

NEWS

Ex-Tewksbury state police detective didn't need to see Bulger movie — he lived it

By **CHRIS CAMIRE** |

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When Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* hit theaters nearly a decade ago, Bob Long was understandably excited to see it. He lived it, after all.

Or so he thought.

The retired state police detective, formerly of Tewksbury, was part of an investigative team that captured surveillance footage of Whitey Bulger in 1980 and 1981 interacting with a who's who of Boston's criminal underworld.

At the time, Bulger was operating his enterprise out of the Lancaster Street garage near the Boston Garden. Larry Bird was in his second season. Kevin White was mayor. U2 had just played its first Boston show at the Paradise.

Long and his team of troopers set up shop in a "flop house" across the street from the garage.

"The walls were paper thin," recalled Long, in an interview this week. "Derelicts. The mentally challenged. Hookers. No air conditioning. It was one hell hole."

For four months, Long watched Bulger's every move. He took photos of him. He filmed him. He listened in on his conversations.

Bulger was seen with reputed organized crime member Donato Angiulo, then a leader in Boston's North End crime family, and Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi, a Bulger associate and now a convicted killer who testified against Bulger at his 2013 federal racketeering trial.

The walls around Bulger were closing in until corrupt cops tipped him off. Suddenly, the conversations Long was listening in on changed.

"The next time Bulger shows up, he starts talking about what a great job the state police are doing on the highways," said Long, chuckling.

The investigation had been compromised. Soon after, Bulger and other members of the Winter Hill Gang stopped showing up at the garage altogether.

Long would continue to pursue Bulger up until his retirement in 1990. Over that time he became a student of the man now considered one of the most dangerous — and notorious — mobsters in American history.

"I remember the way he carried himself — the cockiness, the arrogance, so sure of himself," said Long. "The only way you can be so sure of yourself is if you know you've got all the bases covered, that nobody's going to be coming after you because you've got the Boston police, the state police and the FBI all in your pocket."

If anyone was qualified to critique *The Departed*, in which Jack Nicholson played a Boston mobster modeled after Bulger named Frank Costello, it was Long. His review would make Siskel and Ebert blush.

"It was absurd how Jack Nicholson played him," said Long, with anger in his voice. "It was over the top. It was unrealistic. The only thing nice about that movie was the scenery of Boston."



‘Spent years on Bulger’

Long, 69, is not the type to fall victim to hyperbole. He sounds like a cop, speaking in short, direct sentences peppered with profanity — all in a classic Boston accent. So you can take him at his word when he says seeing *Black Mass* was like “stepping back in time.”

“I spent years on Bulger, so I know all his mannerisms and his habits,” said Long, now a private investigator. “I swear to God, I don’t think anybody in the world except for Bulger himself could have done a better job than Johnny Depp did. He is one talented actor.”

Long has similar praise for Joel Edgerton, who plays John Connolly, the disgraced former Boston FBI agent and longtime handler of Bulger.

“He was so freaking good, he should get an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor,” said Long. “He really portrayed Connolly how he was. So, both of them deserve Oscars.”

Long’s only complaint? With just two hours to work with, the filmmakers could not tell the full Bulger story. Long said key characters, such as Flemmi (Rory Cochrane), Kevin Weeks (Jesse Plemons) and hit man John Martorano (W. Earl Brown) were not fully developed.

“It was just too compressed,” said Long. “It exposed the FBI corruption, but they didn’t have enough time for the state police and their role. It’s something that should have been a “Sopranos”-style weekly series. You just can’t cover 35 years in two hours.”

The release of *Black Mass* has dredged up memories of one of Lowell’s most notorious murders.

In 1988, Bulger crony and mob enforcer William “Billy” Barnoski was convicted of first-degree murder for the fatal shooting of local bookie John “Jackie” McDermott in his Lowell home.

Long, then the head of the state police detective unit assigned to the Middlesex District Attorney’s Office, had been following McDermott for years, primarily to get to the Winter Hill Gang. McDermott’s successful bookmaking business had caught the attention of Bulger.

Barnoski was reportedly sent to Lowell from the Winter Hill Gang to learn the bookmaking business from McDermott. But when McDermott turned state’s witness on Barnoski to avoid jail time in a gambling-racketeering case, he signed his own death warrant.

“That’s why we went after McDermott,” said Long. “To get to Barnoski to get to Bulger.”

Bulger was never charged in the murder. He fled Boston and went into hiding on December 23, 1994, after being tipped off by Connolly about a pending indictment.

By the time Bulger disappeared, Long was four years into retirement. He had moved from Tewksbury to Norwell, where he now lives with his wife, Muriel.

In June 2011 he received a call he never thought would come. Bulger had been arrested in Santa Monica, Calif., after 16 years on the lam.

“My daughter woke me up at 3 a.m. to tell me. I said, ‘Yeah, OK, right,’” said Long. “When I woke up the next morning, I thought I had a dream about it, but I found out it was true. I shook my head, but that’s it. What a joke, the effort the FBI made to find him.”

When *Black Mass* is released on DVD, it will include a documentary about Bulger that Long was interviewed for. He said he talked about the lives that could have been saved if corrupt law enforcement officials had not sabotaged his investigation into Bulger.

“Eight other people would not be dead,” said Long.

Roger Wheeler. Debra Davis. John Callahan. Deborah Hussey. Michael Donahue. Brian Halloran. Arthur “Bucky” Barrett. John McIntyre.

“They would still be alive today.”

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