

Private security outfit raids Calif. pot farms

By Dylan Scott, TPM

They wear camouflaged uniforms, bearing military-style insignia. They ride helicopters over the forests of Mendocino County equipped with firearms, where they cut down illegal marijuana. But they aren't the army. They aren't even the police. They are Lear Asset Management, a private security firm that is attracting a lot of attention for the work it's doing – and even perhaps some work it hasn't done

KCBS in San Francisco described them as “mysterious men dropping from helicopters to chop down” pot plants. Rumors swirl in the area's marijuana community about heavily armed men choppering onto their private land and cutting down their marijuana plants without identifying themselves or answering questions about who they are. Lear has become a boogeyman of sorts for a certain population in Northern California.

But they aren't hiding. Paul Trouette, Lear Asset Management's 55-year-old founder, spoke with TPM for more than 30 minutes earlier this week to describe what his company does and why they do it. They see themselves filling a void that law enforcement cannot. Trouette at one point invoked the Pinkertons – the private detective agency notorious for, among other things, violently busting unions and chasing Wild West outlaws – to demonstrate the historical precedent for what they're now doing in this county of 88,000 on the edge of the California Redwoods.

“Law enforcement just doesn't have the means to take care of it any longer,” Trouette told TPM. The 2011 murder of Fort Bragg City Councilman Jere Melo by an illegal trespasser tending poppy plants as Melo patrolled private land for a

timber company made a big impression on Trouette, he said. Lear was incorporated the same year, and the company has worked with a nonprofit founded in Melo's memory.

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