

“Drawing the Line between Life and Death”- Part A

(This case was prepared by University of Georgia journalism student Kelsi Eccles for JOUR 5170, Advanced Studies in Journalism, based on secondary sources cited below.)

Michael Smith is an award winning investigative journalist with Bloomberg, “How Colombian FARC Terrorists Mining Tungsten Are Linked to Your BMW Sedan.” Smith explored the Amazon jungle with Indian miners who collect tungsten and tantalum. These minerals are used for LCD screens and in luxury cars such as BMWs, Porches, and Ferraris. Smith quoted Cesar Melendez director who said that shippers are aware of the illegal mineral mining. “They falsify the source of illegal metals,” Melendez says. “This is how they launder tungsten.” Smith also discovered that the revenue from the mineral mining led to a large cocaine trade with the terrorist group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia or FARC.

In an attempt to discover more about FARC, Smith met with a group of workers to explore Tiger Hill where the minerals are concentrated. One of the workers received word from a FARC commander who targeted Smith and the workers. Smith’s article recounted this scene. “The next day, an Indian leader warns a Bloomberg Markets reporter and a photographer that he’d just spotted an armed, seven-man FARC combat patrol in a cove about 20 minutes upriver. The commander of that unit had sent word to the Indians that the journalists would be violating a military order if they continued to Tiger Hill. “That makes you a target, so it would be very, very dangerous for you to go,” the Indian leader says. The journalists and miners turn back.”

Discussion:

Should Smith continue his pursuit toward information toward Tiger Hill or should he have let the story go for the sake of his life?

At what point should journalist avoid completing a story when they’re life is in danger? If that point exist.

What should Smith do next?

“Drawing the Line between Life and Death”- Part B

Smith found another way to get the information he needed by accessing tax records in Columbia. Alicia Smith, A Grady College McGill fellow reported the following about Smith’s next step of action. “He began examining export and tax records in Colombia and tracked the sales and shipments of illegally mined tungsten around the world, including to several companies within the U.S. His interviews with workers from the exporting companies revealed that the Colombian company selling it falsified reports of where the tungsten came from.”

Discussion:

Is courage limited to putting your life in danger to complete a story or is the pursuit of information and research considered a courageous act?

Was Smith courageous for his actions by avoiding the physical pursuit of the story and diverting to information?

“Drawing the Line between Life and Death”- Epilogue

Smith's determination to complete the story led to the criminal investigation of companies exporting the illegal minerals. The investigations were opened by all of the companies with products from this area of South America including Apple, Samsung and BIC pens. Most of these companies are American based and plan to resolve these issues, but the companies are still using the same metals in their products.

Works Cited

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-08/terrorist-tungsten-in-colombia-taints-global-phone-to-car-sales.html>

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