

Convicted spy Rod Ramsay as a potential Gardner heist suspect

(Part One)



**Unidentified man (left) with Gardner Museum security guard and heist suspect Rick Abath (right)
Rod Ramsay mugshot from June 7, 1990 (center)**

Though his name has never been raised with the public as a Gardner heist suspect by either investigators or the news media, Roderick James Ramsay, a former Boston resident, arrested on espionage charges in Tampa, FL, on June 7, 1990, just ten weeks after the robbery, is certainly someone who remains worthy of consideration. Ramsay was convicted of espionage two years after his 1990 arrest and spent over a decade in prison after his conviction in 1992.

The Boston Globe, New York Times and other news media long ago abandoned hard reporting on the Gardner heist case in favor of [“conjecture based on a theory.”](#) [mutely disseminated](#) by government officials and their surrogates, like former FBI Gardner heist lead investigator Geoffrey Kelly, who in retirement has updated his narrative (changed his story). He now claims that the security guard Rick Abath was indeed in on the robbery, after publicly suggesting otherwise on numerous occasions for over twenty years.

Kelly, who had a book on the Gardner heist investigation come out in 2026, bases his conclusion on information known to investigators the first week; that the Museum security system did not record anyone going into the Blue Room gallery, where Manet’s *Chez Tortoni* was taken, with the exception Abath, who was recorded entering the gallery twice.

As Kelly himself said on *CBS Good Morning* ten years earlier, in 2015: ["Someone went into the Blue Room that night](#), and the only one that went in that room that night was the security guard [Rick Abath], according to the motion sensor printouts."

But when Abath refused to speak with *CBS Good Morning*, and said publicly he was not doing anymore interviews, the FBI and its surrogates reverted to their false narrative that Abath was tricked into letting the thieves in.

By April of the following year, in 2016, the Gardner Museum's security director Anthony Amore, who is also the FBI's chief public relations surrogate on the case said: "We have nothing to point at to say that he [\[Abath\] was involved.](#)"

An FBI podcast on the case starring Geoff Kelly in June of 2023 begins: "In March 1990, art thieves [conned](#) their way into the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum." Less than two years later, however, Kelly told the Boston Globe he was convinced Abath was indeed involved. But since Abath, who by his own admission was the person solely responsible for letting the thieves into the Museum, if he was indeed involved, which has always seemed very likely, then the thieves did not *con* their way into the museum.

The stalemate ended a year after Rick Abath died, when Abath could no longer defend himself, but more importantly when Abath could no longer put the FBI's investigative team and its coterie of surrogates into a position of having to defend *themselves*. Kelly, in retirement and in need of some juice for his book, now says he believes Abath was involved, which everyone, not in one way or another riding the FBI's disinformation gravy train, or too timid to speak out, had been saying for over a dozen years, when Abath himself started going public about his role as the guard who let the thieves in, after being shielded from public scrutiny for over 20 years.

Meanwhile, real facts, which would lead to the kind of real answers the public is surely entitled to after close to four decades, remain unreported. Among those facts are the evidence supporting the possible involvement of Ramsay, along with the Gardner security guard Rick Abath, and others, such as Brian McDevitt. McDevitt lived just three miles from the museum, and had been convicted in an attempt to rob the Hyde Collection, an art museum in Glens Falls, NY, of a Rembrandt and other works ten years earlier.

In a *Sixty Minutes* interview, McDevitt said that he had no alibi for the robbery and a girlfriend of his at that time, Stephanie Rabinowitz said that McDevitt had asked her to lie, to say he was with her that night. In addition, McDevitt told Rabinowitz he was involved in the heist, she now says.

In addition to being interviewed on *Sixty Minutes* about his possible role in the Gardner heist, McDevitt was brought before a grand jury in 1994, regarding the robbery. But in *Netflix, This Is A Robbery* Tom Mashberg said: "Very remarkable that between 1990 and 1997 there were very few stories about the crime. There was never, say, an arrest or a suspect being questioned. Bobby Donati, nobody ever had a chance to ask him any questions obviously."

“Obviously”? Donati did not die until 18 months after the Gardner heist and was under FBI surveillance during at least some of that time, as he made collections from bookies and loan sharks for the mob affiliated Vinnie Ferrara gang. Kurkjian too, in the same Episode 3 of *This Is A Robbery* falsely stated that: “Between 1990 when the theft took place and around 1997 there was nothing.”

In Kurkjian's own book, he devotes six pages to a ransom note and a follow up note, the Museum received in 1994, which he said may have been "the biggest disappointment, and the closest [Gardner Museum Director Anne] Hawley feels the museum has yet come to recovering the stolen art." The Gardner heist occurred in 1990, but nothing happened that fits the current state sponsored narrative until 1997 so everything before that time, and much after it, is memory-holed, by the likes of Mashberg and Kurkjian.

Real facts have gone unreported, or papered over with false facts by an iniquitous guild of access-driven journalists and news media gatekeepers, who instead disseminate false narratives and suspect theories, originating from within the investigation itself. These corrupted, crowd *saucing* manipulators exploit the intrinsic sensationalism of the robbery, while investigators release information "in dribs and drabs," as WATD radio's Christine James observed, in their efforts to maintain narrative control of a fairy tale.

If ordinary hoodlums had actually pulled off the Gardner heist, we would know their names by now, or the Gardner heist would have been long forgotten. But there is little opportunity for outsiders to fill in the blanks when the facts are so capably filled by high budget productions, and journalists who traffic in deceit.

But while Rod Ramsay was a criminal, and a more experienced one than any of the individuals whose names have been tossed around by the news media as the actual perpetrators, he was not an ordinary criminal. He was a soon to be incarcerated spy.

Another example is the highly promoted, highly reported on, reviewed and taken seriously Gardner heist productions was *Last Seen Podcast* by [the Boston Globe and a local NPR affiliate, WBUR](#), with Kelly Horan serving in the role as senior producer. But while it was treated as a serious work of journalism, it was not, as Horan herself admitted three years later. This arch-disseminator of Gardner heist myth, falsely claims on her Boston Globe bio page that *Last Seen Podcast* "was named a top 10 podcast of 2018 by [The Atlantic](#), the Financial Times, Stitcher, and other outlets." None of that is true, although it did garner quite a lot of attention, with dozens of local journalists endorsing it on social media at the time of its release in September of 2018.

In 2021 and again in 2025 the same New York Times writer put it on a list of preferred podcasts. One called ["6 Podcasts About Making and Appreciating Art."](#) and the other was ["7 Podcasts](#)

[About the Art of the Scam.](#)" *Last Seen Podcast* (about a robbery) fits neither category, of the New York Times stories, but such is the clickbait power of the keywords [**Gardner heist**] that articles referencing *Last Seen Podcast* and its Gardner heist subject matter, are page-view powerhouses, real winners, though definitely not a winner for podcast listeners, looking for accurate information. *Last Seen Podcast* does not even fit the category of “**true crime**,” as Horan herself acknowledged in an interview two years later:

"As someone who also has enjoyed a fair amount of pot boilers I knew that **red herrings** would work and so my goal in structuring the entire [*Last Seen Podcast*] ten episode series, the kind of [narrative arc](#) that I wanted to put in place was one where each episode would take you in deep inside a theory, you would meet the central characters of that theory and then you would leave that episode saying 'Aha! that's the one.' only to have the next episode come along and make you doubt that because that was my experience, the experience of reporting this was like whiplash. You know, 'This must be it.' 'No this must be it.' 'He must have done it. No he must have done it.'" —Kelly Horan

Horan’s “narrative arc,” however, was sold to the public as a serious work of investigative journalism. “Iris Adler, Executive Director for Programming, Podcasts and Special Projects at WBUR said that ‘the producers of Last Seen have obtained [unprecedented access](#) to case files, first-ever interviews and this podcast is the result of a year of investigative reporting to unravel the crime’s many mysteries.’”

It seems the Boston Globe and WBUR were given unprecedented access to case files, just so they could present an assortment of junk theories, “red herrings,” in the words of the person who headed up the project, to present the public with disinfotainment. Last Seen podcast did not “unravel” any of “the crime’s many mysteries.”

A short time before its release one of the staff members on the project, Eve Zuckoff, now a city reporter for WBUR, tweeted out: "If you've spoken to me any time in the last 15 months, [THIS is the secret @WBUR and @BostonGlobe podcast](#) I've been working on! Please SUBSCRIBE and get ready for SO. MUCH. MORE."

If WBUR and the Boston Globe were serious about unraveling *mysteries* they would not have made *Last Seen Podcast* in secret.

In 2016, *Last Seen* consulting producer Stephen Kurkjian wrote that "[secrets](#) that could lead to the whereabouts of the artwork remain hidden among associates, family members and friends of the thieves, and it's these individuals who must be convinced to break their traditional code of silence." But the following year when *Last Seen Podcast* began production, there was no outreach through the mass media capabilities of WBUR and the Boston Globe. It seems inviting

public participation was viewed more as an obstacle more than opportunity. The public is just one more scapegoat to explain away the pretend-failure of the FBI's pretend investigation.

Two years later, when the Netflix 4-part series, *This Is A Robbery*, was in the planning stages, Kurkjian met with the Barnicle Brothers, who were heading up the production of Gardner heist series which was first released on Netflix in 2021. Kurkjian's "major advice to them," he said, "was not to try to solve it, that if they tried to solve it, it would be too frustrating for them. I told them I had tried since 1997 and I still know nothing about who did it, why they did it and most importantly, where the paintings had been stashed."

Once again the "deep dive" was kept secret from the public until shortly before the release date, and limited to the same to the same cast of journalistic characters, who either claim to know nothing, or speak in the vaguest of terms about what the FBI believes, or lie about what "the FBI said."

Shelley Murphy: ["The FBI believes](#) the stolen artwork ended up in the hands of Guarente, a convicted bank robber with ties to the Mafia in Boston and Philadelphia who died in 2004."

Kevin Cullen: ["The FBI believes](#) the stolen artwork ended up in the hands of Guarente, a convicted bank robber with ties to the Mafia in Boston and Philadelphia who died in 2004."

Stephen Kurkjian: ["The FBI believes](#) that the heist was pulled off by local thugs who had been made aware of the museum's poor security by fellow gang members.

Or they just lie. Tom Mashberg: "In 2015 ["the F.B.I. named](#) two long-dead, Boston-area criminals, George Reissfelder and Lenny DiMuzio, as the likely bandits."

The *"likely"* bandits?

In 2013, the FBI said they knew who the thieves were. Geoff Kelly said "We know who did it."

In 2015 Mashberg reported: "Mr. [FBI's Geoff] Kelly showed me that Mr. Reissfelder and Mr. DiMuzio closely resembled police sketches of the two men who had entered the museum." A month later in an email response to an inquiry by BostInno, FBI spokesperson Kristen Setera said: "the FBI has NOT publicly identified the suspects involved in the Gardner heist."

Mashberg's "Stealing Rembrandts" co-author, Anthony Amore, specifically stated in March of 2015 that ["nobody named anybody."](#)

In Episode 4 of *Last Seen Podcast*, called "Two Bad Men," Boston Globe reporter Shelley Murphy, one of the leading disseminators of Gardner heist disinformation for over 30 years, acknowledged that: "All these theories are frustrating. For everything that points toward these particular suspects," she lamented, "there's something that [points away."](#)

Frustrating indeed when a journalist spends decades of their career sourcing stories about the Gardner heist from people inside the investigation, who persist in casting aspersions on

“suspects” for whom “there’s something that points away,” something exculpatory, something that excludes them from having been the actual Gardner heist robbers, effectively deflecting attention from other actual suspects like Ramsay, Abath, and McDevitt, despite strong evidence, and for whom there is little, if anything, “that points away.”

It has not been so frustrating, however, that Murphy and The Boston Globe have ever done anything except continue to assist in this state-sponsored disinformation operation, anything except except cooperate fully with it, by disseminating the FBI’s dubious, ever-changing narrative, supported by false facts, while profitably propping it up with sensationalist news stories, a ten-part podcast, and a four-part Netflix series.

As full of inaccuracies and outright deceit as the Globe’s *Last Seen Podcast*, and The Boston Globe’s Gardner heist news stories generally, is their four-part Netflix series *This Is A Robbery*. This Gardner heist *crockumentary* was produced and directed by Colin Barnicle and his brother Nick, sons of the former Boston Globe columnist Mike “Blarneycle” Barnacle.

When Reader’s Digest was set to reprint a 1995 Mike Barnacle Boston Globe column he wrote about a friendship between two young cancer victims, but was unable to substantiate the story.

“Blarneycle” was eventually compelled to resign from the Boston Globe in 1998.

Barnicle’s sons have done numerous projects for the Boston Red Sox, which is owned by the same people as The Boston Globe, John and Linda Henry. Colin Barnicle was an intern for the Red Sox front office when he was a teenager in 2005. Linda Henry, The Boston Globe’s chief executive officer” was also an [executive producer](#) of the Netflix Gardner heist documentary. The Barnacle Brothers continue to prosper through their relationship with the Henry’s, This year they were awarded a Sports Emmy for Outstanding Documentary Series in 2025, for their Netflix production about the 2004 Boston Red Sox.

In addition, four past and current Boston Globe reporters appear prominently in the series: [Stephen Kurkjian](#), [Shelley Murphy](#), [Kevin Cullen](#), and [Tom Mashberg](#). All four of these reporters at the time of the documentary had been reporting about the Gardner heist for at least a quarter century. In addition, all four of the journalists, who appear in the documentary, aside from archival footage, were current or former Boston Globe reporters.

This Is A Robbery was released in 2021. At that point Murphy and Cullen had both worked at The Boston Globe for over thirty years. Kurkjian reported for the Globe for over fifty years. He retired in 2007, but stayed on as a freelancer, covering the Gardner heist for the Globe for another 14 years, until 2021. Although it had been a while, Mashberg recently wrote a freelance assignment for the Globe in October 2025, on the Louvre jewels heist, and was employed by The

Boston Globe as their New York Bureau chief and then as a reporter for about three years in total, in the early nineties.

Along with Boston 25's Bob Ward, these three Globe reporters (Mashberg, Kurkjian and Murphy) account for over ninety percent of the original reporting on the Gardner heist the past ten years, a good deal of it insincere, false and misleading. Cullen covered the case for the Boston Globe in the days following the robbery, but has written little on the case in the last decade.

In 2015, Cullen expressed a good deal of skepticism about the Gardner heist investigation writing: "On Thursday, federal authorities released a surveillance video showing a security guard letting a man into the Gardner Museum the night before it was robbed of 13 priceless paintings in 1990. US Attorney Carmen Ortiz said officials hoped someone in the public might recognize the mystery man."

"How could this crucial piece of evidence just be coming out, 25 years after the city's most infamous unsolved crime? It seemed like either a breathtaking bit of incompetence by the FBI, or more evidence of the bureau's reluctance to share information with law enforcement partners and the public."

But by the time of Netflix's *This Is A Robbery*, Cullen had been won over. Since that 2015 column about the heist investigation, Cullen had undergone his own Mike "Blarneycle" Barnicle type troubles. After WEEI had questioned the truth of some of his past work, The Boston Globe conducted two reviews of Cullen's past work, and while the veteran columnist was given a three month suspension, he managed to keep his job.

The Boston Globe issued a statement on their findings in June of 2018:

"The reviewers found Mr. Cullen's writing to be 'among the most appealing that appears in the Globe -- precise, well observed and often standing up for the forgotten man and woman with profound effect.'

However, the review did find some problems, concluding that "his [Cullen's] columns at times employed 'journalistic tactics that unnecessarily raise questions about his accuracy' that 'may open the door to providing [seriously misleading information to the public.](#)'"

In other words, Cullen employed the very kind of dark-arts, inside journalism, that has been a central and sustaining feature, a **cornerstone** of Gardner heist news coverage in the Boston Globe's news reporting about the Gardner heist case, since at least 2013, as well as in its podcast, [Last Seen Podcast](#), and in its documentary about the Gardner heist, *This Is A Robbery*.

By 2021, Cullen loved Big Brother. He was happy to help promote the government's dubious narrative about the Gardner heist on the Boston Globe's Netflix series on the case, using those same "tactics," in the series, which had put Cullen in hot water back in 2018, as one of the Globe's Gang-of-Four journalist in the series.

Cullen's statements in Netflix *This Is A Robbery*, like those of his fellow Globe affiliated journalists, Murphy, Kurkjian, and Mashberg, included some that employed "journalistic tactics that unnecessarily raise questions about his accuracy" that "may open the door to providing seriously misleading information to the public." In fact if you haven't got game, you're not part of the highly compensated Gardner heist guild of journalists who have appeared over and over again in all of these productions, and whose bylines have appeared almost exclusively in Boston Globe articles about the case for decades.

In Episode 3 of *This Is A Robbery* Cullen says, "It's really important to understand how organized crime works in the city of Boston," as if the documentary, or anyone ever, had done anything like establish that the Gardner heist was pulled off by local members of organized crime.

But Cullen is in his wheelhouse now: "You had the Irish faction in Southie. You had another Irish faction in Charlestown bleeding **[bleeding!]** into Somerville," Cullen states, laying on the Boston accent with a trowel, as if this Cullen guy isn't some dweeb from Malden, but of *duh streets*.

"In the North End you had this sort of coalescing force called La Cosa Nostra," Cullen continued long after one of Blarneycle's boys should have shouted "Annnd CUT!." "This thing of ours.' The Mafia," Wow! We're really getting into some *deep dive* shit but, again, nothing whatsoever to do with the stated subject of this documentary, the Gardner Museum heist.

The newest member of the gang that could be counted on to not report straight is Kelly Horan. In October of 2025 Horan left her job as the Globe's Assistant Ideas editor, after six years. So far, Horan has enjoyed a mere seven-year career as a Gardner heist dissembler, and red herring disseminator. Can her gift for lying with a straight face propel her onward in the Gardner heist media landscape? A bio-blurb in a column she wrote in 2025 said the prevaricating *plutographer* is "writing a book set in Second Empire France." Uh-huh. We all know what that is. It will be a "pot boiler" no doubt.

The sources for these Gardner heist news stories are almost exclusively Gardner Museum security director Anthony Amore, and FBI lead investigator Geoff Kelly. Amore has been on the case for over twenty years, and Kelly who retired from the FBI 2024, is still out there speaking about the Gardner heist case, which he had worked as lead investigator for over two decades. Neither man can point to any tangible results of any kind in the case.

So not only have all of the reporters, who enjoy access to the Gardner heist investigators with the exception of Horan, been working the case for decades, so too have the "investigators" they cover.

In February of 2026 interview podcaster Julia Cowley, a retired FBI agent and profiler said to Geoff Kelly: "You get assigned this [Gardner heist] case and you had it the whole time up until you retired. Can you explain how unusual that is for someone to have the same case?

It's bizarre," Kelly said.

"I don't know of anybody that's had a case that's even close for that length of time," he continued. "That case followed me through three squad changes and a move down to a resident agency down in Southeastern MA. The case stayed with me throughout."

The interviewer Cowley responded, "Usually when you transfer a squad the cases do not go with you if you transfer out of the office, and even go to another satellite office the cases stay with that squad. So it is very unusual for a case agent to remain with a case agent throughout. not only transfers from squads but different offices through their whole career. Very unusual."

Kelly and Amore like to complain about unnamed armchair detectives, and their unspecified theories, about and how much uncorroborated time and effort these individuals create for the real investigators, like Kelly now retired, and Amore who is not a sworn law enforcement officer.

If Kelly's role was in his own words "bizarre," so too has been that of Amore. The day after the heist, FBI (Boston) spokesman Paul F. Cavanaugh told the Boston Globe that "The FBI does not generally rely on [private investigators](#) when it is assisting in art-theft investigations. However, agents will accept information from any source," he said.

"And when longtime Gardner Museum, hired IGI, a private investigative firm based in Washington DC a private investigative firm based in Washington begun by Terry Lenzner, who had cut his teeth as a lawyer for the Senate Watergate Committee, the FBI's supervisors in Boston complained to US attorney Wayne Budd, who fired off a memo warning the museum that it faced prosecution if it withheld information relevant to the investigation," Kurkjian wrote in "Master Thieves."

"Hatch responded, saying in his letter that he was 'shocked and saddened' by Budd's attempt to 'intimidate' the museum and that it cast 'a pall over future cooperative efforts.'"

But once Amore, who was primarily hired as security director of the Gardner, earned the trust of the FBI on the heist investigation side of his role at the museum, he was invited onto the investigation team.

In 2012, Kelly arranged for Amore to have access to the case files, and like Kelly, he has been "working" the case without success for decades.

"Convincing the FBI to share its responsibilities on the case with the Boston police department and the Massachusetts state police was apparently an impossible proposition," Kurkjian wrote in *Master Thieves*. Actual sworn police officers are shut out, while private investigators hired by the museum who have not been brought in by the feds, invite threats of prosecution. But Amore, who is also not a sworn law enforcement officer, received access to the case files, and nobody in the media challenges Amore unprecedented, high profile role, which has been followed dozens of paid personal appearances, book deals, and two unsuccessful runs for two different statewide offices, which his experience as the Gardner Museum security directly made him eminently qualified for, as the Republican nominee

In 2025, the Boston Globe bought Boston Magazine, which was already an established channel of Gardner heist disinformation. In 2024, the former editor, Carly Carioli, [falsely reported](#) in 2024 that on Sunday, March 17, [Myles] Connor will once again take center stage when he appears at the Regent Theater in Arlington, in conversation with Gardner Museum security director Anthony Amore and Myles's longtime manager and collaborator Al Dotoli, for the premiere of *Rock n' Roll Outlaw: The Ballad of Myles Connor*, a new documentary that examines Myles's incredible backstory—and what he may know about the Gardner heist. But there was no documentary shown that day and there is still no documentary that has ever been released, about Myles Connor, his crimes, and his practically nonexistent musical career.

A year later though, there was a cheesy book about Connor, "The Rembrandt Heist: The Story of a Criminal Genius, a Stolen Masterpiece, and an Enigmatic Friendship" by who? The Gardner Museum's security director, the Fed's friend, [Anthony Amore](#).

Just how enigmatic the friendship between the Gardner Museum's head of security, Amore, and Connor, whom Amore described in 2013 as a ["charlatan" and a "huckster."](#) (Time: 1:24:00) is a question for the Gardner Museum's trustees to decide. What Amore finds interesting or special, an investigator forming a friendship with a criminal, is in fact all too common, and generally regarded as an occupational hazard of investigative work, as was seen with the relationship between [two FBI agents John Connolly, and John Morris with Whitey Bulger](#).

In speaking of Myles, Amore said: "From the handshake we just hit it off. It was weird."

Was it though?

"We just have this appreciation, I think we both have this appreciation," Amore explained, for art that I think is unique from the vast majority of people. [It's "unique" all right.] And somewhere in the middle between good and evil, [you have that gray area](#) where Myles and I meet."

That "gray area," right. That's what they all say, although generally it's through their defense attorneys.

In 2014 Amore said of Connor: "He is one of these guys who committed every type of crime you can imagine. Make a list. Brainstorm on crimes. He can check off every box. You name it, he's done it, [a real bad guy.](#)" But now in the title of his book, Amore calls Connor a criminal genius. If Connor was such a criminal genius, we would never have heard of Myles Connor and he would not have spent most of his adult life in jail, in prison, or on the lam.

Connor is the kind of criminal genius who does a long stretch in prison for selling art, burglarized from an elderly widow, to an undercover FBI agent, and then 15 years later does another long stretch in prison, for selling art stolen from the same elderly widow the same day, to a different undercover FBI agent. According to Connor's book, "The Art of the Heist," the agent posed as an Italian mobster named "Tony Graziano," with a hankering for antique Simon Willard grandfather clocks.

Genius!

Ex-con Connor the con artist is a regular also on the Globe's Gardner heist podcast, and streaming docu-series circuit. As Amore said, Connor is a huckster, so having Connor on to speak of things that are either not corroborated, or flatly contradicted by the public record, is a natural fit for these *faux-true* true crime productions.

Connor helps reinforce the false narrative that Donati was involved in the Gardner heist, by claiming that Donati was one of the crew who burglarized the Woolworth Estate in Monmouth, Maine with him. It was on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend in 1974, he wrote in his memoir.

But Donati, was sentenced to 4-8 years in Walpole State prison in Middlesex Superior Court on May 22, 1974, only [three days before](#) the Woolworth Estate burglary. In Connor's book, he wrote that the burglary was on May 25th, which is consistent with newspaper accounts.

Connor also wrote that in the summer of 1975, he and Robert Donati "found ourselves strolling through the lush courtyard garden" at the Gardner Museum.

Connor claims he took this stroll while on the run from justice—having skipped trial for trying to sell stolen art to an undercover FBI agent. Furthermore, this supposedly took place only a few months after he claims he personally grabbed a Rembrandt off the wall at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, located barely a third of a mile away.

Despite Amore describing Connor as a high-profile "rock star" in Massachusetts, as well as someone whose high profile criminal background at least made him vulnerable to being recognized, Connor expects the public to believe he sauntered through the museum undetected—and did so with Donati, who at that time, was incarcerated at the Deer Island House of Correction.

Far from being a criminal genius, Connor fails to even sound like one in his own first person account of his fabricated exploits.

This go-along-to-get-along (quite comfortably one might add) news coverage of whatever questionable, self-contradicting claims the Gardner heist investigators, and their minions, like Myles Connor, are promoting on any given heist anniversary, or any other time, is just one of the many facets of the Gardner heist story, which point to there being more to this case than a simple robbery investigation, something that might overlap with something like the strange case of convicted spy, and admitted bank robber [Roderick James Ramsay](#).

Convicted spy Rod Ramsay as a potential Gardner heist suspect (Part Two)



Clyde Lee Conrad on trial in a West German courtroom. Conrad was convicted on June 6, 1990 for his espionage activities while serving there on active duty in the U.S. Army, and after he retired from the Army as a resident of West Germany

A Boston native, Roderick Ramsay was a member of the [Szabo/Conrad spy ring](#) while stationed at the Army's Eighth Infantry Division Headquarters in Bad Kreuznach, West Germany from 1983 to 1985, according to official accounts. In an interview, Ramsay said his "personal involvement in the conspiracy was from the spring of 1984 until January of 1986," when he met with the spy ring leader, Clyde Lee Conrad in his hometown where he was living at the time, [Boston, MA](#).

Ramsay's criminal career, however, did not begin with espionage. After his arrest, in June of 1990, the Washington Post reported that Ramsay [had robbed a bank](#) in Vermont, and that while working as a security guard in a hospital, he had attempted to break into a safe," according to the testimony of FBI agent Joe Navarro, at his detainment hearing the day after he was arrested on June 7, 1990.

The Vermont bank robbery took place on August 28, 1981, just eleven weeks prior to his enlisting in the Army, and at a time when the former Northeastern University college student was living just three miles from the Gardner Museum.

In his book, *Three Minutes To Doomsday*, Joe Navarro recalled how Ramsay in one of his forty interviews with him in an official capacity, had told him about the "the bank he and some pals robbed."

Ramsay lived with a high school friend in the Whittier Place building of the Charles River Park luxury apartment complex, overlooking Boston's Storrow Drive, and the Charles River near the Boston Museum of Science.

The roommates had both attended New York Military Academy, a boarding school whose famous alumni include Donald Trump, John Gotti as well as the composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim.

Twenty four years after the robbery, on August 28, 2014, Stephen Kurkjian, author of *Master Thieves*, about the Gardner heist case, sent an email to Joe Navarro, at **2:44 a.m.**, which he forwarded to me, a couple of days later.

At one point in the email, Kurkjian observed that "the two roommates [Ramsay was one] look somewhat like the sketches of the two thieves." The exchange with Navarro occurred six months before Kurkjian's book *Master Thieves*, came out, coinciding with the 25th anniversary of the Gardner heist robbery. The already completed manuscript would not include anything about "the two roommates," the long time Boston Globe reporter had made inquiries about to Navarro, in the early morning hours of his 71st birthday.

At the same time that Kurkjian's book came out, it was announced by the author and ghostwriter Howard Means, that "This book still needs to be written, but from the April 13, 2015, *VARIETY*: George Clooney and Grant Heslov's Smokehouse Pictures has picked up the film rights to Joe Navarro's "*Three Minutes to Doomsday*." That book came out two years later, but there was nothing in it linking Ramsay to the Gardner Museum, or the university he attended, the apartment complex he lived in, or the hospital he worked at as a security guard only a short distance from the museum.

Two other friends of Ramsay, who were also recent graduates of the New York Military Academy lived nearby at Charles River Park as well. The four friends all attended Northeastern University. With the exception of Ramsay, the four friends were from well-to-do families, the sons of successful self-employed fathers. "I'm not like them," Ramsay would remark sometimes bitterly.

The luxury apartment complex was built on 43 acres of what had formerly been the West End, a working class neighborhood situated on prime real estate. The neighborhood was razed in 1958, displacing some 2500 families, in the name of "urban renewal." Among those who grew up in what the government deemed a "blighted," tenement neighborhood, were actor Leonard Nimoy and the painter Hyman Bloom.

Using Ramsay's Whittier Place apartment, as a long distance staging area, three men, two armed with shotguns, [robbed the Howard Bank in Barton, Vermont](#), on August 28th, 1981. A fourth man in a black, 1973 Oldsmobile Toronado, which had been reported stolen in Massachusetts a week earlier, waited outside with the engine running. The bank was a three hour drive from Boston, and only 22 miles from the Canadian border.

The robbers came away with about \$10,000, according to news reports. Ramsay, who was only 19 years old at the time, was said to be [the mastermind](#) of this seemingly successful robbery. With his share of the money, Ramsay quickly left Boston. Travelling to Japan, and then to Honolulu, he enlisted in the Army in Hawaii when the money ran out. Eighteen months later, Ramsay arrived at the military duty station that would seal his fate, the U.S. Army's Eighth Infantry Division Headquarters in Bad Kreuznach, West Germany. was [with a top secret security clearance "assigned to safeguard sensitive military plans,"](#) at what was ground zero for "one of [the largest espionage conspiracies in modern U.S. history."](#)

In court shortly after his arrest, Navarro described the 29 year old Ramsay as a "career criminal." Yet Ramsay had managed to receive a top secret military security clearance, when he was assigned to work under Conrad as assistant classified documents custodian of the G-3 [war] plans section.

The Szabo-Conrad spy ring was founded in 1967 by [Sergeant Zoltan Szabo](#), a Hungarian immigrant. The VietNam combat veteran and silver star recipient rose quickly through the ranks to that of Captain, but without a college degree he lost his commission, when the war was winding down. Szabo however was given the option to reenlist in the Army as a noncommissioned officer, a sergeant, which he did.

Sandor Kercsik told Swedish officials that in 1967 in Vienna he met an American soldier of Hungarian descent called Zoltan Szabo. Over the next several years Dr. Kercsik delivered military secrets stolen by Mr. Szabo to the Hungarians, according to court records in Sweden.

When Szabo lost his top-secret security clearance in 1977 for selling government-issue gasoline ration coupons on the black market, he no longer had access to the classified documents he had been sharing with the Hungarian intelligence service.

"Still, until his retirement in 1979, Szabo personally delivered thousands of pages of classified documents stolen from under the noses of his trusting superiors, a record that one Hungarian intelligence officer described as unequalled. But more importantly, the inventive and resourceful operative developed into a skilled principal agent, [aggressively spotting and recruiting fellow soldiers](#) for membership in Budapest's growing stable of disloyal Americans."

Szabo retired from the Army two years later, and moved to Austria, near the border with Hungary. It was at this point that Clyde Lee Conrad took full control over the spy ring.

It was into this long established and ongoing espionage operation that Ramsay found himself stationed at the U.S. Army's Eighth Infantry Headquarters in Bad Kreuznach, West Germany. Both Conrad and Ramsay worked as document custodians in the Division's G-3 [War] Plans section, with Ramsay working under Conrad both officially in his military unit, and before long illicitly as a member of the Conrad controlled spy ring. Conrad "is believed to have managed at least a dozen people in the U.S. Army to supply classified information. It was one of the biggest [spy rings](#) since World War II," the U.S. Army Intelligence Command posted on Facebook in 2025.

Under Conrad, the operation received millions of dollars in payments from the Hungarians, nearly all of it going to Conrad himself. The ring stole highly classified NATO and U.S. documents, while Conrad personally negotiated their sale and arrangement for their shipment to Hungary and to a lesser extent, Czechoslovakia.

Conrad is believed to be one of only five American spies to have made more than a million dollars selling classified information to America's enemies.

But what most set both Conrad, **and Ramsay** apart from other spies, was their ability to recruit fellow soldiers to work with them in their espionage activities, an extremely high risk endeavor.

"Documents provided to Hungarian agents included NATO's plans [for fighting a war against the Warsaw Pact: detailed descriptions of nuclear weapons and plans for movement of troops, tanks and aircraft.](#)"

"In addition to disclosing NATO wartime contingency plans," the New York Times reported, "the documents revealed [key intelligence assets](#), including networks and safe houses in Germany used by American intelligence agents, according to officials. The Hungarians routinely share their information with the Soviet Union."

Ramsay had been perhaps the spy ring's most prolific member, in terms of the sheer number of classified documents he managed to steal. Included in the "mother lode" of classified materials Ramsay passed over to Conrad, many of which he recorded with a video camera, were documents on the use of tactical nuclear weapons by US and NATO forces, strategic plans for the defense of Europe in the event of an attack by Soviet and Warsaw Pact military forces, and manuals on military communications technology.

After ten plus years of the spy ring's successful operation, however, a senior member of the Hungarian Intelligence, Lt. Col. István Belovai, alerted the CIA that a huge number of classified U.S. and NATO documents were being passed to Hungary, from somewhere inside West Germany.

But before the Army's investigation was completed, Belovai, who had come under suspicion by Hungarian counterintelligence services, was arrested making a pickup at a CIA drop in Hungary in 1985. He believed he was a victim of CIA double agent Aldrich Ames. But by the time of his arrest, Belovai had already provided a list of specific classified documents, which he knew to have been shared with Hungarian intelligence. This list enabled the Army to narrow their focus of their investigation to the soldiers, who would have had access to the specific documents on the list.

After a massive investigation, the Army managed to identify and prosecute most of the members of the spy ring. In the case of Clyde Lee Conrad however, the U.S. Army worked through the civilian judicial system of West Germany where Conrad then resided. The fact that there was no extradition treaty between the U.S. and West Germany for the crime of espionage was the explanation given for why the U.S. Army worked through West German authorities to prosecute Conrad. As a military retiree, however, Conrad could have been brought back onto active duty and court martialled.

The FBI first interviewed Ramsay about security breaches at the Army Eighth Infantry Headquarters on August 23, 1988. Almost three years after he had been honorably discharged from the U.S. Army. Over 40 additional interviews of Ramsay by the FBI until Ramsay's arrest in June of 1990, and many after his arrest would follow.

That first meeting between Ramsay and federal investigators took place only hours after Conrad's arrest at his home in Bosenheim, West Germany. Picking the lock on Conrad's front door at dawn, German police quietly entered Conrad's bedroom with guns drawn. Police confronted the master spy while he was still in bed with his wife.

"You vill take ze hands out of ze vife and place zem vere vee can see zem," a German police investigator, Holger Klein, ordered Conrad, in broken English.

"The day of reckoning Conrad had feared for over two years had arrived," Stuart Herrington wrote in his book, *Traitors Among Us: Inside the Spy Catcher's World*.

Convicted spy Rod Ramsay as a potential Gardner heist suspect (Part Three)



"Law enforcement sources said that the [Gardner heist] suspects' movements are under close scrutiny by federal agents, including one suspect who was [under surveillance](#) during a recent arrival at Logan Airport."

—Elizabeth Neuffer, Page 1 Boston Globe May 14, 1990

Meanwhile, on short notice, the FBI's field office had received instructions to seek out an interview with Rod Ramsay on the same day that Conrad was placed under arrest:

"Anytime after 0400 hrs Zulu [eight o'clock a.m. in Florida and two o'clock p.m. in Bosenheim, West Germany] 8/23/88, you are to locate and interview Roderick James RAMSAY, last known to be living in Tampa, Florida, regarding his knowledge of or association with Clyde Lee CONRAD while stationed at 8th ID, Bad Kreuznach, West Germany: service years 1983—85. INSCOM [Army Intelligence] will liaise and assist: locate, interview, report."

Although the appearance of federal agents at his door that day was unexpected, Ramsay was not unprepared, and may not have been caught entirely off guard. Conrad had told Army undercover agent, Danny Williams, months earlier, how he suspected he was under investigation, and claimed to have warned his espionage confederates, though not the Hungarians, of this looming threat.

Toward the end of their first meeting, FBI agent Joe Navarro asked Ramsay if Conrad had ever given him anything. With that prompting, Navarro wrote, in *Three Minutes to Doomsday*, Ramsay took from his wallet a mysterious slip of paper with a hand-written telephone number on it, which Conrad had told him to call, if he had to reach him, Ramsay told Navarro.

Navarro carefully placed the slip of paper into an envelope, and brought it back to the FBI Tampa field office. An FBI lab determined that the note given to Ramsay was written on a water soluble paper of a kind sold in novelty shops. It was known to be favored by Eastern European intelligence services, as well. The paper dissolved instantly, when exposed to any liquid, such as saliva, making it useful for rapid disposal and destruction of sensitive information in an emergency.

The telephone number was quickly identified as one belonging to the Hungarian Intelligence Service, by one of the other members of Conrad's espionage gang, Imre Kercsik, according to Navarro.

A Hungarian born physician, and Swedish national, Kercsik served as a courier for the spy ring and was arrested, [along with his brother](#), also a medical doctor, soon after Conrad. Unlike Conrad, the two brothers cooperated with investigators. Four days after Conrad's arrest, and after the FBI's first interview with Ramsay, the New York Times reported on the front page that the Kercsik brothers were under arrest, admitted working for the Hungarian intelligence service, and that Sandor Kercsik "told Swedish officials that he first met Clyde Lee Conrad [in 1974](#)."

"Mr. Conrad is potentially a more valuable source of information," the article also reported, "since he was responsible for obtaining the highly classified documents and could describe exactly which secrets were compromised." But Conrad never cooperated, which made the interviews with Ramsay, Conrad's right hand man, with ["a near photographic memory"](#) as Navarro had testified, even more important.

The slip of paper given to Navarro by Ramsay represented hard evidence of Ramsay's personal involvement in espionage.

Interestingly, in a book called *Damian and Mongoose*, a first hand account written by an Army counterintelligence agent, Danny Williams, about his experiences working undercover to investigate Conrad, Williams describes how he too was given a slip of paper with a contact phone number to Hungarian intelligence.

It is hard to discern what Ramsay's exact motivations were in giving this slip of paper to Agent Navarro. Clearly it was incriminating. Was he looking to recruit Navarro? Was he looking to be recruited *by* Navarro in some sort of counterintelligence operation? Whatever his motivation, the voluntary sharing of a melts-in-your-mouth slip of paper, would certainly have solidified the belief that Ramsay had been involved in Conrad's espionage operation.

Less than a week after Ramsay's first interview with the FBI, he told Navarro in a subsequent meeting, that in 1986, just a few months after he was discharged from the Army, he had met with Conrad in Boston, where Ramsay was then living with his mother. Conrad was returning to his hometown of Sebring Ohio to visit family. He stopped briefly in Boston, to meet with Ramsay.

Ramsay's espionage activities may have ended with the end of his enlistment and return to the United States, but it would be the responsibility of federal investigators to ensure that was the case, and if not, then to try to find out what new projects he had taken on in the espionage realm, and with whom. Navarro's book mostly treats his dealings with Ramsay as part of what seems more like a standard criminal investigation, than a counterintelligence operation. He says as much to a former colleague, in trying to expedite a photo lineup, which includes Ramsay, he wants to be shown to the Kercsik brothers. "This is no longer a CI [Counterintelligence] matter. It's a criminal matter that needs to be expedited. We want to aggressively go after Ramsay," Navarro told his fellow agent.

Three weeks later Navarro is informed that the Kercsik brothers had indeed picked "Rod Ramsay out of the photo lineup we sent and confirmed he was involved in the Conrad case."

But then: "The next day, FBIHQ once again orders us to break off all contact with Ramsay—an all-caps ORDER this time, the kind you can't ignore. By the time I'm again allowed to talk with Rod Ramsay, **357 days later**, Lynn Tremaine [his partner on the Ramsay case] is married and gone from the Tampa office, and the case against Ramsay has gone cold as a Russian winter." The Ramsay investigation was a counterintelligence matter after all, something that Navarro seemed to have understood (somewhat) more clearly when he was able to resume his interviews with Ramsay a year later.

For that first interview with Ramsay, the FBI's Navarro was accompanied by Al Eways of the U.S. Army Intelligence Security Command (INSCOM). It was Eways who was credited with doing much of the dogged investigative work, of combing through Army personnel files and the backgrounds of individual soldiers, who might fit the profile by virtue of those having access to some or all of the classified documents known to be taken.

The effort led to the identification of Conrad as a suspect, and perhaps Ramsay as well. If it had not already been strongly suspected, that Ramsay was involved in espionage, it seems doubtful that Eways would have been riding along with Navarro in Tampa, Florida, on the same day that the spy ringleader, Clyde Lee Conrad, the big fish, whom Eway's had personally helped bring down, was being placed in custody, in West Germany, thousands of miles away.

As early as April 1987, Conrad was convinced, and with good reason, that he was under investigation. He said as much to an old Army buddy, Danny Williams, who was then working

undercover in the investigation against him, that he believed he was under investigation. This was 16 months before Conrad's arrest and the initial interview of Ramsay by Eways and Navarro, in August of 1988. Ramsay claimed he had not communicated with Conrad since their meeting in Boston in 1986.

To address the danger an investigation posed, Conrad told Williams "I contacted **everyone** who has worked with me. "I said 'after I'm gone do whatever you want.' I closed my accounts, destroyed all the material, and wiped information from my computers."

In any case, given the nature and scope of the espionage Ramsay would later confess to, the former Army sergeant must have suspected, when two federal agents, one FBI, and one from the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM), showed up on his doorstep in Tampa, Florida, unannounced on a summer afternoon, that he too was under suspicion, although the agents wishing to speak with him tried to downplay that possibility.

"You can relax, we're not here to talk about you, "we just need to pick your brain about the Eighth Infantry Division," the FBI's Navarro told Ramsay standing outside his door, after asking him, "Would it be okay if we come inside to talk?" Ramsay agreed.

"Happily, Rod is buying what I have to sell," Navarro concluded.

More likely, Ramsay, a smart and experienced spy and criminal, understood what was going on, but played along knowing that perhaps the best way to buy himself some time, and perhaps at least some of his freedom, was to negotiate with that one thing he had of value: the information he possessed about operations within the Szabo-Conrad spy ring.

In addition to the book about Navarro's experience interviewing Ramsay, *Three Minutes To Doomsday*, written a quarter century later, there is another less known book, called *Damian and the Mongoose, How a U.S. Army Counterespionage Agent Infiltrated an International Spy Ring*, like Navarro's a first-person account written by former MSgt. Danny Williams, about his relationship with Conrad, while working undercover to investigate him, published in 2011.

There are striking similarities in how MSgt. Williams and FBI agent Joe Navarro dealt with the close range investigative process they were engaged in, that of conversing with suspected spies. But what is even more striking is how similar Clyde Lee Conrad and his former espionage protege Rod Ramsay responded to the danger Navarro and Williams represented, to them personally.

So call them, maybe

As mentioned previously, just as Ramsay had given Navarro a piece of paper with the telephone number to Hungarian intelligence, Conrad had also given a number to Hungarian intelligence to

Williams. "I want you to have these. The first one is a number in Budapest for the Hungarian Intelligence Service, used by agents and couriers when they want to meet with someone. The second, is the same type of number for the Czechs in Prague," Conrad told Williams.

Whether it was intentional or not, handing over the number was certainly a convenient way to put Williams and Navarro in direct contact with an enemy intelligence services, where they could perhaps, if they were so inclined, betray their country, and perhaps negotiate some kind of arrangement, which could include an exit ramp for Ramsay and Conrad as authorities closed in on them. Perhaps a long shot, but if there was a way out for Ramsay, it perhaps laid with turning his inquisitors into allies.

The purpose of the Army sending MSgt. Williams undercover, was for him to get reacquainted with Conrad, so they could find out more about his espionage operation, and so that they could catch Conrad in the act of recruiting him. Despite his suspicions of Williams initially, Conrad did try, "Everything Clyde said, every story, every illustration was part of a determined effort to get me to volunteer for espionage, which he hoped he could later claim was entrapment."

Ramsay, too, in one of his few meetings with Navarro without anyone else present, in the parking lot of the Orlando Sea World, seemed to be warming up to making Navarro a recruiting offer. "Joe, be honest with me. Now that the Wall is down, does all of this matter? My helping you, my reports, do they even amount to a hill of shit?" But if this was the start of some kind of offer, it was quickly shut down by Navarro.

Both Conrad and Ramsay managed to recruit people into espionage without ever being turned in by anyone for doing so. There are subtleties to their sales pitches that can not really be conveyed by individual quotes. But it is an impression one might take away from reading longer passages from these works.

In both Danny Williams' discussion undercover with Conrad, and Navarro's interview, not undercover, with Ramsay, there was discussion about an idea of Conrad's to open a legitimate video rental business near a military base, as a front for gathering information about the soldiers who became customers. "Well," Rod says, "what if, hypothetically, Clyde wanted to set up a video-rental business that wasn't really about renting videos?" Ramsay said to Navarro.

In the case of Conrad in speaking with Williams it was a business proposition, in the case of Ramsay perhaps it was just another story of how brilliant Clyde Lee Conrad was, or a demonstration of how easy it was to make money using some of the principals and methods developed by Conrad, in the field of black market information brokerage.

Unlike MSgt. Williams, Navarro was not working undercover, but neither was he being entirely forthright about his purpose in interviewing Ramsay either. He was questioning Ramsay, he told

him, to find out everything he could about the Szabo-Conrad spy ring, but really, what Navarro most especially wanted to find out about was Ramsay himself, and his spying activities, and not just about Conrad and the Eighth Infantry Division, as he claimed to him initially.

Navarro made a concerted effort to keep things casual in his interviews of Ramsay. "Don't wear anything that would make you look like an agent," Navarro instructed his new partner Terry Moody, when they were preparing to interview Ramsay. "Jeans are fine, but no skirt, no business suits," he told her. "On most occasions, I'll be wearing a polo shirt with khaki pants, and for the record, my weapon will be concealed, as will yours."

"We're not going after a confession," he added. "We have to focus on what is important: small admissions that add up until they satisfy the espionage statute."

"The worst thing you can do in interviewing is set the bar at confession. What you want is what I was just talking about: facetime. Get enough of it, and eventually you'll learn everything you want to know."

In his dealings with Conrad, starting in 1987, Williams favored an approach similar to Navarro's, and with even more compelling reasons. He was working undercover, and was pretending to be just a fellow career soldier, trying to renew a friendship with his old Army buddy, Clyde Lee Conrad. If his questions were too direct, Williams feared he would blow his cover, and if that happened, he also feared what Conrad might do. "Conrad issued a threat to kill me if he decided I was part of the investigation [of him] he was sure he had discovered," Williams wrote.

It was a difficult and dangerous assignment, and Williams's higher-ups were nonetheless putting pressure on him to be more direct in asking Conrad about his espionage activities.

Both Conrad and Ramsay admitted from the start to being involved in illegal activities, although nothing as serious as espionage, and both men implicated close military associates, early on, in espionage. Conrad implicated Zoltan Szabo, the founder of the spy ring and the man who had recruited him into espionage, saying that the retired Army soldier was now a Colonel in the Russian GRU. This claim by Conrad was an exaggeration, but one that did point to Szabo, an associate of Conrad's, being involved in espionage. Ramsay had implicated Conrad when he shared the phone number to Hungarian intelligence he said Conrad gave him, with the FBI.

Both Conrad in speaking to Williams, and Ramsay in speaking to Navarro seemed to sense that either a fight or a flight response would likely hasten their being both under investigation *and* under arrest. Both men strived to keep their interactions amicable, in an effort to buy some time, for a little more freedom, or perhaps to develop some kind of an escape plan. There was enough evidence against them, that talking kept them out of jail, in the short run, but they were talking

their way into prison in the long run. It was probably an unavoidable fate anyway, so maybe they bought themselves an extra year of freedom, and an opportunity to figure a way out.

Conrad did bare his teeth now and again. "Danny, if I find you're a threat to my family, I'll put a bullet between your eyes. Family is everything," Conrad told Williams, on the first day Williams met with Conrad at his home, after many years of not seeing or being in contact with each other. It was a threat he repeated more than once.

Both Ramsay and Conrad were not without some bargaining power, however. As Ramsay explained to Navarro, something that Conrad had taught him was that "information was the most valuable thing in the world." While the information Ramsay had was not the most valuable thing in the world, it was not worthless either, although much of it probably was. The U.S. Army was well aware that documents held in the G-3 plans section were potentially compromised, and that there was a leak, and had likely implemented counter measures even before Ramsay arrived in West Germany. even before [in 1983](#).

Five years later, whatever military intelligence Ramsay held in his mind or in some other location was likely revised, replaced, adulterated, and mostly obsolete. If the feds thought Ramsay had anything that was truly a danger to national security, they would not have left him out on the street driving a cab out of Orlando International Airport.

Upon completing his fifth interview with Ramsay, less than a month after he first met with him, Navarro said that he had already gained from Ramsay, "a ladder of admissions that, when we finally get to confession or even if we don't, will allow us to build the kind of rock-solid criminal case that can stand up against the toughest defense...in less than a month."

But ten days later Navarro is ordered to break off all contact with Ramsay, and the case then "sat on the shelf for twelve months and eight days."

These discussions with the two spies did have some value, for investigators, and as well as value for Ramsay and Conrad, who likely delayed their arrest and incarceration.

Only Ramsay knew exactly what information he had: Sources and methods, and knowledge of the espionage ring itself, which had operated for over 15 years from inside Eighth Infantry Headquarters. Ramsay definitely possessed some key information, not even known to Conrad himself, because Ramsay had kept it a secret from him. He knew the identities of two other soldiers, who had engaged in espionage with him at Eighth Infantry Headquarters. These were individuals whom Ramsay recruited himself, to assist him, without Conrad's permission or knowledge. The two soldiers Jeffrey Rondeau, and Jeffrey Gregory eventually confessed based on information supplied to authorities by Ramsay.

Convicted spy Rod Ramsay as a potential Gardner heist suspect (Part Four)



FBI Surveillance photo of Rod Ramsay.

For twenty months, after having implicated himself in espionage, Ramsay had been free to come and go as he pleased. There was not even any surveillance on him of any kind for over a year, or so Navarro stated in his book:

For a year Ramsay was seemingly left to his own devices to try to develop a plan to extricate himself from this seemingly hopeless predicament. Perhaps counter intelligence operatives were interested in what Ramsay would do in such a desperate situation, and sought to find out whom he would contact, by keeping him under surveillance, but in secret, even from agent Navarro.

In a scene in the fictional TV series *The Americans*, a Russian spy character, Nina Krilova, remarked to one of the FBI's spy-catchers agent Beeman in Season 1 Episode 8:

"FBI. You are cops. Policemen in your hearts. Sometimes I wonder if you understand spies. What do you want with us? One day, with Arkady and the others in the rezidentura? Do you want to put them in jail? That's how policeman thinks. Not how spies think. We want everyone to stay right where they are and bleed everything they know out of them. Forever."

So it might well have been with Ramsay. The FBI's desire to gather information from him, including information he would not readily give up voluntarily was a higher priority than prosecuting him for espionage, especially at the beginning of their engagement with him.

About a month after the start of Agent Navarro's second round of meetings with Ramsay, ABC News reported on October 30th, 1989, that Conrad's recruits continued to work for him back in the United States, illegally exporting hundreds of thousands of advanced computer chips to the Eastern Bloc, through a dummy company in Canada.

Ramsay admitted to the FBI that he was the source of that ABC News story, but said that he and Conrad had only *discussed* illegally exporting chips to the Eastern Bloc, during their brief

meeting in Boston, in January of 1986, but the project, Ramsay claimed, had never gotten off the ground.

The two spies had never followed through on their plan to illegally export the computer chips, he insisted. "That [ABC] producer, Jim Bamford, he kept bothering my mother. She was getting very upset. I thought if I just gave him this one little story, some bullshit, he would go away," Ramsay told Navarro.

In that way Ramsay acknowledged that he and Conrad had at least engaged in the planning stages of illegal acts inside the United States that threatened national security.

Facing the possibility of decades in prison, or even life, Ramsay was an individual in desperate circumstances, but one with a sharp and experienced criminal mind with which to come up with the means to possibly save himself. The only alternative to abjectly submitting to his fate in the federal criminal justice system, with the weak cards he was holding, would have been to come up with some different cards, a plan, something big, given the kind of manhunt that he, as one of the most prolific spies in American history would be up against, if he simply fled.

Ramsay would need a caper big enough to make such a manhunt something that could be either overcome or unnecessary, a plan where he would be negotiating from strength and could strike some kind of a deal. At the very least it would have to be able to help make his life more comfortable while he was inside prison, and perhaps after he got out, with a shorter sentence possibly, as well.

"Over 25 years, [so many names have been thrown into this \[the Gardner heist case\].](#)" Kurkjian said in 2015. But none of those *so many names* included Rod Ramsay, and none had the kind of motivation, the desperation, or the kind of extensive criminal background that Ramsay had, which matched up so well with pulling off the Gardner heist.

Nor did any of those "so many names," like Ramsay's, have the need for secrecy that the government might deem necessary, if it were a spy who robbed the Gardner, and not some local hood, whom the FBI never quite got around to interviewing.

Unlike all of the other members of his espionage gang, Clyde Lee Conrad was not cooperating with investigators in any way, and never did. The master spy who recruited Ramsay and others, earning for himself millions of dollars from America's enemies, died in prison, less than ten years later, without having admitted to any wrongdoing. Denying all of the charges against him, Conrad did not implicate Ramsay or anyone else, in acts of espionage after his arrest.

Ramsay may have had buyer's remorse. He might not have liked the weak negotiating position he found himself in with the people investigating the spy ring, and may have wanted to do something to help his friend Clyde Lee Conrad and himself.

There is indeed strong evidence, not shared directly with the public, pointing to the art having been taken as a get-out-of-jail-free card. In 1976, Myles Connor had famously arranged for the return of a Rembrandt stolen from the Museum of Fine Arts, in Ramsay's hometown of Boston, MA. in exchange for a reduced sentence. In addition, a very close associate of Ramsay's was from Connor's hometown of Milton, Massachusetts, although the friend, a former boarding room classmate, and college friend, was twenty years younger than Connor.

The association added to the possibility that Ramsay was familiar with the story of how [Connor](#) had made a deal for a shorter sentence, by returning a Rembrandt painting, "Portrait of a Girl Wearing a Gold-Trimmed Cloak"

Connor would later claim starting over three decades later, that he had himself stolen the work although his various and wildly divergent accounts, to authors and journalists as cravenly hungry for attention and celebrity as Connor himself, as well as the fact that he did not fit the description of the robber put out by the police, suggests otherwise. More likely Connor was "*Myles away*," at the time of the robbery as his former friend William Youngworth put it. But Connor was nonetheless able to negotiate the return of the painting from the Charles Street jail.

"A gangster could avoid jail for [anything short of murder](#), if they led authorities to missing paintings," the Gardner Museum's Anthony Amore suggested in 2010.

But shortly before the Gardner heist Ramsay had admitted to videotaping hundreds of sensitive documents in 1985 in one of the ['most serious breaches' of U.S. and NATO security ever](#), an FBI agent testified Friday." His crimes may well have been deemed, not "anything short of murder," but as bad and potentially worse than murder.

Four years after the heist, the Gardner museum director Anne Hawley received a ransom note, and a follow up letter. According to Stephen Kurkjian in his book *Master Thieves*, "the letter writer stated that the paintings had been stolen to gain someone a **reduction in a prison sentence**, but as that opportunity had dwindled dramatically there was no longer a primary motive for keeping the artwork." The most likely reason for putting this bit of backstory into the ransom note would have been to establish credibility, since if no offer had ever been previously made to negotiate on these terms, for a reduction in prison sentence, then that statement would call into question the authenticity of the ransom note.

Fourteen years after receiving the notes, the FBI still had not ruled out the possibility that the ransom notes were indeed legitimate. "In 1994 we took it [the ransom notes] very seriously and we continue to take it very seriously," the FBI's Gardner heist lead investigator Geoff Kelly said on a segment of American Greed in 2008, called *Unsolved: \$300 Million Art Heist*.

Gardner Museum director Anne Hawley, also felt there was reason to believe the ransom note was real. In a CNN segment about the Gardner heist in 2005, there was "an exclusive on camera appeal from the museum's director, an overture to an anonymous letter writer eleven years ago who seemed legitimate."

Hawley: "I'm particularly interested in hearing from [that person](#) who had, I think, a real concern about our getting the work back."

In 2015, Hawley said on *CBS Good Morning*, "When people say, 'Well, why is it important?' I say, 'Imagine if you could never hear Beethoven's Seventh Symphony again, ever,'" Hawley said on CBS Good Morning in 2015, adding "a Vermeer is certainly at that level of creation, and so is the 'Storm of the Sea of Galilee.'"

The Gardner heist, therefore, is a crime with a multitude of victims, millions of people have experienced a sense of loss from these missing works. But millions of people were the victims of Ramsay's espionage as well. Ramsay was already living in a kind of exile on Main Street, dwelling in a state of anticipated estrangement from his fellow citizens, when news of his spying was released to the public. Tens of millions of art lovers was not going to change the state of his relationship to society at large.

Hawley supplied other information that suggests the Gardner heist thieves were not ordinary street criminals as well. In 2013, twenty three years after the heist, and ten weeks after I had first contacted the Gardner Museum about my speculation that Rod Ramsay may have been one of the Gardner thieves, Anne Hawley told a WBUR reporter that "The museum was experiencing these bomb threats coming from people in penitentiaries that were trying to negotiate with the FBI on information they said they had — and the FBI wasn't responding to them so they were hitting us. You can't paint a more difficult time."

If the Gardner heist investigation was being handled as a standard robbery investigation and not something more, as part of a counter intelligence operation, they would have spoken to this person who was so desperate to speak with them, they were committing additional crimes from behind bars, which could easily be traced back to them, just to speak with them.

Six weeks later, in 2013, Hawley reiterated those claims in an interview she did on the WGBH news program *Greater Boston*. "We also were being threatened from the outside by criminals who wanted attention from the FBI, and so they were threatening us, and threatening putting bombs in the museum," Anne Hawley said recently. "We were evacuating the museum, the staff members were under threat, no one really knew what kind of a cauldron we were in."

The head of the museum claimed there were "criminals who wanted attention from the FBI," but this story and the ordeal the Museum underwent was not reported until 23 years later, and no other news media ever picked up on the story either time.

"In an interview with Hawley when she retired in 2015, the Boston Globe described the dangers Hawley felt at that time. Hawley endured death threats in the months immediately following the

robbery. She twice evacuated the museum after bomb scares, and the FBI instructed her to take a different route home each night from work." "“They scared me,” said Hawley. ‘I wouldn’t go out of my house alone at night,’” but the Boston Globe reporter Malcolm Gay, left out a critical part of the story, the WHY, Hawley and the Gardner Museum were the target of bomb threats. It was because there was someone who wanted to speak with the FBI about the case, and the FBI would not speak with them, as was stated by Hawley on two different occasions to two different media outlets.

"The FBI has searched basements and attics, [conducted elaborate sting operations from Miami to Marseilles](#), and tracked thousands of leads in the United States, Japan, England, Ireland, Russia, Canada, and Spain."

“If these paintings do not get recovered — and I hope that’s not the case — it’s not going to be for lack of trying by the FBI, the museum, and the US attorney’s office,” said FBI special agent Geoff Kelly, who has spearheaded the investigation for a dozen years." Yet the history of the investigation that can be documented and corroborated suggests otherwise," with people who claimed to have information including eyewitnesses, saying they were met with indifference, rudeness, intimidation, or never followed up with at all.

The sting operations from Miami to Marseille, refers to any undercover operation conducted by Robert Wittman. The New York Times reported: "Mr. Wittman wrote that his efforts in the investigation, called Operation Masterpiece, were sabotaged by an F.B.I. superior, called “Fred” in the book, who micromanaged his work and tried to get him thrown off the case. ‘We’d blown an opportunity to infiltrate a major art crime ring in France, a loose network of mobsters holding as many as 70 stolen masterpieces,’ [Mr. Wittman wrote.](#)"

There is some evidence of an effort to recover the art, somewhat diminished by ridiculous, uncorroborated claims, however, the already challenging proposition of recovering the stolen Gardner art, is clearly subordinated to two higher priorities. The first is that the government will not reveal the identities of the original Gardner heist thieves, which is a hindrance to the recovery. The government, for example, was willing to publicly conclude that [Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman](#), the authoritarian ruler of Saudi Arabia, a sometimes vitally important strategic partner of the United States, "approved the gruesome political killing of Jamal Khashoggi," in the year following his death, but that same government refuses to identify the names of the Gardner heist robbers, whom they now claim are dead, close to four decades later.

In retirement, former FBI lead investigator [Geoff Kelly makes the childish claim](#) that the two thieves were [George Reissfelder and Leonard DiMuzio, after clumsily hinting](#) those names for over ten years in a way that was an embarrassment to the city and to the profession of journalism, and should have been to the FBI and to Kelly himself.

In addition, Kelly also now claims that the guard who let the thieves in, Rick Abath, was involved, now that he's safely dead, [after saying he was not a suspect](#) for over twenty years, and says he bases that conclusion on information that was known the first week. The fact that no one went into the Blue Room, where Manet's *Chez Tortoni* was taken, after Rick Abath had been in there doing his security rounds, before the thieves entered the building, as if there aren't [a dozen other convincing reasons to suspect Abath](#).

In 2013, the FBI said they knew who the thieves were, but now twelve years later and with Kelly in retirement, the *Globe* reports that "after scrutinizing dozens of potential scenarios involving a dizzying array of suspects, Kelly has settled on this theory." The official narrative is transitioning from *knowing who the thieves are*, to *settling on this theory*, without any mention of the fact that this is yet another change to the official narrative, one more example of the Boston *Globe*'s [disinformation hijinks](#) as it relates to the government's official Gardner heist narrative, by one of Kelly's trusted journalists, Shelley Murphy, who has been a knowing party to the state sponsored deception surrounding this investigation [since 1993](#), when she described Brian McDevitt as "a Swampscott native" and "a California screenwriter."

McDevitt was no more a screenwriter than he was one of the Vanderbilts, which he had also claimed in one of his previous cons, when he tried to rob the Hyde Collection (Museum) in Glen Falls, NY. McDevitt had been on *Sixty Minutes* ten months earlier, to discuss his suspected involvement in the Gardner heist, and at that time said he had zero writing credits to his name.

Morley Safer: Have you ever published anything anywhere?

Brian McDevitt: Nope, haven't.

While it is true that McDevitt is a Swampscott native, his last known residence prior to moving to California was 69 Hancock Street, in Boston three miles from the Gardner Museum, which is where he said he was the night of the robbery, while admitting he had no alibi. They even showed the outside of his Boston apartment building on *60 Minutes*. But the story made no mention of McDevitt having ever lived in Boston.



60 Minutes shot of Brian McDevitt's residence at the time of the robbery, three miles from the Gardner Museum

The 1993 Boston Globe article begins by stating that McDevitt was "once eyed," as a Gardner heist suspect. "Once eyed," does that mean he was cleared? He was being brought in front of a grand jury, which seems more like McDevitt was *still* "eyed."

"[Unnamed] Sources familiar with the case confirmed that McDevitt is not a suspect. They said he was called before a grand jury because he was evasive when interviewed on two occasions by FBI agents, who have focused on more than a dozen suspects worldwide during the probe which has yielded few clues."

They had focused on more than a dozen suspects, but none of those suspects were brought before a grand jury. Only a guy, who lived nearby, who tried to rob a different art museum, in a very similar way, who was under FBI surveillance, and does not have an alibi, and who was not a suspect, but merely evasive when questioned by the FBI, was brought before a grand jury. Uh huh. Thirty one years later, Murphy is still covering the Gardner heist for the Boston and still getting more access to the FBI more often to discuss the case than anyone over the last dozen years.

Ten months earlier on *60 Minutes*, speaking from his residence in North Hollywood, CA, McDevitt said: "Down here in the canyon, if you're lucky, you can see the FBI agents who keep watch on my house all the time. They're right down there." And Morley Safer reported that "The FBI continues to press McDevitt."

But unnamed sources confirmed McDevitt is not a suspect. "Confirmed" is one of those inside-journalism words favored by Gardner heist dissemblers like Murphy and Kurkjian to bolster their false narrative. The unnamed sources did not merely *say* he was not a suspect, they "**confirmed**" it.

Over three decades later, Murphy is still covering the Gardner heist for the Boston Globe and still getting more access to the FBI, and to their unofficial spokesperson, their investigative partner, Anthony Amore more often to discuss the case than anyone over the last dozen years. Like her front page story about Anthony Amore's uncorroborated claim about all the leads that are pouring in, this time from people who have seen the stolen Gardner art in online Zillow real estate ads.

By the time of this story, which rehashes all of the FBI's key disinformation talking points, McDevitt's name has been dispensed with by the Boston Globe altogether. Murphy writes: To this day the baffling case remains one of the city's most enduring mysteries, with countless theories and a dizzying array of suspects that included a **Hollywood screenwriter**.



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MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2024

Does that Rembrandt come with the house?

No shortage of purported 'sightings' of stolen Gardner museum artworks in homes for sale

By Shelley Murphy
GLOBE STAFF

The tipster was startled. While scrolling through photos on Zillow of a luxury home for sale in Atlanta, there it was, hanging on the wall: what appeared to be one of the great masterpieces of the art world, worth more than \$100 million.

It sure looked like "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee," the only seascape painted by Rembrandt and one of the 13 artworks stolen 34 years ago from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. With its dark, dramatic imagery, it looked convincing enough to the Zillow scroller to contact the muse-

um last year to report the sighting, which could bring a hefty reward.

The purported sighting was among about 20 tips reported to the museum over the past year from people who thought they saw one or the other of the two most recognizable stolen paintings, "The Storm" or Vermeer's "The Concert," in homes across the country that were staged for sale and featured in real estate listings, according to Anthony Amore, the museum's security director.

"You know there's a low probability that they're our paintings," said Amore, who ruled out each one as be-

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JULIANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Anthony Amore, the Gardner museum's head of security, posed at the scene of the crime, which occurred 34 years ago Monday.

Boston Globe front page story about Gardner heist 'investigation' on anniversary of the robbery

"A dizzying array of suspects" indeed, like you get out of Putin's Russia.

In 2018, the Washington Post reported that "The disinformation campaigns now emanating from Russia are of a different breed, said intelligence officials and analysts. They fling up swarms of falsehoods, concocted theories and red herrings, intended not so much to persuade people but [to bewilder them.](#)" And this is exactly what has been going on with the media coverage of the Gardner heist. The array of suspects would not be so dizzying if the Boston Globe would just report about them fully and accurately. But "dizzying" is the whole point.

As Murphy herself said on Last Seen Podcast Episode 4: "It's frustrating. [All these theories are frustrating.](#) For everything that points toward these particular suspects [George Reissfelder and David Turner] there's something that points away."

If that is indeed the case then these are not "suspects," at all they are individuals who have been cleared by exculpatory evidence, and nobody to get dizzy over.

If they tried doing coverage of a certain Cold War spy as a suspect, we would see how very undizzy people would get in a hurry.

Murphy is the kind of *no-getter* reporter, that deceitful Gardner heist investigators like Geoff Kelly go back to again and again, in 2015 with [a lie-filled article](#), and in 2025 with a [no quote](#) accusation against Rick Abath, whom he protected for nearly all of the 21 years he was the Gardner heist lead investigator before Abath died, except when Abath was doing interviews and publishes excerpts of a book about the case in 2013-2015.

Kelly spoke with Murphy again when his [deceitful book](#) came out in February of 2026, pointing the finger at people who are no longer alive to defend themselves, including an honorably

discharged VietNam vet, U.S. Marine corporal, Leonard DiMuzio, the victim of a brutal unsolved homicide, and a man who spent 15 years in prison for a murder he didn't commit, George Reissfelder.

The second priority, that recovery of the art takes a back seat to, is that the federal authorities do not want the original thieves to benefit financially from the return of the art. ["Anyone — except the thieves themselves — is eligible for the reward."](#) the Museum has stated many times.

In 2004, ABC News reported that "In 1997, Youngworth claimed he could broker the return of the missing art. But years went by and, he said, returning the stolen art for the \$5 million reward, without getting himself or his friends arrested, had proven to be almost impossible." This was due to the fact that: ["Federal prosecutors did not want the thieves to get away with a deal."](#) "You can't turn your back on a very serious criminal offense, and if you do, you basically give ammunition to other people to steal priceless works of art," said Donald Stern, the former U.S. attorney for Massachusetts.

In 2000, the Guardian reported that: "Many officials at the Gardner museum, and also some officers at the FBI, did favour some form of compromise, but those higher up in the legal establishment had no desire to send such a message to the criminal fraternity at large. The attorney general's office in Washington warned against pandering to ['cultural terrorism.'](#)" Time and again, the FBI has interfered with a return of the art because they do not want a reward paid out to the original thieves, whom they have gone to great pains to not name and whom they have been claiming since 2015 are dead.

In 2013 they were still quite alive according to the FBI's Richard DesLauriers: "The FBI believes with a high degree of confidence in the years after theft the art was transported to Connecticut and the Philadelphia region and some of the art was taken to Philadelphia [\[as recently as 2003\]](#) where it was [offered for sale](#) by those responsible for theft." "With that confidence, we have identified the thieves, who **are** [not **were**] members of a criminal organization with a base in the mid-Atlantic states and New England." DesLauriers did not simply mispeak, these were words provided to the media in a written press release.

DesLauriers did not mispeak, the Globe reporters did not mishear, or fail to accurately transcribe DesLauriers' remarks that day. That statement from the Globe story is exactly the same, word-for-word, as what appeared that day in [an FBI press release](#).

Compared with the local toughs, whom the FBI have been hinting were responsible since 2013 (and not in the slightest in 2003), Ramsay had far fewer disincentives to pull off such a monumental crime, and fewer reasons to concern himself with the consequences of getting caught. His possession of the art, and knowledge of the crime, might well strengthen his negotiating position with federal authorities. The Gardner heist took place at a time when Clyde Lee Conrad's lengthy trial in West Germany was still ongoing.

There was no way Ramsay, a star witness *in absentia*, would be arrested during the trial at least. At the same time, compared with the FBI's local toughs claims, there were potentially far greater reasons to conceal the identity of the robber, if it was someone involved in espionage like Ramsay. If he were arrested for the Gardner heist, in addition to discrediting him as a witness, against three fellow spies, the government would also have to explain why they left Ramsay to roam free, after they already possessed two eyewitness accounts as well as direct physical evidence of his espionage, 18 months prior to the Gardner heist.

As a soon-to-be key witness in an espionage trial of a retired American soldier in a foreign country, Ramsay had a distinct advantage, not enjoyed by other criminals. An arrest of Ramsay for the Gardner heist, or any serious crime would have made international headlines and would have jeopardized the successful prosecution of Conrad and possibly others.

In a practice permitted under West German law, Navarro testified at Conrad's trial, in a West German courtroom, concerning what Ramsay had told him about the Conrad's espionage activity and that of others including his own,

Around that same time, other criminals, who like Ramsay, had entered into a cooperative relationship with the FBI, had exploited their status as witnesses and informants to commit additional crimes with impunity.

In 1975, a career criminal named Robert "Deuce" Dussault, along with seven other armed men, pulled off Rhode Island's Bonded Vault heist. The Bonded Vault was a secret mob bank, inside an old fur storage building in Providence, RI. One of the largest robberies in US history, the thieves stole an estimated \$30 million in cash, gold, and jewelry from safety deposit boxes. The heist is considered the biggest in the criminal history of the Northeast.

Well into the 1980s, Dussault, who had turned on his fellow gang members and became a star witness against them to save himself, was being flown back to Providence, RI to testify at the trial of his fellow robbers, from Colorado, where he had been placed and settled in, under the federal witness protection program.

During that time, Dussault proceeded to engage in a crime spree in Colorado, that included armed heists and shootouts, at the same time that federal prosecutors were still depending on his testimony against the people involved in the Bonded Vault robbery back in Providence.

In a book on the Bonded Vault case, called "The Last Good Heist," the authors wrote that "even after all these years, it's still unclear just how far federal investigators went to protect Dussault [from arrest and prosecution]." WPRI-TV investigative reporter Tim White one of the co-authors of the book, said in an interview on Rhode Island's NPR affiliate, WNPN, that Robert Dussault "robbed banks and businesses absolutely blind while under the thumb of the federal government."

“Deuce’s now unclassified FBI file shows him escaping from a state prison in Colorado on October 28, 1985; twenty one days later he was robbing a bank there. How many other robberies he may have committed that year state and federal authorities are either unable or unwilling to say.”

Another famous example from that same era as the Gardner heist was James "Whitey" Bulger, who “rose to power as [a secret informant](#) for the FBI and counted on FBI agents to help him get away with murder and extortion.”

At the same time “Bulger was credited inside the Justice Department with helping take out the top and middle tier of the local Italian Mafia.”

As William Youngworth, who famously tried to negotiate the return of some of the Gardner art said in the 2005 Gardner heist documentary, Stolen: "The FBI takes this public posture that 'listen we just want the stuff back and we don't really care how it comes back.' That's not true. I mean I have sat there behind closed doors and they only have one agenda, the only thing they want is names," and "they want an informant, more than they want the art back." adding, "They give people passes for 19 murders, you know, we're only talking about some pictures here."

In the same documentary, U.S. Attorney Michael Sullivan asks: "What's more important, the artwork or a criminal prosecution?"

If there was any criminal prosecution that was more important to the U.S. Government, at the time of the Gardner heist than “some pictures here,” it was that of retired U.S. Army Sergeant Clyde Lee Conrad, then on trial for espionage in a West German courtroom.

Convicted spy Rod Ramsay as a potential Gardner heist suspect (Part Five)



Picture of [Gardner heist eve video visitor March 17, 1990 \(left\)](#) and Rod Ramsay in Tampa, FL after his [arrest on espionage charges](#) on June 7, 1990 (right)

As desperate as the Gardner heist would have been, even for someone as desperate as Ramsay, it could at least serve as an opportunity to strike a blow against the city of Boston, where his past misdeeds, he may have realized, or suspected, had come to light, as well as the government, which had used him.

Ramsay, the smartest guy in the room, who played at being a master archcriminal with Clyde Lee Conrad, like it was Dungeons and Dragons, for a couple of years, might have suspected when it was too late, that while he thought he and Conrad were playing the U.S. Army, it was he and Conrad who were being played all along.

There is reason to believe this is the case. According to a 2022 article in Daily News Hungary, Lt. Col. István Belovai, a Hungarian Strategic Military Intelligence Service officer, first got in contact with the CIA in 1982, to inform the Americans about the activities of the [infamous Conrad spy ring](#), one of the most damaging espionage operations ever against NATO." Ramsay did not arrive in Germany until 1983. [\(American and Western news media\)](#) place Belovai's dealings with the CIA beginning in 1984.

Navarro too, in *Three Minutes to Doomsday*, suggested that the investigation into the spy ring preceded Ramsay's arrival at the Eighth Infantry Army Headquarters. After quoting Ramsay as saying that he met with Conrad in Boston, in "maybe the spring of '86," he next writes that Conrad had been in WFO's [the FBI's Washington field office] sights for years by then.

The 1999 book *Traitors Among Us* by Stuart Herrington pushed back the timetable of the Army's awareness of the Szabo/Conrad spy ring back even further. Herrington wrote that in 1978, six years before Ramsay set foot in Germany, that CIA sources in Moscow advised ominously of "a Hungarian penetration that was regarded as the most lucrative espionage success in Europe since the end of World War II."

CIA officials, realizing the importance of their agents' warnings, brought the [grave news](#) to the Department of Defense in 1978.

The agency tip led to what would ultimately become the longest-running, most sensitive, most tightly compartmented, and costliest counterespionage investigation in history. If the agency's spies were correct, NATO's ability to defend Western Europe against the Soviets and their Warsaw Pact allies was in jeopardy."

Only after the investigation had been ongoing "for years," was Ramsay assigned G-3 [War] Plans of the division headquarters, placed in the exact same position Conrad held, when he was recruited by Zoltan Szabo, whose former position Conrad then held.

In courtroom testimony, Navarro described Ramsay as someone with a high IQ, who spoke Japanese, Spanish and German. He was also said to have a remarkable gift of near total recall of whatever he read.”

In addition, as someone who graduated high school from the same military boarding school as Donald Trump, Ramsay would have had little trouble conforming to the rigors and traditions of military life, which would have reassured the senior NCOs and commissioned officers he worked under.

At the same time, Navarro also testified that before joining the Army on November 17, 1981, Ramsay had robbed a bank in Vermont, and while working as a security officer in a hospital, had attempted to break into a safe.

For Conrad to bring someone into his espionage operation, Navarro told Ramsay in one interview, he described in his book, “It had to be someone he trusted, someone who was really smart, someone who wasn’t scared to push the envelope, someone as smart as Clyde himself.”

“That would make perfect sense, wouldn’t it?”—with emphasis on the word “perfect,” Navarro wrote was Ramsay’s reply.

A little bit too perfect, however, and Ramsay’s reply suggests it may have dawned on him just how very a-little-too-perfect it all was.

As Rod’s mother said to agent Navarro, “Rod was assigned to that job, Mr. Navarro. He didn’t seek it out.”

The odds of someone smart enough and criminal enough (an actual bank robber) to be relatable to Conrad, and to wind up assigned by the Army to work directly under him, at the site of his decades long espionage operation, as a records custodian for some of the Army’s most top secret documents, was greater, much greater, than a one in a million shot.

While some spies are motivated by ideology, a shared culture, or national heritage, a personal grudge, or blackmail, Conrad, like many other spies, was motivated by pure greed. For him, the records the Army entrusted him with safeguarding were just one more form of contraband he could use to make a profit.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, Conrad saw an opportunity to buy and sell classified documents, and anything else he could manage to steal, to any and all governments, agencies, and actors. He saw an opportunity to get rich.

Like Ramsay, Conrad's criminality was not limited to espionage.

"I've been a bad boy," Conrad admitted to Master Sergeant Danny Williams, who worked undercover investigating Conrad and wrote about his experience in a book called "Damian and Mongoose."

"I mean a really bad boy." I've put buyers in touch with bank robbers who needed to get rid of some money. I've arranged buyers for stolen art. I have some of that [stolen art] on my wall right now," he said.

Conrad's operations, which combined acts of espionage with other forms of criminality like bank robbery and art theft, particularly as the state apparatus in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc crumbled, his gangster style of espionage, posed a new and dangerous challenge to America's national security.

The emergence of the spy/gangster could explain the federal government's complete and total take over of the Gardner heist investigation as well as the government's determination to never allow the original thieves to profit from the Gardner heist, if one or more of the perpetrators had been involved in espionage as well.

If something is too good to be true, it usually is, and it should have occurred to Conrad and Ramsay that their match made in heaven was a match made somewhere on earth, in the Pentagon perhaps, and not the result of random chance.

Since Ramsay had joined the Army so quickly after the bank robbery he committed, it may have taken some time for his criminal past to catch up with him, either through a criminal investigation of the bank robbery, or some other crime, or in the process of investigating him personally for his top-secret security clearance.

It could be that the crime-prone Ramsay was sent in deliberately to work under Conrad, with the idea, the hope, that Conrad, who was approaching Army retirement age, would recruit him.

Ramsay may have been a double agent, of a type known as ["an unwitting double agent, an extremely rare bird."](#) The manipulative skill required to deceive an agent into thinking that he is serving the adversary when in fact he is damaging its interests is plainly of the highest order," a 1995 CIA report stated.

Ramsay's "Detainment"

"A former Army sergeant arrested on espionage charges Thursday night had [robbed a bank in Vermont prior to receiving a top secret Pentagon clearance.](#)" That was the first sentence in the story of Rod Ramsay's arrest in the Washington Post. A bank robber with a top secret clearance was something different, something newsworthy, at least the Washington Post must have believed to begin their story that way.

But there were no espionage or any other criminal charges entered against Rod Ramsay that day, or for another 13 months. He was brought to court for a *detainment* hearing. But even "though prosecutors and Navarro said Ramsay possessed critical knowledge of NATO defenses that could command a high price from unfriendly nations, they never explained why, [if that were true] [he was not arrested earlier.](#)"

Even after providing in depth information about Conrad's espionage, as well as his own, and others, Ramsay was still a free man, for several months, or as free as he could be earning barely enough to survive, [as he read John Clancy novels](#), while queued up for a fare at the Orlando airport, well aware of a rapidly approaching expiration date on his liberty.

The criminal profile of the typical spy is more that of a white-collar criminal. And Ramsay, through his espionage, had certainly demonstrated he was capable of white-collar type criminal acts. But he was also someone who as a teenager robbed a bank in Vermont, armed with a loaded shotgun. Ramsay was a multifaceted criminal threat, of a kind that might have proven to be a challenge for those who sought to contain him. Or perhaps it was believed the risks were worth it, and that it was more important to watch Ramsay than to stop him, up to a point.

The effort however, to watch Ramsay proved challenging. "Once he has a fare in the backseat, he goes wherever the customer directs, in a yellow cab identical from the air or ground to perhaps two thousand other yellow cabs working the streets of Greater Orlando," Navarro wrote, adding "and you've got to be on your toes at all times, because it's easy to detect surveillance if you know what you're doing, which suggests that they were trying to have Ramsay under surveillance without his knowledge.

With access to the hundreds of pay phones at the Orlando airport, and other public [pay] telephones on every busy street, and with anyone able to get into his cab, the surveillance of Ramsay, the cab driver, an independent contractor, was not the same

as if Ramsay was still working as a busboy at the Bob Evans restaurant in Tampa, as he had been a year earlier when Navarro first met with him.

Orlando had a large military presence at that time. It included the Orlando Naval Training Center, the Orlando Recruit Training Command, as well as the Navy Nuclear Power Training Command. For the time Ramsay was working there Orlando also had the potential to be the home of the Ramsay espionage operation from out of his rented Yellow Cab.

"Thanks to Disney World, Epcot Center, SeaWorld, and a dozen other lesser tourist destinations, Orlando probably has as many for-hire car services per capita as any place in the United States," Navarro wrote.

Also more members per capita in the United States of the *nomenklatura*, the elite, communist party members in the crumbling Soviet Union and its Eastern bloc satellite countries, bringing their family on vacation there, per capita as well, south of Arlington, Virginia. With family vacations as a cover, Orlando was known to be a hotspot for espionage activity.

It is unthinkable that given the legal peril Ramsay found himself in, as well as the immediate and continuing financial strain he was under, that the government was not keeping close tabs on him, unless they were convinced that any information he possessed was so compromised, outdated, adulterated, or otherwise obsolete, that there was no point in worrying about it. There was still the possibility, however, he could get involved with new espionage or criminal projects.

But Navarro, who claims Ramsay often did not have enough money to eat, claims just that. That there was no surveillance or interaction with Ramsay for over a year, after he provided hard physical evidence of his involvement with espionage, had admitted to a meeting with Clyde Lee Conrad, in the United States after he left the Army, and had been positively identified in a photo lineup by two members of the Conrad spy ring, as also being a member of the ring.

After a year best of all, not only do I have permission to talk with Ramsay again, but we were actually able to find him, and believe me, that wasn't easy given how long this case has been on the shelf. We can't keep tabs on people just because we think we might want to collar them someday."

In fact that is exactly what counterintelligence agents do when alerted of the existence of a known spy like Rod Ramsay who is meeting with foreign nationals and American military personnel in the privacy of his taxi cab every week.

According to a news story at the time of his arrest. Officials at Yellow Cab Co., where Ramsay worked, could not be reached to confirm the dates of his employment, although he appeared to have worked there from last summer to this spring, which means he quit around the time of the Gardner heist, March 18, 1990. At his detainment hearing, Narvarro described Ramsay as an unemployed cab driver.

Suddenly, everything changed after Clyde Lee Conrad was convicted and sentenced to life in prison on June 6, 1990. Rod Ramsay was arrested the following day. At his *detainment* hearing FBI Special Agent Joe Navarro described Ramsay as a trilingual career criminal with a near photographic memory. He and prosecutors said Ramsay possessed critical knowledge of NATO defenses that could command a high price from unfriendly nations, [but] they [never explained why he was not arrested earlier](#)

But then Ramsay was arrested, and as Ramsay's sentencing judge, "U.S. District Judge William Terrell Hodges would at his sentencing in 1992: "The circumstances of the case could easily warrant that [a life in prison] sentence."

Ramsay was completely at the mercy of the government.

After his arrest, [Ramsay waived his right](#) to a speedy indictment and trial and declined numerous requests for interviews. He was placed in [solitary confinement](#) in the Hillsborough County jail for 13 months, unsentenced, unindicted, and uncharged.

Ramsay was indicted in July of 1991, but the indictment [was not unsealed](#) for an additional two months and there was no announcement of the indictment. signed a plea agreement in August, but that remained under seal until September as well.

Authorities gave no explanation for the [secrecy or the sudden unsealing](#) of the case. He remained unsentenced and [in solitary confinement for an additional 14 months](#).

This was hardly standard operating procedure for spies or anyone other class of criminal. Solitary confinement for an extended period, is tortuous if not torture." Under the Nelson Mandela Rules, the United Nations' revised minimum standards for prisoner treatment, anything more than 15 days in isolation is considered torture. A growing body of medical literature establishes that isolation can cause permanent damage to people's brains and that virtually everyone who spends extended time in isolation suffers severe impacts on their mental and physical health.

Ramsay's solitary confinement was combined with the profound uncertainty he was living under. He did not know if charges would ever be filed against him, and he would be released, or if he was going to be spending the rest of his [life in prison](#).

What was most likely to be the case was something in between. But what was that something? Ramsay was left to wonder in isolation.

Solitary confinement is typically meted out as a punishment, or perhaps for the safety of the inmate. The county lockup might well be a dangerous place for an accused spy. But that was the government's choice to keep him there.

There are probably many people who feel no sympathy for someone who betrayed their country in the way that Rod Ramsay had. There has to be some reason however, for singling out Ramsay for this unusual and cruel, if not cruel and unusual, treatment. One possibility would be that they believed he was holding back on information, but given some of the other peculiarities of his plea agreement, it seems more likely that they were worried about what he **would** say, that he would say too much to the wrong people, not that he was not saying enough.

The government revoked Ramsay's freedom not only to speak about his crimes, but also **the investigation** of his crimes. Although solitary confinement is used to extract information, Ramsay was already cooperating and with a life sentence possibly hanging over his head, unless there was something else, besides his espionage in Germany they were looking to get from Ramsay, it seems unlikely that would be the reason for the solitary, and other treatment of Ramsay which was unlike other spies and members of his spy ring.

In addition, the government "As part of a plea agreement, government censors [must clear any of Ramsay's future writings](#) about his espionage activity **or the investigation of it.**" In addition, Ramsay agreed to give the government any future profits from the telling of his *spy* story." Why would a prison inmate need to take polygraph tests? What information did Ramsay have that they were worrying about him sharing? What profits did he stand to make from Ramsay's *spy story*?

Even if Ramsay shared information with another person who turned that information into a book or movie, any money Ramsay received would belong to the government according to his plea deal. Making these details of his plea-deal public, would serve to ward off any journalists, who hoped to capitalize on the life and times of the "career criminal," Rod Ramsay.

Essentially Ramsay's plea deal included a nondisclosure agreement. If Ramsay was involved in the Gardner heist and there was any kind of overlap between his espionage and his potential involvement in the Gardner heist, then it could be censored. The agreement may have been constructed in such a way that would cover specific time periods, or other ways to make it broader in scope, so that it encompassed other criminal activities during the time he was under investigation.

Ramsay may have plea-bargained away his First Amendment right to admit to knowledge or involvement with the Gardner heist, or any other crime during the period of his espionage and the espionage investigation, even if he was guilty, or had any knowledge of it, would be subject to review by government censors. Ramsay was sentenced to 36 years. His cooperation with the limits placed on him through his plea deal, could well influence whether he would be released from prison in [ten years](#), when he would first be eligible for parole, or something closer to his full 36 year sentence.

Ramsay was provably out of prison by 2004, [less than 14 years](#) after his arrest in June of 1990, despite newspaper reports and claims by the human-lie-detector guy, and author, Joe Navarro, while on the book tour circuit, that he was in prison until 2013.

In December of 1994 the New York Times ran an article called "[*Five Years And \\$300 Million -- A special report; The Maddening Mysteries Of the Greatest Art Theft Ever*](#)" about the Gardner heist case. "'A lot of people for different reasons are looking,' Daniel J. Falzon, the FBI's agent leading the investigation, said."

"Yet," the article continued, "the theft seems to have generated little underworld street talk, as if some fearsome crime clan had clamped a lid on, or killed the actual thieves." Perhaps it was not a fearsome crime clan, but the government itself that had clamped a lid on, a lid that remains clamped shut to this day. They had certainly clamped one on Rod Ramsay.

It also suggests that the perpetrators were not a part of the criminal ecosystem where "underworld street talk" is exchanged. As Rick Abath, (the Gardner Museum security guard that former FBI lead investigator Geoff Kelly now says was an accomplice) wrote in his uncompleted book on the case, "Pandora's Laughter": "It's easy for a reporter [to get hooked on to one train of thought](#) and ride it to its logical conclusion; even if it was a fantasy from the beginning."

And as an accomplice, according to Kelly, [Abath is someone who would definitely know.](#)

By Kerry Joyce

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