

In an effort to confound investigators, Bout continually changed the registration of his aircraft from one African country to another, all the while basing his air operations in Sharjah, one of seven emirates that make up the UAE.

Bout's alleged dealings with the Taliban and al Qaeda are the subject of an ongoing, classified U.S. operation that began in early 2000. "There was a concerted effort at the tail end of the Clinton administration, continued into the Bush administration, to put him out of business," said one former U.S. official.

U.N. and U.S. officials said Bout cut a deal with the Taliban in 1996 in UAE, one of only three countries in the world that recognized the regime.

The deal called for Bout's Air Cess to supply and service Afghanistan's Ariana Airways and the Afghan air force, both of which used Soviet-era aircraft. Another company that Bout had an interest in, Flying Dolphin, provided charter flights from Dubai to Afghanistan, the sources said, and soon there were several flights a week from Dubai to the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar.

U.N. investigators say they now believe many of those flights were loaded with weapons. When U.N. sanctions shut down Ariana in November 2000, Flying Dolphin obtained a U.N. waiver, for reasons that are not clear, and continued flying the Dubai-Kandahar route until being shut down by the United Nations in January 2001.

"Bout undoubtedly did supply al Qaeda and the Taliban with arms," Peter Hain, Britain's minister of European affairs and lead investigator into Bout's global arms trade, told the Associated Press on Feb. 19.

A 1998 Belgian intelligence report on Bout's activities, obtained by The Washington Post, says he made \$50 million in Afghanistan, selling heavy weapons to the Taliban. However, Peleman and other investigators said they had doubts that Bout had earned that much money from the Taliban and al Qaeda, in part because Bout also supplied weapons to anti-Taliban leaders, some of whom were his close friends.

Nonetheless, the United States launched an effort to disrupt Bout's arms trading, trying to freeze his assets and pressuring other nations, especially the UAE, to expel him. U.S. officials said they were limited in what they could do because they believed Bout had violated no U.S. laws. One of Bout's companies, Air Cess Inc., based in Miami, was dissolved on Sept. 19, according to public records, and its telephone number no longer works.

In late 2000 the Clinton administration asked the UAE at an "extremely high level" to shut down Bout's operation, a former U.S. official said. UAE officials repented that they had no evidence of criminal wrongdoing by Bout.

"We would have preferred they shut him down completely but they took helpful incremental steps that disrupted his operation," the source said, including imposing new and costly equipment requirements on his air fleet.

When President Bush took office, the Bout project received less attention, U.S. officials said. Then came the Sept. 11 attacks. "Suddenly, he was back on our radar screen in a very significant way," a senior U.S. official said. "His importance suddenly loomed very large."

HONORING COMMON THREADS AWARD RECIPIENTS

HON. GEORGE RADANOVICH

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 26, 2002

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sharon Clauss, Patricia Hillman, Roxie Moradian, Agnes Pelous, and Alice Peters on the occasion of their being awarded the 2002 Common Threads Award. Common Threads is a joint venture of the Agricultural Education Foundation, California State University, Fresno's College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, and AG ONE Foundation. The award is given to women in agriculture who have invested in their communities through community service and philanthropy. Honorees must live in Fresno, Kings, Madera, Merced, or Tulare County.

Sharon Clauss has been involved in dairy farming all her life. She and her husband, Richard, operate Clauss Dairy in Hilmar, California. Her support for agriculture and her community include active participation and financial contribution to numerous organizations including California Women for Agriculture, Agricultural Leadership Foundation, 4-H, Hilmar Covenant Church, and the American Jersey Cattle Association.

Pat (Heiskell) Hillman works with her family's farming businesses, Heiskell Family Farms and J.D. Heiskell & Co., in Tulare, California. She also volunteers with the World Ag Expo. Her involvement in her community spans six decades from co-founding of the Tulare County Symphony League in 1956 to being a founding docent of the Heritage Complex in 2000. Pat has also contributed to the Tulare Historical Museum and Society, First Congregational Church of Tulare, and Pro-Youth Tulare and Pro-Youth Visalia.

Roxie Moradian is a former owner of Penny-Newman Grain Company and has been involved in agriculture all her life. Her community service includes not only the Ag One Foundation at California State University, Fresno, with the founding of the Frank Moradian Foundation for Agriculture Scholarship for students, but also the Fresno County Library, Fresno Philharmonic Association, Saint Agnes and Valley Children's Hospitals, Salvation Army-Fresno, and many others.

Agnes Pelous began her ag life in Los Angeles County as the daughter of immigrant farmers from Italy. Agnes continued with farming when she married Alex Pelous and they relocated to Tulare County. She has been an active member in both the Orange County and Tulare County Farm Bureaus. Her other community involvement includes the Lindsay Hospital Guild, Las Madras Guild for Valley Children's Hospital, Parent Teacher Association, Tulare County Cotton Women, Tulare County 4-H, California Women for Agriculture, among many others.

Alice Peters and her husband, Leon, owned and farmed orchards in the Fowler, California, area for many years and owned Valley Foundry which was connected to agriculture throughout the world. Alice has been active in many community service organizations including the Fresno Philharmonic, Valley Public Radio, Fresno Metropolitan Museum, and Fresno City and County Historical Societies. The School of Business at California State University, Fresno named their auditorium in her honor.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sharon Clauss, Pat Hillman, Roxie Moradian, Agnes Pelous, and Alice Peters for receiving the 2002 Common Threads Award. I invite my colleagues to join me in commending these outstanding women for their commitment to community service and agriculture and wishing them many more years of continued success.

COMMEMORATION OF THE CHINESE NEW YEAR

HON. DAVID E. BONIOR

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 26, 2002

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, Chinese American communities across this nation have gathered to celebrate the Chinese New Year. This lunar new year celebration is a special and important time for all Chinese Americans.

China is a country rich in traditional and religious holidays, but none are comparable to the New Year festivities. The New Year is a time for celebration, reflection and most importantly, family. The renewal and strengthening of family ties during this important time is not only essential to the Chinese community, but to America as a whole. In a period that has been difficult for so many of us, I am particularly moved by the Chinese New Year's emphasis on peace and happiness. We should all be well served by following such a tradition.

Our country has been greatly enriched by the many Americans of Chinese descent who have brought with them such rich customs. Michigan is fortunate to have had thousands of Chinese Americans make our great state their new home.

Mr. Speaker, in the Year of the Horse, I join the Chinese American community in celebrating this most joyous New Year or Bainian. I salute all of them for the tremendous contributions to freedom and human dignity which they have made.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO TONY FORTINO

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 26, 2002

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize an extraordinary man who embodies the spirit of my district in Colorado and whose contributions to society have been honored with his induction into the Pueblo Hall of Fame. Tony Fortino is a pillar of the Pueblo, Colorado community and has dedicated countless hours to the betterment of his beloved city. As Tony celebrates his achievement, I would like to commend him for his commitment to his fellow citizens and community.

Tony's service to the City of Pueblo began when Tony took it upon himself to promote Pueblo's Downtown business corridor and the city itself. He served in leadership positions in the Greater Pueblo Chamber of Commerce, the Pueblo Economic Development Corporation and the Pueblo Development Foundation. His hard work ethic pushes him to take the initiative and provide leadership on projects, as