for fifteen years to get the agency to

come to terms, that he did not want to go public with any of it. He just wanted to be left alone and go into retirement.

There's an individual that I have come to know very well who lives down in Florida who has been following Culligan's case very closely for seventeen years. He has a phenomenal computerized database on this, catalogued audio tapes, including many, many tapes. One where Culligan is describing exactly how he killed King Farouk, or had Farouk killed in Italy, for example. A very, very extensive, exhaustive file.

The fact is that Culligan has filed, as I say, four Federal law suits against the Central Intelligence Agency. I personally have gone to two of those jurisdictions to verify those cases were on file and the contents. Interestingly enough, about a year ago when I went to Asheville, North Carolina to make sure that I had all the documents in the file, the court clerk claimed that there was no such case on file until I showed her the cover form that we had received earlier with her signature on it. She said, "Oh, that case!" Most of the people in these official capacities write Culligan off. Everybody seems to dismiss it, that he's a nut case and so forth. Yet right on the surface of it you have to ask yourself what kind of glutton for punishment would file cases like that if there weren't something to it? Not one, but four cases.

Q: And he hasn't written a book or tried to get publicity that way?

A: Yes and no. In fact, he actually had written a book, which I believe was published in Brussels in 1982 called *Highway Into Hell* but apparently the CIA prevented publication and distribution in this country. Interestingly enough, and this is something I have learned very recently and have not yet been able to verify it but I suspect it may well be the case, that he was supposedly the inspiration for the *Matt Helm* spy series of some years back. It was unfortunately played as a spoof by Dean Martin, but Culligan claims that he knew the people behind the writing of that and that many of those incidents were based on his own real life experiences.

Be that as it may, his overall thrust has been to try to just lay low and stay quiet and try to work out some sort of deal that would enable him and his wife, both in their sixties, to just fade into the sunset. He claims that because of what he knows and what he participated in there's no way that he would ever be permitted to do that. And so after trying to make contact with a number of people, I had gained his confidence and actually have made a total of six trips up to the prison. One of them, I might add, the second to last one, I made with Steven Seagal's attorney for five hours, during which we audio-taped three hours of

Culligan's jailhouse confessions, describing a number of these assassinations that he claims to have performed. Therein lies pretty much my dispute with Steven Seagal at this point. I should pronounce his name correctly, it rhymes with sea gull.

Q: One of Culligan's claims is that he rubbed out the JFK hit men in Guatemala in 1965?

A: Absolutely. He claims that there were three men, I don't have their actual names in front of me or I would give them to you, he claims that they were part of the hit team in Dallas and that all of these men were paid a great deal of money and given special treatment, but as he stated in one of his affidavits, "They were demanding more money and what they got was me." He describes how he had met with them in Miami and supposedly was assembling a team to perform an assassination. His cover story to them was that they were to perform an assassination in a South American country and he arranged for them to meet him down in Guatemala to set up the logistics for it. He has given me the names of the two men that he claims participated with him in these executions and that he then flew down to Guatemala and dispatched all three men. And what makes this especially interesting is that, as I say this a case that has an extensive track record for at least fifteen years that I'm aware of, the question is how much of it is absolutely true and real and ultimately provable. That's the difficulty. Frankly, that's why I got in touch with Steven Seagal, in about February or March of 1993.

Q: Before we get to that, Culligan also claims that the two surviving members of that hit team are E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis?

A: That's correct. He has a habit of referring to, and I've noticed this with a number of these ex-agents, he refers to Sturgis as "Burgess". Apparently back during that time there was a battery called Burgess and I guess when he would make contacts or whatnot they'd make a sort of code. But, yes, Frank Sturgis. He claims that one of Hunt's many pay-offs was an incident where he was given something like \$400,000 for a bunch of garbage art in his attic and so forth. But, yes, he claims that they are the only two surviving men.

Q: How does Steven Seagal fit in to this story?

A: As I say, he seemingly came out of nowhere. He has surrounded himself with this aura of mystery. Those people who have watched his films or follow him to any degree, are aware that he apparently ran an aikido dojo over in Japan. He has claimed in various interviews that he performed special works and favors for very powerful people over there with a heavy amount of implication that these were CIA people.

What has come out of these most recent articles

and in some of my own background investigation on Steve is that apparently one of the key people that he associated with over there, while he was actually running his mother-in-law's *dojo*, was a man by the name of Robert Strickland, who was an actual CIA agent and was involved in a number of very sensitive operations. Steven for a number of years had claimed him as a godfather type and Strickland apparently had unrestricted access to the film sets and so forth, until about 1989, when he claims, and the Connolly article quotes him as claiming, that Seagal tried to persuade Strickland to rub out was man by the name of Gary Goldman, who I know fairly well. Goldman had worked over in Vietnam, was a captain in the US Army and has been involved in a number of operations with Lieutenant Colonel Bo Gritz, the POW missions and so forth. In the period of time when I was helping Bo put his books together, I had gotten to know Gary fairly well.

Moving back a few months: I had contacted Seagal because I thought that he might be interested in this Culligan story. It seemed that it would not only make very good film fare but at that time I had the impression that Seagal was very sincere about wanting to try to bring the truth out about a lot of these covert operations. He's a very knowledgeable guy. He prides himself on having that sort of awareness and background. And we had a number of mutual acquaintances, such as Dan Sheehan and Andrew Davis. So I contacted him and was very pleased and surprised that he got back to me right away. And for the first two or three weeks he was extremely gracious and concerned and solicitous about my welfare and health. He seemed to be very genuinely concerned about the truth of Culligan's story or getting to the truth of it.

What I had originally proposed to him was that he underwrite a thorough investigation of Culligan's claims so that we could first and foremost find out how much of it really was provable before we did anything with it. Then, assuming that a lot of the claims that he had made were verifiable, then obviously this would have made tremendous background for a film, book, whatever, especially with the thirtieth anniversary of the assassination looming. If some of the stuff that Culligan is alleging in court could really be verified, obviously it could help to bring about a major breakthrough. So that was my primary goal and always has been, in terms of verifying these things through a very serious investigation.

What I noticed pretty quickly with Seagal was that he seemed to be much more interested and obsessed with the details and the intrigue and the sensational aspects than he did with really getting to the bottom of it. So much so that, and this is the first time I've said

this publicly, during two of the conversations that we had he seemed to be so enthralled with this idea of this incredible hit man that he actually started bragging about some of his own activities in that regard, which disturbed me tremendously, for obvious reasons. Number one: I don't support assassination for any reason. Number two: I'm very uncomfortable around somebody who is either bragging about something that either did not happen or, worse yet, that did.

So I started to become very uncomfortable. On two occasions, and I want this said for the record, Seagal actually made some fairly direct suggestions that I should consider performing some favors for him or, in the case of Culligan, that we should consider eliminating a particular general, who I mentioned earlier, who was working as his case officer and apparently Culligan claims is the one responsible for all the grief he has suffered over the last twenty years. I was extremely disturbed about that.

Q: Now Seagal is actually filing a slander suit against both John Connolly and *Spy Magazine* for these accusations, which you are basically supporting.

A: In fact, yes. That's why I wanted to put this on the record. He filed a slander suit against John Connolly personally and threatened to file suit if *Spy* printed it, which is a fairly apparent case of prior restraint. Part of the reason I want to put this on the record is that I turned this information over to the LAPD, which is investigating some of these claims by Goldman and myself, and they seem to be virtually non-concerned. As a matter of fact, I'm a fairly good investigator and I was really stunned that three weeks after Goldman made his report on this matter, even though they had contacted people around the country, they hadn't called me, and at that time the detective had to ask me what Seagal's phone number was, where he lived and who his attorney was. So anybody that sees anything here relating to what happened in LA in June 1968, the parallels seem slightly ominous here.

Q: That was the thing that made the reputation for the LAPD as investigators, the RFK assassination. John Connolly's credibility is very good. He's done a lot of good work on the Casolaro investigation.

A: In case anybody is ready to write him off or say that he is pursuing a vendetta, your readers should know that he has a law degree and was a former New York City homicide detective. So it isn't as if he doesn't have a certain amount of professional expertise in this field.

One of the names that has surfaced repeatedly in

the Casolaro investigation is a man by the name of Robert Booth Nichols. In the short period of time that I was attempting to negotiate with Seagal, I was stunned to learn that he had Robert Booth Nichols act as his technical advisor in his last film, *Under Siege*, and actually apparently plays a small cameo role as one of the terrorists. I thought that was appropriate.

I have actual documents from the First Intercontinental Development Corporation, when they were incorporating, in a letter to Robert Booth Nichols describing this corporation which includes Robert A. Mahen, which I'm sure many people will remember from the Hughes Interel period, the guy who in many volumes now is described as having set up the hit against Fidel Castro, on behalf of Richard Nixon with Santos Trafficante, Sam Giancana and Johnny Roselli, under the JM WAVE program. Many researchers have alleged that it was members of that same team, which included Frank Sturgis and Howard Hunt, that later turned around and went after John Kennedy in Dallas.

Another person who is part of this corporation with Nichols was Clint Murchison, Jr. People who have done their homework will remember the name Murchison: his father was the very wealthy Dallas oil man who was involved with J. Edgar Hoover, at whose home both Hoover and Nixon were visiting the night before John Kennedy was killed. Of course, they later couldn't remember where they were that day.

For those who have been following recent developments in the Casolaro case, there was a letter written by Ted Gunderson, the former FBI man who has been investigating the Satanist and so forth, that was written to Robert Nichols back as far as 1983, to try to get him to get some information for him in Australia. It's my understanding from several sources that Ted Gunderson was actually involved in Meridian Arms Company with Robert Booth Nichols and Michael Riconosciuto. These are the kind of people that Steve has been associating with very heavily, employing in his films and so forth.

Getting back to the issue: what really concerned me tremendously was that in the middle of our discussion Seagal was actually bragging about his expertise in this field himself. His attorney was sitting right there when he was describing this in great detail. A close friend of mine was sitting there at a subsequent conversation where Steve was bragging to us, after we came back from interviewing Culligan in prison. Culligan claims that he actually fired the fatal shots at Raphael Trujillo in 1961 in the Dominican Republic using a 270 rifle, and he exclaimed "My favorite!" Apparently that inspired Mr. Seagal so much that he had to run out and buy two of them and then brag to us about it.

I was very concerned about all this and where he was coming from. As we were getting close to trying to complete the deal, which I was becoming more nervous about, I was told that apparently someone had contacted him and tried to warn him away from dealing with me. In hindsight, I was actually very pleased about that and I later found out that that person happened to be Gordon Novel.

Q: We discussed him in our previous interview. He was on the PBS special concerning J. Edgar Hoover and he's been on the scene for a long time, a guy who tried to de-rail the Garrison investigation.

A: Who actually brags about it publicly. One of the other people that both Novel and Robert Booth Nichols have been hanging out with over the last year or two is John Lear, who I have written about in a hundred and twenty page affidavit, *UFOs, Aliens and Ex-Intelligence Agents: Who's Fooling Whom?* John Lear, who lives in Las Vegas and goes around the country purporting to be a UFO expert, but who in fact was involved in flying six hundred tons of Soviet weapons to Somalia in 1977 to set up this problem we're now having to deal with. Lear bragged openly and showed me proof that he was involved in the shipment of weapons to Iran in violation of the embargoes in early 1981, which as you can see ties in closely to what Casolaro was looking into, what I believe was part of the actual payoff for the October Surprise election deal. I have also verified personally from first-hand experience, Lear was directly involved in the shipment of what ultimately amounted to 1.33 trillion dollars out of the Philippines in Guam, into Zurich, Switzerland. The latest reports that I have gotten from Las Vegas are that Seagal, apparently according to John Lear himself, hired Lear's wife as his casting agent.

Q: Lear, of course, throws stories out there about secret government manipulations with alien beings and so forth to entertain people while at the same time he is involved with moving Marcos gold and flying weapons to Somalia.

A: I just make the point again, not to get off on the UFO tangent, but certainly would hope that if any of your readers have an interest in that to look more closely into this and question very closely what the ulterior motives are of a lot of these so-called experts out there, to disinform and confuse. Pay attention to more of these mundane details. The reason why a character like Novel is so important to be looked at very closely, this is a guy who actively impersonated Lee Harvey Oswald thirty years ago and is still right in the middle of the situation here. Believe me, he is not the only one.