



Covert: My Years Infiltrating the Mob

Bob Delaney , Dave Scheiber , Bill Walton (Foreword)

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Featured on NPR and CNN

In a riveting page-turner, NBA referee Bob Delaney reveals the clandestine life he led before becoming one of professional basketball's most respected referees.

In 1975, Delaney had spent only a year and a half as a New Jersey State Trooper when his superiors approached him with a tantalizing yet dangerous undercover assignment: to infiltrate the Mob. Delaney accepted, and became Bobby Covert, the president of Alamo Trucking, a fully-operational business used by law enforcement as flypaper for snagging crooks.

At the height of *The Godfather* era, Delaney wore a wire and lived among wiseguys who modeled themselves on their on-screen counterparts, quoting lines from "The Movie" and boasting of how often they'd seen it. Delaney even crossed paths with Joe Pistone, the real-life Donnie Brasco (though neither knew the other was undercover), knowing all the while that a single slip could get him killed.

Ultimately gathering enough evidence to convict 30 members of the Bruno and Genovese crime families, Project Alpha was a success, but Delaney struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder and traces of Stockholm syndrome after getting too close to those he investigated. Therapy helped him come to terms with all he'd endured during his three tense years undercover, and, once a college basketball star, Delaney began officiating high school and intramural games as a way to rebuild his life—eventually working his way up to the NBA, where he has been a referee for more than two decades.

Covert: My Years Infiltrating the Mob Details

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From Reader Review Covert: My Years Infiltrating the Mob for online ebook

Brandon Kurtich says

I thought that Bob Delaney did a great job at telling his story without being overly self-involved like so many other memoirists out there. He has led a very interesting life and it was very intriguing to read about where he has been and what he has done. Delaney is a hero for his efforts to breakdown the grasp of organized crime in the New York/New Jersey areas.

Brian says

This was a pretty decent undercover-in-the-mob book. What I found interesting was how many of these storylines made their way into the Sopranos. Especially fascinating/depressing was a story that seemed to contain the origins of Artie Bucco.

Denise says

I enjoyed reading this book though in some areas it was a little slow. Good story about a young state trooper who agreed to work undercover and infiltrate the mob. Once he retired from the state police he became a NBA referee. Good read!

Ice says

NBA referee Delaney's fascinating account of his prior life as a New Jersey state trooper who infiltrated organized crime will be a must-read for those drawn to Joe Pistone's similar account in Donnie Brasco (or the movie adaptation starring Johnny Depp).

In 1975, Delaney was a relative novice in law enforcement when he was tapped by a superior to help build cases against major Mafia families by creating and running a fake business, Alamo Trucking. With the aid of St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times sportswriter Scheiber, Delaney captures perfectly the daily routine and perils of undercover work, and describes the psychological challenges he faced during the three years of Project Alpha: The granite foundation of my self-image... had given way to shifting sands of doubt and worry. While less heralded than Pistone's work, Delaney's achievements—which yielded multiple convictions of members of the Bruno and Genovese families—were significant precursors to the Feds' massive 1980s assault on La Cosa Nostra.

Becoming a basketball referee after these proceedings was a return to an early passion of the high school all-state forward and captain of his college team—but the fear, he says, still comes back sometimes.

Macjest says

Awesome story and scary at the same time. I really felt sorry for him for all the things he had to go through while under cover. He had a very hard time getting his life put back together after being “covert” for so long.

Marc says

Bob Delaney is a referee for the NBA, but that wasn't his first job. Before basketball, he was a New Jersey State Trooper who worked deep cover to infiltrate the mob on the Jersey waterfront. This book outlines the events of his under cover life.

I enjoyed reading this book very much for the most part. Although it opened on the basketball court, something I had little to no interest in, it jumped quickly into the law enforcement side of things. Delaney did a great job describing his experiences and created quite a page turner - until about three quarters of the way through, where I found the one major disappointment.

After surviving his time undercover, Delaney glazes over his time in court. He describes how he became an instructor at the academy, revolutionizing training on the subject of organized crime, but once again glazed over any experiences. Instead, he quickly moved on to his basketball career, which he described in great detail. If you're interested in how he became a referee, this is great. For me, it was very frustrating. I wanted to know more about the court experience, more about the training experiences, more about the law enforcement side. This is, after all, why I was reading the book.

Still, all in all I enjoyed the read. Even if you stop when the basketball discussion starts, it's worth the time.

Ray Mulder says

Good read about New Jersey cop infiltrating the Mob. Very realistic and hard to put down. Really brought home the way the Mafia ruined good peoples lives and how the only way to beat them was to become like them and then betray them.

Kunal says

This is a very interesting book for anyone looking to understand the life of an undercover agent. Bob Delaney, who recently graduated from the New Jersey Police Academy, gets chosen to serve as an undercover agent for Project Alpha (an operation to infiltrate the mob). The initial operation is slated to last only 6 months, but the team realizes after 6 months, they barely have made any progress whatsoever. It is not until they end up gaining an informant that they start to have a breakthrough in their investigation. This informant is very well known and liked inside the mob. Bob and this informant end up setting up an undercover business called Alamo Trucking which they end up turning into a front while they conduct illegitimate business operations with the mob.

It is amazing to hear the several cases of racketerring that happens within the mob. One legitimate Italian Restaurant owner gets threatened by one of the mob groups to start paying them a percentage of his profits,

but he reaches out for help and he ends up getting another mob group to protect him. Little does he know, but asking for that protection ends up costing him 20% of his weekly profits to this other mob group. In addition to that, this mob group frequents the restaurant every other day without paying for anything and treat the restaurant as if its their own.

As 6 months turns into 1 year and 1 year turns into 2 years, Bob Delaney is now fulling becoming a mobster. No longer does he feel like he is playing a part, but he starts to talk and cuss without thinking now as if the mob language is his regular language. He also makes a trip to Florida with the informant without notifying his police colleagues to work on a deal with the mob. This is the point at which he realizes how his head is getting too big. Despite being just 26 years old and a relatively new cop, he is talking back to his superiors and telling them he is not going to do certain things. Some of the cops remind him who he really is and say they cant wait for him to get back in the force so they can treat him like the junior cop he really is.

You see quickly into the book how grueling the life of an undercover agent really is. Wearing wires into places with mobsters and hearing all of the atrocious murders these guys commit and laugh about, you are constantly afraid of being found out and killed frankly. When they finally decide to shut down the operation and arrest all of the mobsters, Bob Delaney (Covert) starts to feel a little saddened about turning in some of these mobsters who have become his good friends now. He even finds himself defending some of these guys to the police saying, "Come on, all that they were doing is asking for 10% of their business etc)". This is prime example of how he no longer is just playing a part, but how the mob life and mindset has taken over him. Bob truly plays an outstanding role here though as he sees the investigation all the way through helping the lawyers understand the countless hours of tape and testifying in several instances to convict as many mobsters as possible.

Post Project Alpha, Bob starts officiating basketball games at the high school level and then the college level and he ends up getting asked to become an NBA official. He does this role concurrently with his job as a policeman at first, but he finally ends up quitting to go full time. It is quite incredible to be honest to see him take such a high profile role in the spotlight given the amount of people he ratted out, while the informant who was his colleague at Alamo Trucking entered the witness protection program.

Ian says

Pretty good non-fiction book and Delaney himself is a very impressive guy. However, unlike many non-fiction works that are really fascinating, I feel like this book is only interesting because it is true. The stories just aren't that captivating. I guess I may just be spoiled by all the fictional mob stories out there and was expecting too much.

Cindi says

3.5 stars...Overall it was interesting, minus some language due to quoting his time with mobsters. I actually found the parts about his referring in the NBA just as interesting, if not more. Mr. Delaney certainly made a great and positive impact in many aspects of his life.

Gina Denny says

Not enough mob stories. Not enough details about how they collected evidence. A major increase in either

would have significantly improved this book. That's what I was looking for: either a lot of mafia stories that would make me completely paranoid or a super-spy story. This had bits of both, but just not enough of either.

Instead, there was a lot of his life before the mob, a lot of the nuts and bolts involved in setting up a legitimate-looking-but-interested-in-affiliating-with-criminals business, waaaaay too much head-hopping, and a bunch of basketball stuff at the end.

Plus, I'm always disappointed when mythical stuff turns out to be not-so-mythical. Mobsters really are named Paulie and Johnnie and Vito. They really do call each other things like "Fat Anthony" and "Bubble Eyes" and "Little Joe". And they're just trying to make money. A lot of it, and through illegal means, but otherwise... Meh.

A couple of interesting takeaways: after spending a lot of time around the mob, Delaney started saying things like "He's not a bad guy, he just steals stuff for a living." and started acting like a mobster, even when he was around non-mob folks. An intriguing lesson on surrounding yourself with people who will influence you for good. Also, the intimidation techniques used by the mob were very similar to intimidation techniques used by cops. Where's the line between good and evil? Where's the gray area? How do you decide?

So, to sum up, interesting stuff, food for thought, but not enough of it. That all gets kind of muddled by all the extra stuff.

PARENTAL ADVISORIES:

Really? He lives with the mob for three years. This is not a book for your kids, under any circumstances.

Adam Buongiovanni says

This was my first NF book in a while and it really spoke to me. It connected two things - basketball and the Mob. I knew a lot about basketball and knew little about the Mob. I was so interested in how deep the mob is and all of the control they had. My favorite part of the book was when one of the mob members that Bob had grown to befriend, looks at him and is shocked and devastated that he turned him in. It breaks a barrier that show the mean, stereotypical mob guys, with normal, everyday people. No matter what we do, we all share bonds and connections with each other. I loved how heartfelt this stories were and emotion provoking, I loved it.

Kathryn says

Books about the mob and its history fascinate me and this one was no exception. What an incredible story. The only reason I didn't give it 5 stars is that it left me with so many questions!

Jen says

I saw an interview with Bob Delaney on ESPN when his book came out and was interested in his story-

undercover NJ trooper turned NBA referee. Good story, simple but effective writing and storytelling, lots of interesting mob facts and references. I especially liked reading about his life after coming out of his undercover role and how becoming a referee shaped his life and outlook.

Melanie says

Okay, this may not be the best-written book I've ever read, but it might be one of the best memoir-not-written-by-a-writer that I've read. The writing wasn't fantastic, but it wasn't weak. And the story was different enough and interesting enough to keep me reading. I didn't care so much about the basketball part, so I was glad it was smallish, but the parts about being undercover and recovering from being undercover were very informative and highly readable. This book was just what I was looking for.
