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The American Robert Mazur was able to destroy the financial network used by the Medellin Cartel:

This is the story of the undercover agent who took down the seventh largest bank in the world.

The former agent, who this Thursday will be speaking at the Business Generation seminar, says that Chile is being utilized as a base of transportation for cocaine from other South American countries.

Eduardo Olivares C. Life in Tampa, Florida is quiet, with sunshine almost all year round. And for someone who has played with death in secret, high risk operations it is the ideal place for retirement. That's where Bob Mazur (61) lives, a former U.S. federal narcotics agent, who two decades ago broke up the criminal network of the then seventh largest bank in the world and collapsed the financial support of the Medellin Cartel.

"I just finished a series of radio interviews with some radio stations here," he says from his office at Chase and Associates, the firm he presides over, dedicated to the forensic investigation of criminal and civil offenses.



Who is it? For security reasons, the real face of the former federal drug enforcement agent Robert Mazur can't be shown. He's been asked to return to work in intelligence operations, but says that his time "already passed."

Photo: Robert Mazur

He is in full promotion of his book, *The Infiltrator*, subtitled "My Secret Life in the Dirty Banks Behind Pablo Escobar's Medellin Cartel," which he already has an agreement with director Brad Furman ("The Lincoln Lawyer") to make into a movie. This Thursday he'll be in Chile, in a seminar about ethics in business organized by Business Generation at Casa Piedra.

The bank's fall. In the late 80's, the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) had the benefit of global prestige, but a good part of its financial firmness was supported by a framework of illegal business deals that used the institution to launder money. For five years, in a secret operation christened C-Chase, Mazur, posing as Bob Musella, a multimillionaire

who wanted to launder money, infiltrated and investigated. The former agent mentions, that thanks to two drug traffickers from New York who said they knew him, he had quick access to the criminal world. He spent millions on hotels and private jets. “I lived in luxury, but it never cost the taxpayers anything. The costs were charged to the assets of the “bad guys” he says.

With that lifestyle he was able to contact a number of people who opened the doors to the money laundering network, the same one which allowed Pablo Escobar to launder his profits from drug trafficking. After he had already compiled enough evidence, there was still one thing missing; how to arrest the leaders if they were spread all over the world. Mazur’s coup de grâce: He invited them all to his fictitious wedding in Florida. Captivated by the personality of the supposed millionaire, 39 people arrived, among them politicians, military personnel and sheikhs. But what was waiting for them was prison, in the biggest blow to drug trafficking that had ever been witnessed.

The case appears in detail in his book, whose translation to Spanish was ready for print at a Colombian publishing house. Suspiciously, he says, it never went to print and today he’s looking for another publisher. Years later, Mazur continued with his undercover operations, disrupting financial networks associated with the Cali Cartel and in Costa Rica.

Family’s cost. “I’ve been married to the same woman who I fell in love with in high school”, Mazur comments with certain joy.

That they are still together required a lot of work. “When you are away, your family adjusts to living without you. And when you return, you think everything is the same and you put on your dad shoes, but what happens is mom has already taken that role,” he remembers.

Sometimes he would disappear for a couple of months and when he would come back home he had to keep in touch with the bad guys on the phone while on the other side of the room the kids played. “With that kind of work, there is no way you cannot put at risk even the strongest relationship. My kids have not considered following my career, due to the problems they went through in our family,” he says now.

“There are a lot of people who have businesses around the world and spend time outside, but the difference is that they never stop being themselves. When you are an undercover agent you have to keep two brains functioning at the same time. You never forget who you are and why you are there, but you can’t allow for your true way of speaking, your genuine gestures, your real life to come to the surface” he says.

Would you work again? I was in Washington not long ago, to check out a real interesting case. I can’t receive classified information anymore, but I had a meeting with some people, which was very informative, because I obtained valuable information about the Cali Cartel in Africa and the Middle East. In between all of that, they told me they intended to put together good intelligence operation and at the end they asked me if I would consider doing it again. I told them, “I think my time already

passed. My family already paid a high price and my place is with them right now. Thank you, but no thank you. I believe I could still be effective, but I think it's time for other generations."

By the end of the 80's, he infiltrated the intricate money laundering network which involved the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI).

Three times close to death. The former undercover agent says he's been afraid of dying three times while on operations. On one occasion, while trying to infiltrate the Cali Cartel, he felt the circle he was in was suspicious of him. He felt afraid when, despite that he needed to leave, they insistently asked him to stay. Finally he got away.

The second time, he was in the lobby of a hotel with a Colombian drug trafficker when all of a sudden he heard from behind, "Hey Bob." He turned around and saw the accountant of a criminal network that Mazur had taken down a few years ago. Luckily his alias was always "Bob," but with a different last name. "Oh, it's an old friend, the one who said hey to me." Mazur told his Colombian companion as he walked towards the accountant who he hugged and whispered in his ear that he was in the middle of an operation. "I let him go. The sweat ran down my back waiting to see what he would say, and fortunately he played along and started talking about the casinos. The next day we got together for breakfast and I thanked him for his help."

There was a third time. Normally when there are meetings to collect money, the

agencies follow the undercover agents with security personnel for back up. "But the bad guys are not stupid and they have their own counter surveillance equipment," he says. On one of the most dangerous operations, his counterpart received a telephone call warning him that there were federal agents outside. Just that suspicion could give him away, but he was able to come out of that intact.

Danger in Chile? The information Mazur has from DEA circles says that Chile is being used as a base of transportation for cocaine from other South American countries. He also comments that the likelihood of sending money from Chile abroad to launder money is very high, especially if currency exchange houses are used. "It's not unusual to withdraw cash from Mexico or Guatemala, but a country where I have seen it has increased is in Peru. Couriers can register as currency exchange houses and send it back to the United States. I don't believe because of the level of business in Chile, they are able to ship large volumes of bills, but the ability of the currency exchange houses could create problems," he explains.

Greed, the cause of drug trafficking. "The biggest reason why someone falls into this is, unfortunately, greed. But if you see it from the other extreme, in the case of drugs, there are a lot of businesses and legitimate banks that never get involved in acquiring deposits or investments from individuals who are suspected of being involved with money laundering," Robert Mazur says.

“Nowadays risks are higher as opposed to when the BCCI fell, due to globalization. The resistance then was stronger than now,” he adds.

The most recent case that he comments on is Wachovia Bank, who last year declared itself guilty of being involved in the laundering of \$14 billion in cash coming from Mexico, “When I was involved in this issue, we saw that sometimes in US cities up to two million dollars at a time was picked up to launder in boxes and suitcases of five, ten and twenty dollar bills.

Assuming they picked up \$14 billion in 20 dollar bills (although in my experience the denominations were mostly lower), we’re talking about 725 tons. That’s not logical, nor are attorneys needed to prove where this money comes from,” he claims in the Wachovia case.

“I feel embarrassed to say that due to the insatiable desire for illegal drugs in my country, out of the \$400 billion laundered in the world, \$65 billion are sold in the United States,” he explains.