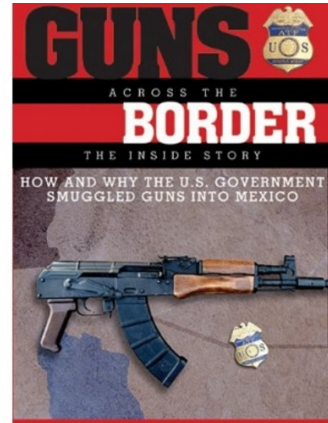




Written by [James Heiser](#) on January 6, 2015

A Review of “Guns Across the Border”

Keeping track of the scandals related to the Obama administration could easily be a full-time profession, and the books and articles associated with tracking the development of those scandals would already be enough to fill a small library. However, among the more egregious of the early scandals were the “gunwalking” sting operations conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (still known as ATF) during the first several years of President Obama’s first term.



Two such stings — Operation Wide Receiver and Operation Fast and Furious — attracted a measure of public attention when the Obama administration used the results of ATF’s own operations as part of a justification for a crackdown on reports of gun sales in states along the Mexican border. As the present author [wrote for *The New American* in January 2011](#), the administration used the guns that the ATF allowed to flow into Mexico to serve as a pretext for claiming that firearms dealers were not doing enough to stop “straw purchases.” (A “straw purchase” takes place when an individual who cannot pass the federal background check uses another person to purchase a firearm, thus evading the background check.)

The ATF instructed licensed firearms dealers to permit such “straw purchases,” allowing large numbers of firearms to be transferred into the hands of known members of Mexican cartels and then smuggled across the border as part of Operation Wide Receiver and Operation Fast and Furious. One such licensed firearms dealer was Mike Detty, who worked for the ATF for several years as a paid confidential informant (CI). Detty’s detailed account of the inner workings of Operation Wide Receiver has been published: [Guns Across the Border — How and Why the U.S. Government Smuggled Guns Into Mexico](#). In the book, Detty presents an ugly picture of mendacity, petty careerism, and political agendas at work within the ranks of federal law enforcement, which Detty alleges are behind one of the more reprehensible scandals of the Obama administration.

Detty attributes his willingness to work as a CI to a sense of patriotic duty; however, after years of cooperation in Operation Wide Receiver, placing his life at risk interacting with known criminals with cartel connections, Detty declares that he was utterly disillusioned:

All of my life I had nothing but the greatest respect for federal agents and those who worked in the Department of Justice. Now, for the first time I was seeing them for what they were — lazy, sloppy self-protecting civil servants who cared more about self-preservation and collecting a paycheck than doing the right thing. The high regard I once had for these people had been replaced with contempt. I’d gone from someone who was extremely proud of my involvement in helping federal law enforcement to someone who was ashamed and embarrassed.... They had gone out of their way to turn a patriot who would have done anything they asked into a disillusioned cynic.

Guns Across the Border is based on both the detailed journal Detty kept throughout the time during which he was a CI and on the copies of recordings that he made of his meetings with both the alleged



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criminals to whom he sold firearms, and the federal agents to whom he reported. The book is a fast-paced, engaging account of the seamy side of the “gun business.” Detty does not hesitate to name names when it comes to his assessment of various federal agents, and the agents who turned hostile toward Detty when they found out that he had been keeping a journal of all his activities have discovered they had every reason to be concerned about what would happen when those facts detailed within its pages became a matter of public record.

Detty’s account of the inner workings of Operation Wide Receiver is undoubtedly highly embarrassing for those government agents who were involved — whistleblowers have a way of not earning friends in high places. However, among the more alarming details Detty relates was the attempt by unknown parties to destroy his computerized records. Audio files and e-mails were selectively deleted from his computer; however, Detty had made a complete backup of these files. Nevertheless, a friend of his who worked in the intelligence field counseled him:

After you restore your files, go to one of the office supply stores and buy a bunch of thumb drives. Copy all the files pertaining to these ATF cases and send them to trusted friends around the country. That way, if they destroy your computer and get hold of your external hard drive, you’ll still be covered. Who knows what they’ll try next? Breaking into your house? Don’t underestimate these guys, Mike.

Reading *Guns Across the Border*, this writer was left with the impression that while Detty may have underestimated his “friends,” his own cautious nature saved him from an outcome to Operation Wide Receiver that would have been far more deleterious to his future: Without his journal and other materials, it would have been his word against the government, and the public is often highly inclined to simply accept the “government line.”

At the conclusion of his book, Detty speculates about the logic behind the whole existence of the “gunwalking” operations. What was the point of an operation that was allegedly so poorly conceived that American officials never even communicated their intentions or details of their operations to their Mexican counterparts? In Detty’s assessment, it had nothing to do with stopping “straw purchases” and *everything to do with gun control*:

In my opinion, the reason that guns were allowed to cross the border in Wide Receiver as well as Fast and Furious was to have American guns show up at Mexican crime scenes.

With American guns being used in ruthless savagery across the border, a push could be made for a new assault weapons ban here in the United States. There is no other explanation why guns would be continually allowed to cross the border after the purchasers, their cartels, and ports of entry had already been identified.

And Detty does not hesitate to place blame on one agent in particular:

The one common denominator between Wide Receiver and Fast and Furious was Bill Newell, the Special Agent in Charge of the Phoenix ATF office. Newell took over the Phoenix office just a few months after Wide Receiver started and was there from start to finish for Fast and Furious.... Newell had Dennis Burke as his US Attorney in Phoenix. Burke had been one of the authors of the 1994 Assault Weapons ban.

And Newell, Detty hints, had every reason to see his records destroyed:

I possessed information that would prove damning to Newell and the ATF. Whoever it was who



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corrupted my audio files understood this. I believe the detailed journal I kept that caused such heartburn with everyone is also what kept me safe from government reprisals.

Guns Across the Border is a book worth consideration by anyone who wants to understand the true character of the Obama administration's first major firearm scandals. And it is a cautionary tale of the dangers connected with federal agencies pursuing agendas that are meant to be hidden from the sight of the public and accountability to our public representatives.

Mike Detty, [*Guns Across the Border — How and Why the U.S. Government Smuggled Guns Into Mexico*](#), (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013). 264 pages. \$24.95.



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