

Outlaws run Virginia sheriff's dept. that worked to frame up candidate

by an EIR Investigative Team

The same Loudoun County Sheriff's Department in Leesburg, Virginia which was at the center of the 400-man paramilitary raid against presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche's associates in October 1986, is now itself the target of an expanding federal investigation for corruption which has drawn national press attention. Loudoun County Sheriff John Isom, the man at the center of the controversy, is a close political ally of the ambitious Virginia Attorney General, Mary Sue Terry, for whom he gave the nominating speech at the 1988 state Democratic Party Convention. Terry and Isom worked together to engineer the conviction of LaRouche for federal "conspiracy" charges of which he was totally innocent, and subsequent trials which have put nearly 50 individuals on trial solely for their political ties to LaRouche.

The federal investigation into Sheriff Isom is in part focused on a self-appointed private military force known as ARGUS, an acronym for Armored Response Group United States. The investigation also concerns practices similar to those which made the LaRouche case an international scandal—such as withholding exculpatory evidence, and illegal surveillance and investigation methods. In a special statement to the Leesburg community on May 14, Isom boasted that he was "instrumental" in getting LaRouche convicted. Court testimony in various Virginia state trials of LaRouche associates has established that from 1985 on, Anti-Defamation League (ADL) operatives met in the Loudoun County Sheriff's Department with Isom, Deputy Don Moore, and other deputies, to coordinate various operations against LaRouche.

The mysterious ARGUS Foundation, and its financial relationship to both Isom and the Sheriff's Department, is one area of focus for federal investigators, according to Col. J.C. Herbert Bryant, the director of the paramilitary Armored Response Group U.S. Foundation. Just below the surface, however, is a much bigger scandal—one that links ARGUS and its co-founder and vice president, John Isom, to the "secret government" apparatus that, among other notorious acts, controlled Oliver North's drug- and gun-running operations.

The FBI wants to know if there was commingling of Loudoun Sheriff's Department funds and those of the AR-

GUS Foundation, various law enforcement sources report.

According to the self-proclaimed Colonel Bryant, who also has given himself the title "general," "major general," and "attorney general," federal investigators also want to know if the Loudoun Sheriff's Department has ever given ARGUS "rent-free office space . . . given us anything free of charge . . . such as seized vehicles . . . or rented anything for us . . . anyone associated with us . . . any consultation fees or other compensation . . . was there any official association with ARGUS with the Sheriff's Department other than a friendly agreement, an arrangement?"

Also, he said, "They wanted to know if we had made any donations, contributions or loans . . . had anybody at the Sheriff's Department received any donations, contributions or loans made by ARGUS or anyone associated with ARGUS, if we tried to backdoor something to the Loudoun County Sheriff's Department or any employee thereof. . . . It looks like they were fishing to see if we were paying Isom, or was Isom paying us?" ARGUS's financial records, including copies of rental leases and canceled rent checks, are part of the documentation given by the Sheriff's Department to the FBI.

A resident of wealthy Middleburg, Virginia who lives down the road from Sheriff Isom, Bryant vigorously denies that ARGUS is involved in any wrongdoing of the Sheriff's Department. But what he confirmed in an interview shows why there should be concern about ARGUS and its relationship to Isom and the Sheriff's Department:

- Isom and Bryant cofounded ARGUS in 1985.
- Colonel Bryant contributed to Sheriff Isom's electoral campaign.
- ARGUS shared and donated office space to the Sheriff's Department in Leesburg, the county seat.
- ARGUS's office is located in the same building as the Sterling substation of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Department.
- Capt. John Sealock, head of the Loudoun Sheriff's Department's SWAT team, is a member of ARGUS.
- ARGUS is a member of the Regional Organized Crime Information Center (ROCIC), as is the Loudoun Sheriff's Department. ROCIC is an intelligence-sharing network composed of many local and state police agencies in some 10

mid-Atlantic states. ROCIC is funded in part by U.S. Department of Justice grants.

'Rambozos'

Although ARGUS portrays itself as a philanthropy out to help underequipped local law enforcement agencies, some federal law enforcement officials have labeled the group a "bunch of political vigilantes." The ARGUS Foundation is a private, paramilitary group which provides specialized tactical equipment to law enforcement agencies for dealing with "special crises" such as terrorism or narcotics problems, according to its own public relations. Professional law enforcement officials and intelligence sources believe that ARGUS is an "off-line" creation reflective of "secret government" networks which were components of the Iran-Contra operations.

Known jokingly in some circles as "Rambozos," a subculture of government officials and private citizens has developed a series of private front groups, businesses, and intelligence community "interagency task forces," to carry out their own political extremist agenda. The finances of these operations are traditionally murky, as earlier investigations into Colonel North's networks have demonstrated.

Several national security directives were enacted by presidential executive decree in the mid-1980s, including Executive Orders 12333 and 12334, which gave the mandate for the suppression of civil liberties under pretext of a perceived national security threat, as defined by the "secret government" operatives themselves; those executive orders also provided the national security "cover" for the frameup of Lyndon LaRouche and his associates, in which Isom played a prominent role.

Under various "national security" or "states of emergency" scenarios, local law enforcement agencies would operate as adjuncts of federal authorities. Local sheriffs and police officers could be deputized, with the authority of a federal law enforcement official.

Colonel Bryant is himself a deputy U.S. Marshal, even though his only employment is for ARGUS, a non-governmental, ostensibly non-profit agency. Colonel Bryant says he receives no compensation for his work.

Sheriff Isom is no stranger to "secret government" operations. He has been linked to illegal CIA domestic actions since at least the early 1970s, when he worked at the McLean substation of the adjoining Fairfax County Police Department. In 1975, a major scandal erupted when the Rockefeller Commission disclosed that the CIA had utilized the Fairfax County police to conduct illegal domestic political operations.

Former Loudoun Sheriff's Deputy Lt. Donald Moore, who worked with Isom in Fairfax and was brought to Loudoun when Isom became sheriff there, began his career in dirty operations when he shared a tent with Col. Oliver North, while both were in the Marine Corps special forces in Vietnam. Bryant confirmed knowing former Lieutenant Moore

in the context of Moore's activities against LaRouche and his associates.

Isom also made use of former intelligence officers in the Loudoun Sheriff's Department for various activities. According to the Winter 1990 issue of *Periscope*, the newsletter of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers (AFIO), a public relations arm of the CIA, Sheriff Isom has used "retired" CIA operatives in county law enforcement activities.

The January-February 1987 issue of *Law Enforcement Technology* magazine reported, "ARGUS first started in August 1985 and was conceived of by Col. Herbert Bryant of the Mississippi State Sheriff's Office and Sheriff John Isom of the Loudoun County, Va. Sheriff's Dept. Bryant and Isom both believed there was a need for police agencies to have at their disposal a variety of armored vehicles for use in different tactical situations, and both know that due to the high cost of armored vehicles and their limited amount of use, it would not be cost effective for individual departments to try and purchase individual armored vehicles."

One of those vehicles, an armored personnel carrier, or Ferret, owned by ARGUS and housed in Leesburg, was used in the Oct. 6, 1986 Leesburg raid on companies associated with LaRouche. ARGUS and its strange Colonel Bryant provide a convenient cover for the mobilization of such police state actions. ARGUS personnel have been observed training at the Summit Point racetrack in West Virginia with personnel who participated in the Iran-Contra operations. ARGUS remains the target of several independent investigators, determined to further pierce its public relations armor.

Patrons in high places

On May 10 the *Sunday Washington Post* published a front-page story on the ARGUS scandal. It reported that Sen. John Warner (R-Va.), a Middleburg neighbor of Bryant and Isom, wrote letters to then-Secretary of Defense Weinberger and others, to help Bryant secure military equipment for ARGUS. Bryant is also close to Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), who told the *Post* that Bryant is "a very fine man." Thurmond is a director of the U.S. Marshals Foundation for which Bryant is president. Bryant and Isom are also deputy U.S. Marshals.

As the federal investigation expands, some former backers are jumping ship. At least four ARGUS board members have resigned, according to media reports. Loudoun County Board of Supervisors Chairman George Barton ordered the county to cut its ties to ARGUS May 11, in response to revelations that the county owns and stores several pieces of military equipment used by the group.

Charles Waddell, the Democratic state senator who represents Loudoun County and Fairfax County, was an honorary board member of the secret government group, but he told the media: "I signed onto it at the time, but I had concerns about accountability and oversight. I don't think I want a private police force running around with guns and badges."