

American Whistleblower: The Gene Wheaton Story

Episode 3

NARRATOR:

You are listening to Episode Three of: “American Whistle-blower: The Gene Wheaton Story.” Produced by AW Media Group and Dan Storper.

(MUSIC CUE)

GENE WHEATON:

The covert operations subculture and the pyramid system of it is difficult for the average citizen to understand. And I understand it because I saw it, but it’s awfully hard to describe.

NARRATOR:

Gene Wheaton was a career military man and security contractor who was deep inside the U.S. government’s Iran-Contra operations during the 1980s.

GENE WHEATON:

I was recruited into Ollie North’s network by that group during the summer of ’85 because they wanted my airplanes for missions for the Contras ... It was in that vein ... that the guys in the National Security Council wanted to bring me into the inner circle.

(ARCHIVAL AUDIO: IRAN-CONTRA HEARINGS)

“Colonel North, did you have any ...”

NARRATOR:

As Wheaton became more closely involved with the covert intelligence world, he witnessed illegal government activities that prompted him to become a whistle-blower.

GENE WHEATON:

This struck me as being treason and grand larceny on a major scale, stealing from the taxpayers’ money — and having been a cop all my life, I thought it was kind of wrong.

(ARCHIVAL AUDIO: NEWS STORY ON MENA, ARKANSAS)

“Congressional investigators in recent months have tried to learn if Mena, Arkansas was an illegal staging area ...”

NARRATOR:

Wheaton went on to conduct multiple investigations into other illegal, covert activities — crimes that he talked about at length, very publicly:

GENE WEATON:

I was on to some investigations around Mena, Arkansas concerning events after drug smuggler Barry Seal was assassinated, and some of the covert air operations got on to Mena.

NARRATOR:

However, there was one secret he kept confidential for years ... only disclosing it toward the end of his life.

(AUDIO FROM WILLIAM LAW INTERVIEW WITH WHEATON):

There was a CIA-funded program to assassinate Castro. And they were — according to them — that they were the ones that diverted the Castro funds and training for their own agenda to snuff Kennedy. And there was another clique above them that was worried about Kennedy not increasing the program to escalate hostilities in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia ...

NARRATOR:

This is the last episode of a three-part series that examines the life of Gene Wheaton — a military criminal investigator who became a key intelligence community whistleblower during the Reagan administration, and beyond.

(MUSIC CUE OUT)

(ARCHIVAL AUDIO OF IRAN-CONTRA HEARINGS)

“There was a lot of internal friction within the bureaucracy about General Secord.”

NARRATOR:

In the previous episodes, Gene Wheaton’s Iran-Contra whistle-blowing led to the exposure of illegal covert activities, resulting in congressional investigations and criminal prosecutions. In the years that followed, Wheaton continued his investigations into wrongdoing in the intelligence community and elsewhere in the government, and became an important source for journalists covering the covert world. During all of those years, Wheaton also harbored one secret that he kept close — only mentioning it publicly toward the end of his life. The information he would later reveal pertained to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

(MUSIC CUE)

NARRATOR:

Prior to his involvement in Iran-Contra, Gene Wheaton had a three-decade military career, followed by work as a private security contractor in the Middle East. His entree to the Iran-Contra operation had come through Carl Elmer Jenkins — a long-time covert operator whom Wheaton had befriended. The following interview with Wheaton was conducted in 1998:

GENE WHEATON:

The guys that I had known for several years — primarily Carl Jenkins, who was a long-time career CIA paramilitary mercenary operator ... probably the most highly respected of those people in that division of the agency ... he was the commander of the biggest CIA base in Laos. Carl and I became very close friends in the early '80s to the point where I would keep a bedroom in his home in Washington with clothes and papers and things so I didn't have to carry them from California. I was commuting regularly back and forth, and when I was going overseas ... and Carl and his wife — who was an active super-grader in the agency — he was her case officer, but she had been his interpreter and then he got her a master's degree and then she got her PhD ... She went on to head one of the branches of the agency. We became like brothers and sisters, between me and them.

NARRATOR:

Gene's son Gary is a former security contractor, who met Carl Jenkins during the period when his father and Jenkins were close.

GARY WHEATON:

I did stay with my Dad at Carl Jenkins' house ... well, I would say apartment. It was a small apartment. Very nicely decorated, as I recall. We sat at ... between the kitchen and dinning room bar, to have our conversations. The conversations were always friendly. They were, again, like I said, very hospitable and, uh, kind couple when we were there.

NARRATOR:

Television producer Matt Ehling interviewed Gene Wheaton for several radio and television programs.

MATT EHLING:

I first met Wheaton in 1998, and over the course of ten years or so, he furnished me with hundreds of pages of his personal records, including the resume for Carl Jenkins. I have that document here — and it provides an overview of Jenkins' career, starting with

Marine Corps service in the 1940s, and then transitions to paramilitary training in Southeast Asia in the late 1950s.

For the years 1960-61, there is an entry here that reads: “Chief of base for Cuban project, first in Florida and then in Guatemala.” It also says, “Responsible for selection and training of cadre” and “assignment of officers for invasion brigade.” And this would have been the Bay of Pigs timeframe.

NARRATOR:

Danny Sheehan is an attorney who worked with Gene Wheaton on investigating the Iran-Contra operation. Through Wheaton, he met several times with Carl Jenkins.

DANNY SHEEHAN:

Carl — was assigned to train the Bay of Pigs people, down in Nicaragua. He was training them down there, basically, for the invasion. Uh, because a lot of the guys who were basically just right-wing Cuban guys, hadn’t had any combat training, or any kind of, you know, infiltration training, or anything. And so he went down there to do that.

(MUSIC CUE)

NARRATOR:

Other Bay of Pigs veterans — including Felix Rodriguez and Rafael “Chi Chi” Quintero — were working as part of the Iran-Contra supply operation during the 1980s, when Wheaton and Jenkins were in close contact. Gene Wheaton:

GENE WHEATON:

So I was back in Washington trying to drum up business for this little cargo airline and Carl agreed to be my Washington representative, uh, for marketing purposes to open doors for me in Washington, D.C. to see if I could get some cargo contracts. And Carl took me to an office in the State Department which is called Under Secretary for Security Assistance, Science and Technology. And Carl had moved a U.S. Army colonel into that office, in civilian clothes, who was a CIA officer, who was a Cuban from the Bay of Pigs.

NARRATOR:

Through Jenkins and Quintero, Wheaton became aware of the illegal dimensions of the Iran-Contra operation. He then began collaborating with public interest attorney Danny Sheehan, who had been conducting his own Iran-Contra investigation from the outside. In 1986, Sheehan initiated a civil lawsuit directed at several U.S. government-connected Iran-Contra participants.

(MUSIC OUT)

(SFX: Street sounds)

NARRATOR:

While Sheehan was gathering information for the case, he and Wheaton would visit Carl Jenkins at a CIA safe-house. At the time, Jenkins was cooperating with Wheaton to release certain information about Iran-Contra, due to their mutual frustrations with former CIA official Ted Shackley, who was involved in the Contra project and other illegal operations. Danny Sheehan:

DANNY SHEEHAN:

So we drove out of Washington DC, down through Georgetown, out across the bridge, and out into Virginia. It was on a little side street. And it wasn't very big ... We, we didn't go in the front door. We always went around to the side, and went in through the kitchen. There was this door there. And you'd ring the bell. And you'd ring it twice and wait, and then you'd ring it three times, and then Carl would come to the door. And that's ... that's where we met.

(MUSIC CUE)

NARRATOR:

After one particular meeting with Carl Jenkins, Sheehan and Wheaton exited from the safe house to return to their car. Sheehan revealed that Wheaton then made an unexpected comment:

DANNY SHEEHAN:

I remember .. when we came out the door from the kitchen, out that back side door, and Gene ... closed the door, and Carl went away, and he turned to me. We were still on the sidewalk ... and he said to me, "He's not worried so much about the Shackley thing," he said. "About this operation," he said. "It's the Kennedy Assassination," he said. That's what he said to me. I mean, like, out of the blue. You know? I hadn't even raised the Kennedy Assassination, or anything. And, and Gene just said that to me. Like that. Uh, and I never pushed — I never probed at him. You know. 'Cause that was one of the reasons I was able to have them tell me as much as they were willing to. 'Cause I never pushed on 'em. To make them tell me anything ... but that was the ... that was the, virtually the only time he ever talked about the Kennedy assassination directly with me.

NARRATOR:

In 1988, Sheehan deposed Wheaton at length for the Christic Institute's Iran-Contra lawsuit. A portion of the suit related to an alleged CIA-managed assassination program, and Sheehan questioned Wheaton on the record about his findings related to the program, as well as discussions with Rafael "Chi Chi" Quintero regarding a list of alleged assassinations. During the course of the deposition, Wheaton mentioned trying to arrange immunity for Quintero if he would testify about past assassination operations. On the record, Wheaton stated that Quintero told him that if he testified, "it would be the biggest scandal that has ever hit the United States since the nation was formed." Danny Sheehan:

DANNY SHEEHAN:

Oh, I assume he was talking about the Kennedy assassination. There wasn't any doubt about what I thought he was talking about, yeah ... It was a strange period in the deposition, because, as I said, he was talking more in the deposition than he had actually talked to me about before. And so it wasn't something that we'd prepared a-head of time. And so that ... I was trying to figure out ... now I'm in a situation where I can ask him some questions that I wouldn't have asked him otherwise. And so I just wanted to see how far he was going to go.

NARRATOR:

Sheehan's line of questioning about the assassination program continued for a short while longer. Wheaton testified that he had talked to Carl Jenkins regarding information he had heard about a team of anti-Castro Cuban assassins being trained in Mexico in the early 1960s, as part of a triangulation shooting team. Wheaton also testified that Jenkins made a comment that the information was "preposterous" and would not discuss it any further.

Years later, Sheehan would reveal that he had additional reasons to be curious about Wheaton's Kennedy assassination comments, dating to his brief time working for F. Lee Bailey's law firm in the early 1970s. Bailey served as defense counsel for Mafia boss Santo Trafficante and James McCord — a former high-level officer in the CIA's Office of Security. Trafficante had worked with the CIA on plots to assassinate Fidel Castro, and several of the Watergate burglars were involved in clandestine activities including coup and assassination plots going back to the 1950s. In conversations with Sheehan, Trafficante was surprisingly open regarding his knowledge about details of the Kennedy assassination, the anti-Castro Cubans involved in the Watergate break-ins, and the connections between the two events.

DANNY SHEEHAN:

And so I ended up leaving Bailey's office because I didn't want anything to do with that, when I learned that Bailey was on "Index Four" — which is that list of lawyers,

American lawyers — that if any CIA agents are caught engaged in domestic covert operations, which is totally prohibited under the charter for the agency, that these are the four lawyers ... one of them would be hired. And it turns out that's why Bailey got brought on to represent James McCord.

(MUSIC CUE)

NARRATOR:

In 1994 — six years after his Christic deposition — Gene Wheaton wrote a confidential letter to the Assassination Records Review Board. The board had been established by Congress a year earlier, after Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" had created a public firestorm over the tens of thousands of Kennedy assassination documents the government had refused to release. Congress created and tasked the ARRB with locating, reviewing and releasing these assassination-related documents. In his letter to the board, Wheaton provided his professional background, and noted that he had information relevant to the board's inquiry.

Documents show that the board followed up with Wheaton, and assigned an investigator to interview him. Wheaton then revealed his close association with people of a covert operations background, including Carl Jenkins, and indicated that they had expressed intimate knowledge about the Kennedy assassination. Wheaton's correspondence also contained a copy of Jenkins' resume and passport.

A memo prepared by board investigator Anne Buttimer summarized an April 1995 conversation with Wheaton, in which he related stories, told by associates of his, that were connected to the Kennedy Assassination. Wheaton offered to provide further information, but asked that the matter be kept confidential.

(MUSIC CUE OUT)

NARRATOR:

Larry Hancock has written several books about the Kennedy Assassination and anti-Castro operations, and has reviewed Wheaton's correspondence with the Records Review Board.

LARRY HANCOCK:

So what I would say about that memorandum, is it was actually a well-structured, and very concise description of what Wheaton was offering. He was approaching it as a law enforcement officer would. That's why he ... clearly why he sent his credentials and his resume along with the information, and made a very limited assertion in his first contact,

simply saying that he had heard ... heard conversations from people that he knew well ... that knew names, individuals, details. He was offering these individuals as sources of information ... So from the very beginning he had approached this as legally valid information, that he was trying to protect.

NARRATOR:

Carl Jenkins' background as a trainer of anti-Castro Cubans went even deeper than the Bay of Pigs. Government records establish that Jenkins worked on other Cuba-related programs that began during the Eisenhower/Nixon administration in 1960, including CIA plans to assassinate Fidel Castro. Larry Hancock:

LARRY HANCOCK:

It's documented — that Jenkins at one point in time was associated with what was designated in a few documents as the "PATHFINDER" project. Part of the PATHFINDER project was to prepare individuals to be infiltrated into Cuba ... to be trained, and equipped, and provided with information to allow them to conduct sniper attacks. And to assassinate Fidel Castro ... either on his way to, or at ... basically a retreat he used near the coast, at a former plantation. In 1963, a new project — highly secretive project — called AMWORLD was initiated ... and Jenkins was brought back specifically to be the operations manager, case officer, for that military effort. Which, again, was going to involve some attacks on Castro ... it was all military ... And Quintero — "Chi Chi" Quintero — was actually the Cuban exile side. The anti-Castro equivalent to Jenkins. They liasoned. Jenkins was the case officer, Quintero would be in the actual operations, he was involved in recruiting people, setting up bases, obtaining boats, and then doing those missions.

NARRATOR:

Attorney Danny Sheehan notes that from the days of these anti-Castro operations, many of the participants maintained long-term connections, as they worked within various parts of the covert operations world.

DANNY SHEEHAN:

They all had a ... a horizontal relationship with each other. Whatever their vertical relationship was with the government, or some security agency, or some covert operation — whatever it is — that whatever the vertical relationship they had officially — they had this informal, uh, horizontal relationship with each other.

NARRATOR:

During Wheaton's days inside the Iran-Contra program, he would stay with Carl Jenkins when he was in Washington DC. Jenkins would frequently have former Cuban exiles

from the anti-Castro programs — including Rafael “Chi Chi” Quintero — up from Miami for meetings, and to socialize with other intelligence community members. In his 1998 interview, Gene Wheaton described his attendance at these events:

GENE WHEATON:

I was being brought into this subculture as the next generation of these people, to be their fair-haired boy, one of them. And I was adopted into their subculture. And I attended their parties and things. All of their decision-making was made in someone's backyard during a smoker, during a barbecue, people having wine, something, sitting around in backyards out in Virginia, out in the suburbs, outside the Beltway, in Maryland. And I was just basically accepted in the crowd.

NARRATOR:

It was during these events that Wheaton was exposed to Kennedy assassination stories told by intelligence community veterans.

Anne Buttimer’s 1995 memo about her phone call with Wheaton reads: “Over the course of a year and a half his friend told him about his activities training Cuban insurgency groups. Wheaton said he also got to know many of the Cubans who had been his friend’s soldiers and operatives when the Cubans visited Virginia from their homes in Miami. His friend and the Cubans confirmed to Wheaton they assassinated JFK. Wheaton’s friend said he trained the Cubans who pulled the triggers. Wheaton said the street level Cubans felt JFK was a traitor after the Bay of Pigs and wanted to kill him. People above the Cubans wanted JFK killed for other reasons.”

Buttimer’s memo ends by noting that, “Wheaton said he would speak to the Board confidentially, but would not allow his name to be used publicly because his friend and the friend’s associates said they would destroy me in the media with a blitz of disinformation to destroy my professional reputation.”

(MUSIC CUE)

NARRATOR:

Wheaton’s correspondence with the Board was eventually discovered in the National Archives by JFK assassination researcher Malcom Blunt. Blunt shared the records with other researchers, including Stuart Wexler and Larry Hancock:

LARRY HANCOCK:

A friend of mine, Malcom Blunt, who is a British researcher, who has spent perhaps more time in the American National Archives than any American has, um, would periodically

come across documents that could be investigated. They, they had names, living people, whatever, that could be investigated, and then he would pass them back to me or to others, and so I got an air mail from England, and he passed on a couple of copies — pieces of these documentation, from the ARRB.

And, and of course I don't think Wheaton ever appreciated that the ARRB's files were public files, and would ever be released and go into the public domain and into the National Archives, and be read by anybody. Uh, so I got these, and immediately, a couple of us got together — Stu Wexler and I got together — and we immediately could document that these were really serious people. Jenkins and Quintero are real people, they've involved extensively in very high-level anti-Castro operations.

And at the same time I was doing some other things, and I happened to be working with William Law, and so we were spending a lot of time together, and I found out that William and Mark Sobel were going to be going into an area in California where we thought Wheaton might be living. And I said, you know, come on ... let's see if we can find him.

NARRATOR:

Author William Mason Law eventually contacted Wheaton on behalf of Hancock and Wexler, and arranged to interview him about his correspondence with the Board. William Law:

WILLIAM LAW:

I got a call from Larry. Uh, and he said, "William, I've got some papers here, it's got a guy's name in it. His name is Gene Wheaton. And we don't know too much about him, but I got these papers sent to me ... it's got a phone number on it. So he said, "Would you mind trying to get ahold of this guy, and see if he would talk to us?"

So I called the number, and a few days went by, and I thought, "Well, I'm going to have to call him back," when he called me. And we had a little talk ... He was surprised to know that somebody had stumbled upon the records. He didn't even know the records had ... had come out. And I had to explain to him that these records were indeed out, and that's how we knew about him. He was ... he was curious ... uh, very nice to me, the further we talked. Uh, you know, he told me about some of the of the background, he told me about Ann Buttimer, and how he had some information that he thought that the Records Review Board might want to know.

Now, you have to keep in mind that ... I knew ... None of us at that point knew who Gene Wheaton was. I knew nothing about him ... it was just a little throw-away

interview that I was going to do as a favor, and I guess it turned out to be much, much more than that.

NARRATOR:

Law traveled to California with filmmaker Mark Sobel, and captured Wheaton on camera, reviewing his correspondence with the Records Board. William Law:

WILLIAM LAW:

I found him to be a pretty open guy. And just kind of matter-of-fact ... “Now keep in mind,” he said, “This isn’t like ... this didn’t happen all at once. This took years for me to be around these people, and for me to get them to ... I became,” he said, “like furniture. I was just there and they ... they would talk about stuff.”

NARRATOR:

The following audio is from William Law’s interview with Wheaton:

WILLIAM LAW:

I asked you once about ... did they ever talk about the JFK assassination? (PAUSE) And I said, “How’d that make you feel?” (PAUSE). And you said something like, “I pretended I was deaf.”

GENE WHEATON:

Well, um, in the beginning I just ... whatever they’d all about, it was just ... I would absorb it, and listen to ‘em, you know. And they would talk to each other. But as time went along, I started feeling Carl out, and Chi Chi Quintero, particularly, because Chi Chi was a shooter. And he was trained by I.W. Harper. And I started feeling these guys out about their involvement with ... with, uh, the Kennedy assassination. ‘Cause Carl was from Louisiana. And he was the CIA’s liaison with Carlos Marcello, the Mafia boss down there. And connected in with Sam Giancana and John Roselli and other guys who were in public record as being part of that crowd of Mafia guys that they say were inter-connected with the Kennedy assassination.

WILLIAM LAW:

Did you learn in the discussions whether that was true?

GENE WHEATON:

Well I learned what they said ... they said it was true. And I, I had been working with Senator Scott — Hugh Scott — to, to see if we could get the record set straight on the Kennedy assassination after so many years, and, and Chi Chi Quintero’s wife Delores — out of Miami — and they had a son up at an Ivy League school in New England, and a

daughter at Georgetown ... and ... and, you know, he had family responsibilities that he didn't have when he was a young, hot-shot shooter and explosives man and stuff, and I said ... I said, "If you guys will, you know, set the whole record straight, Senator Scott and I will try to work through the House, the White House, and the Senate, to get you total immunity if you'll just tell the whole, straight story."

WILLIAM LAW:

So, as he told it to you, what is the straight story?

GENE WHEATON:

The straight story is that there was a CIA-funded program to assassinate Castro. And Carl was in charge of training the Cubans ... from Miami ... to assassinate Castro, and it was paid for by the CIA. And they would go through Texas down to Mexico and take old convertibles and things down in the hills and rocky areas ... and stick watermelons up in back seat, and "plunk" 'em. They had a thing called a "triangulation shooting team." And they were — according to them — and, uh ... that they were the ones that diverted the Castro funds and training for their own agenda to snuff Kennedy.

WILLIAM LAW:

A rogue element, in other words.

GENE WHEATON:

Well, it was partially. It was a paid element, but — and they were CIA people.

WILLIAM LAW:

They were ...

GENE WHEATON:

But, they were ... they were, uh ... training to assassinate Castro, but if you're trained to assassinate one man, you can assassinate anybody with that same training. Because ... well, the Cubans ... because of his imprisonment of those guys, and because of the failed Bay of Pigs thing, and JFK backing off at the last moment on supporting the Bay of Pigs invasion.

WILLIAM LAW:

So they were still angry.

GENE WHEATON:

Oh they were —

WILLIAM LAW:

— all these years later —

GENE WHEATON:

— furious. And they still are to this day, the ones who are still alive.

WILLIAM LAW:

Now —

GENE WHEATON:

And there was another clique above them that was worried about Kennedy not increasing the program ... to escalate hostilities in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. So at an extremely high level — and I'm talking about the political elite level — within the shakers and movers of the country, and with the very top people in the CIA and the Pentagon, and the White House ... uh ... they didn't want Kennedy to shut down that war, 'cause they were just trying to get it warmed up in the early '60s and they wanted it to escalate so they would have a long ... war in Vietnam ...

WILLIAM LAW:

Now keep in mind that this was in 2005, and the people he talked about were still living. They, they were ailing, but they were still alive. And yet, he had the guts to sit in front of that camera, and name names. He was absolutely unafraid. Uh ... I said at one point, "Does any of that frighten you?" You know, he says, "No, I'm a cop." He considered himself to be a cop, a policeman.

(MUSIC CUE)

NARRATOR:

After Wheaton's interview with Law and Sobel, other JFK assassination researchers tried to contact him, but were unable to get further details. Larry Hancock:

LARRY HANCOCK:

He became more reclusive, I would say. They moved not too long after that interview. There's every sign ... if anything, he tried to lower his profile. Um, even, even when people managed to get in contact with him. He just wouldn't go any further than he had already gone. He didn't take back what he had said, but he didn't add to what he had said, or certainly try to elaborate any more than what he had provided to the ARRB.

NARRATOR:

William Law's video-taped interview was eventually released on YouTube after Wheaton's death — providing the first extensive public disclosure of Wheaton's statements about the Kennedy assassination. Wheaton's family members, including his son Gary, recall their father talking about the assassination in passing over the years, but never focusing on it at length. Gary Wheaton:

GARY WHEATON:

Now as far as the JFK assassination goes, yes, uh, he allegedly knew the shooters' names. And he got that information from Carl Jenkins. He never conveyed any kind of questioning of the information that he received. It was like two buddies talking to each other at the time. He was very good friends with him. And he never, ever indicated that he may have been fed misinformation. Not that that's not possible ... Because you've got to consider who you're dealing with. Also ... but he was, was very good at, I would say, discerning, the truth. And whether he was receiving the truth or not. He was very aware of not going too far into conspiratorial things, because he would be discredited as a "conspiratorialist" quack. He was very careful about which ones he would attempt to throw out into the public, because he had to stay legitimate, in order to be successful in his other investigations.

(MUSIC CUE OUT)

NARRATOR:

In 2013, Wheaton was at home with one of his daughters, when he lost his footing and fell onto a rock formation near his home, striking his head. Denise Wheaton is one of Gene's daughters:

DENISE WHEATON:

He was still doing stuff until he had a head injury. He fell down a hill — it's all rocks — and he hit his head. And it was a serious concussion ... I had him taken to Cedar Sinai Hospital. So I got him in that hospital, and they got him back, but not enough. And so he had the head injury, and then, two years afterwards, he had another one. Head injury. And we don't know how that one happened, cause no one was around when that one happened.

ANITA WHEATON (off mic):

I found him ..

DENISE WHEATON:

She found him. Yeah. He was alive. But went into the hospital, and he died in the hospital. When I talked to the doctor the second time, he said he wasn't healed enough. And so they said he didn't have enough time to heal from that. Even though the second injury wasn't serious, it was serious because of the first injury. And so he died in the hospital.

(MUSIC CUE)

NARRATOR:

A three-decade military and security career had preceded Wheaton's role as a government whistle-blower. The peak of his public exposure came during the 1980s, with Wheaton's work to uncover the illegalities of the Iran-Contra operation. During that decade, Wheaton's investigations brought him into contact with Texas billionaire Ross Perot. Wheaton's findings about illegal government activities contributed to Perot running as a third-party candidate against George H.W. Bush in the 1992 presidential election. Perot's third-party bid cut deeply into Bush's vote total, contributing to his loss to challenger Bill Clinton. In the years that followed, Wheaton pursued multiple, other investigations — including for the families of military service members whose loved ones had died in what they considered to be suspicious circumstances. For instance, Wheaton spent several years investigating the contested death of U.S. Marine Colonel James Sabow, who was found dead of gunshot wounds at his home at El Toro Airbase in California. Denise Wheaton:

DENISE WHEATON:

People kept contacting him. He did help people. Like families of people who died. It's like, at least ... One of the things that the family needs ... one major things a family needs is that, "someone is listening to me." And that's a big deal right there. He liked more people knowing. He wanted the reporters to come out and share the information, so that people know.

NARRATOR:

Gene's son, Gary Wheaton.

GARY WHEATON:

The collateral of his actually investigating, is Iran-Contra coming to the surface in the first place. Because he was associated with Dick Secord in Iran. Ollie North and all that are all part of that circle. Had he not investigated so vigorously, it's possible that it might not have ever came to light. He had a part in, in exposing some of the corruption in this country.

NARRATOR:

Danny Sheehan:

DANNY SHEEHAN:

Well, he's ... he's one of the people who was ... was ... at the very edge of history. The fact that he's the one who re-opened the pipeline of weapons to the Mujahideen. You know. The fact that he's the one that kind of blew the whistle on Mena, Arkansas. That's not unimportant. The fact that he's the one that talked with Ross Perot, and Ross Perot, you know, ran against Bush to get him out of there. For a second term, you know. That's not an unimportant role. In history. You know, there are active things that he did, that are ... that have an impact on history. But this thing with regard to the Kennedy thing, he was never quite able to get anything done about that. You know. I mean, that's the big one.

NARRATOR:

Gene Wheaton.

GENE WHEATON:

I have sat on the banks of the Potomac in restaurants with 75- and 80-year-old retired CIA people and retired generals, West Point graduates. Honorable people ... who coming up through the ranks were busy climbing the pyramid to success and almost every one of them had a CIA case officer even if he became more than a two-star general, and they helped get them promoted. These old men have told me that, "Gene, what you're into, you understand it more than we did, and it is absolutely true, but it's just so big you can't do anything about it." I guess if I believed that, I'd go off to some South Sea island and drink Cuba Libres and lay in the sand or something, but somebody has to keep charging in there, you know ...

(MUSIC CUE OUT)

NARRATOR:

You are listening to episode three of "American Whistleblower: The Gene Wheaton Story." Produced by AW Media Group and Dan Storper.

END