



Episode 1,029: NSA Whistleblower Bill Binney, and His Ordeal

Guest: Bill Binney

WOODS: I have this desire as a host never to bore the guests. Certainly I don't want to bore the audience, but I don't want to bore the guest with questions he's answered a million times. But unfortunately, Bill Binney, you are one of these souls who is destined to repeat his story many, many times indeed. So I'm afraid I am indeed going to start there, because eventually do want to get to Russia and so I don't want to leave the conversation without that tie to current events. But I do want to talk about your background, because you and the NSA have rather an interesting career together. And not only that, I just discovered this documentary about you called *A Good American* that I haven't seen but I'm dying to see. And I was actually wondering if I could show my kids this documentary without spooking them and making them terrified all the time, so maybe you can give me some guidance on that.

BINNEY: No, I think it would be a good idea to show it to your kids so they can begin to get – I think it helps inspire thinking – at least I hope it does [laughing] – for Ω to start to think about what's going on and not just absorb it from high up like in the White House and all of that without any thought behind it. I mean, it's like I always say a democracy is not a spectator sport. You have to participate. In order to do that, it requires thinking, not just absorbing and accepting as truth what people tell you. So I really think it would be a good idea for them. I mean, you should watch it first just to see, and I bet you'll agree.

WOODS: Oh, I have pretty much no doubt. Let's start with your career. What were you trained to do and what did you start doing for the U.S. government?

BINNEY: Well, I got into intelligence in the U.S. Army when I went in NSA 1965. And I was in there from '65 to '69, and I did what they call traffic analysis, which is analyzing data and interactions between people and organizations. So that's how I started getting into that, and that got me into looking at codes and ciphers and data systems and data.

WOODS: So what was it that you were looking to do for the U.S. government that, when the NSA started to do it, you had an objection?

BINNEY: Well, what I was doing with Ed Loomis and the SARC, the SIGINT Automation Research Center, was putting together an automated process that would look at the entire worldwide communications systems and decide what in there was important for our analysts at NSA to look at to start reporting on activities or threats from criminal

organizations worldwide or militaries or any leadership or anything, you know. So the objective was to go to make sure that we got all of that data and not bury our analysts with other kinds of data, which, back in the 1990s even before they had the capacity to do a lot of the collection of data, they were even buried back then and so it was an effort to make them functional again.

But what they did was, once we had the capability to see into everything and select only what we wanted, they removed that filtering out front and just took in everything. And that was the first thing they removed. And we had built into that system also a method of protecting the identity of people by encrypting their data so that no one could really tell who they were. And NSA analysts, for example, couldn't do love intelligence. They called it LOVEINT internally at NSA, where they looked into the data to see if their lovers were cheating on them. So they couldn't do that because they wouldn't be able to tell which encrypted data represented their lovers, so that wouldn't be possible for them. And so they removed that.

And then the other thing was we had a monitoring system that was monitoring what was going on in the network when people came into look at that data so we could see what they were doing, where they went, how long they stayed, what they did while they were there. And since they didn't want any monitoring of what they were doing, they removed that [laughing]. And so they ended up being able to monitor everybody, and that's what they did to that program. They distorted it totally.

WOODS: This is the least of the problems with it, but as you were kind of indicating before, doesn't this lead from their point of view to information overload? I mean, from our point of view, it's frightening that they have all this information, but when you have all that information, how on earth would you begin to sort through it?

BINNEY: Well, that's the point. They can't. And that's why they're failing. That's why these attacks occur and they can't stop them.

WOODS: Well, and that raises a good question. Have they been able to point successfully to any nefarious activity they have been able to stop? Have they tried to point to anything?

BINNEY: Well, they did with the Leahy committee in the Senate Judiciary Committee. General Alexander, the former director of NSA, claimed he had stopped that program that stopped 54 attacks, and then Senator Leahy asked him to prove it and he couldn't prove any of them.

WOODS: So as of now, none of this — Does that put them on par with the TSA, then?

BINNEY: [laughing] I guess, pretty much so.

WOODS: Yeah.

BINNEY: I looked at it as a swindle. They kept telling us all the time you have to give up privacy for security, and that's been a lie from the beginning. And they knew it and

they perpetuate it because it meant they got a lot of money to perpetuate or build up their intelligence apparatus.

WOODS: So what do you think is the primary problem? Is it that there's the potential for abuse, that for instance somebody who's politically unfashionable could have all kinds of, let's say, compromising information about him in the hands of the government? Or is it that – I mean, where does the danger lie, so that, in other words, the average person sees where the danger is?

BINNEY: Well, let's put it this way. If you looked at what they did to the Tea Party, that can be deduced directly from this data because the networking is all there for all the Tea Party people. Also, any religious group trying to get association in the 501(c)(3) activity, the IRS – this is the IRS, by the way. They also have a view into this data, and that's how they got this information, I'm sure. Also, Eliot Spitzer, when he was going after the bankers for defrauding people in the 2007 and '08 crisis, they got rid of him by looking into this data. And they also went after Jim Risen looking at it, and Jim Rosen and the Associated Press, so much so that the press is basically no longer an investigative tool. It's functionally dysfunctional.

WOODS: What about the claim, though, that, look, of course the unfortunate things are going to happen and the best we can do is try to minimize them, but the fact is we live in a world now where we have such a wily enemy who moves so quickly and their contacts are so instantaneous and swift that we don't have time for the old, clunky system of the FISA courts or whatever? We just need to have a system that's agile, that's on the spot, that's ready to go, and if we don't have that, we're going to be vulnerable.

BINNEY: Yeah, that's also a lie. I mean, we had said that back when we were there that we wanted to automate the requesting for a warrant, which meant that we could do a couple million a day. So there was no need. That was also a false issue, a red herring.

WOODS: Okay, so tell me then about – I want to know about something that happened to you personally. Was there actually a raid on your home?

BINNEY: Yes.

WOODS: On what grounds?

BINNEY: Well, it was fabricated. The FBI – under Mueller, I might add – and the DOJ under Comey falsified statements to the court to get a warrant to do a raid on us. And we pointed that out, wanted to sue them for violation of constitutional rights because of the lies that they put into the affidavit.

WOODS: Okay, so why were they targeting you in the first place?

BINNEY: Because NSA wanted them to do it. We filed the DOD IG complaint against NSA for corruption, fraud, waste, and abuse, and the DOD IG office found that everything we said was true and much more, and they reported that in their

intelligence report, DOD IG 05-INTEL-03, titled TrailBlazer and ThinThread Requirements. That was published in 2005, and they've been keeping it under wraps since then. They don't want anybody to know about all this corruption going on.

WOODS: So can you describe the scene for me what happened at your home?

BINNEY: Yeah, about 12 agents with guns drawn came in, pointing guns at my son and my wife and me, and you know, it was basically an attempt at intimidation because they didn't want us to talk about what we knew of the Terrorist Surveillance Program and its violation of the constitutional rights of every U.S. citizen.

WOODS: So how long did this go on?

BINNEY: They came there at 9 o'clock in the morning and left at about 4 in the afternoon or something like that.

WOODS: Were they going through your papers and things?

BINNEY: Oh, everything, yeah. They destroyed our business and took any electronic equipment we had: phones, email, you know, discs, computers, everything.

WOODS: These things were of course returned at some point?

BINNEY: Only after we sued them. They kept them for five years, and so we did what's called a 41(g) return of property lawsuit because they are required by law to tell us after they confiscate material – within 60 days, they have to tell us what material they're going to keep and what they'll return, and they never did that for five years. So they violated the laws, and so we did a 41(g) lawsuit and won, by the way. We set a precedent by doing that. We represented ourselves pro se, and we made them look like silly fools in the courtroom.

WOODS: Oh, man, I wish we had a video record of that, but of course not. Did you have any inkling that this raid was about to happen? Did it take you completely by surprise?

BINNEY: Actually, the court still has the audio of that trial.

WOODS: [laughing] Ah, okay, well, that's good to know.

BINNEY: It's the federal court in Baltimore.

WOODS: So as I said, did you have any inkling that this was coming?

BINNEY: Actually not. They had been asking me about – because this was after the *New York Times*' exposure of the warrantless wiretapping, and they had called me in and I'd been talking to them several times. I met with them three times before the raid and telling them everything I could remember. And they obviously – we actually found out later that the Department of Defense' Inspector General gave our names as likely candidates to them because we filed that report to the IG's office, which is what

you're supposed to do by law. Also it's a requirement for working for the U.S. government. You are required to report fraud, waste, abuse, and criminality.

WOODS: All right, so can you, just so we can get this all straight in our minds, just go over the timeline with us of exactly when you did that and when this raid occurred? At least those two dates, roughly.

BINNEY: Okay, we filed the complaint in September of 2002, and the raid occurred 26th of July 2007. The Inspector General's office didn't give our names until after the 2005 *New York Times* report hit the street.

WOODS: Okay, so you were in the intelligence community. You were appalled at what you saw going on at the NSA, but —

BINNEY: Amoral impeachable activities, by the way. It was all direct violation of the Constitution.

WOODS: Well, how many people — did you feel comfortable talking to your colleagues about this?

BINNEY: Sure.

WOODS: And did they — I mean, you must have had some who felt the way you did.

BINNEY: Oh, yeah. In fact, some of them retired or got out of the place when I did, so there were a number of people inside NSA who went to talk to the Inspector General inside the NSA, and then they were visited by the FBI and basically told to basically be quiet.

WOODS: Did some of them remain quiet?

BINNEY: Most of them did, yeah. They were afraid of losing their jobs or being indicted or something. That's what they were threatening them with.

WOODS: Well, given that, as you say, some people resigned over this or in one way or another they left, what does that say about the composition of people working at the NSA today?

BINNEY: They're afraid and they're basically — under the Myers-Briggs, they're ISTJs, introverted, sensing, thinking, and judgmental people. So basically, they're the kind of audience that can be easily threatened.

WOODS: But also I would think at this point, if you were going to work for the NSA in 2017, you know what they're up to, right?

BINNEY: Yes, right now, yes, that's right.

WOODS: So how did your name, your individual name, given that there are other critics, get to be associated with this? Did you begin speaking out publicly?

BINNEY: No. In fact, we had done everything inside channels with the intelligence committees or with the Inspector Generals of the Department of Defense and also the Department of Justice.

WOODS: But yet, today, you are in demand — I've seen you on different programs — to speak around the country. So how did you become rather a celebrity in this area?

BINNEY: Well, I mean, I just got out there and told the truth. I guess the truth is kind of rare these days [laughing]. And every time I did, people wanted me to come and give other talks, which I did as much as I could. In fact, the latest ones I gave with [inaudible] in Vienna, talking against this bulk bit data that they were also advocating a very similar bill to the British IP bill to what NSA had been doing in secret from 2001 on to try to authorize and retroactively make it legal. But we talked against that, and finally the supreme court in Austria ruled in unconstitutional, and also the parliament voted the bill down. So that's the first country to start doing something positive in the right direction.

WOODS: Oh, how about that? Now, when you say — just before I forget, you say some people didn't want to lose their jobs and so maybe they thought the best thing was to just keep quiet. What did you —

BINNEY: They also saw what was happening to us and they saw that people were going to be attacked and have to defend yourself against the government, and that really can basically bankrupt people.

WOODS: Yeah, and ruin their future prospects. So what did you wind up doing once you left this field?

BINNEY: Well, I went directly after that — I mean, after I retired, I went directly to the House Intelligence Committee, and that of course got things started. And the staffer on the House Intelligence Committee brought it up with Goss, who was the chair, and Pelosi, who was the ranking member. And they both told her that she should go see General Hayden, who was the Director of NSA at the time. And what she didn't know was that they had both already agreed in October — a briefing they got of this program back in October 2001, they both agreed to it. Now, this is the House of Representatives. It's supposed to represent us, and they also took an oath to defend the Constitution. And these are grounds for impeachment and they never followed through. And the reason they didn't — and that's why Pelosi said impeaching George Bush was off the table — because she was involved in agreeing to the program, and so if she wanted to say, "I want to impeach you," then he would say, "You have to impeach yourself because you're a part of this."

WOODS: What was your thought when you discovered that *The New York Times* had known about warrantless wiretapping and sat on the story for maybe a year and a half?

BINNEY: I thought it was disgraceful. I mean, that tells you what's happening to our news and reporters and all the news agencies we have, because they're all being threatened and you can just see how the government can manipulate them. I mean, they can threaten them with grand juries like they did with Jim Risen and so on. So

even they are getting the message and they're basically staying quiet and saying nothing except what the administration is telling them. The administration – in there, I include the agencies of the government, like NSA, FBI, CIA.

WOODS: I want to ask you, before I ask you about Russia, about this brand-new documentary about you called *A Good American*. How did that come about and what do people learn in it?

BINNEY: Well, it started by phone call from Fritz Moser, the director of the movie, in August of 2013, I believe it was. And then he said he was interested in finding a background on what this intelligence was all about, the bulk acquisition and spying that came out from Edward Snowden's material. And he said that he saw me as who was there who had the thread back and he didn't know how much of a thread I had on that. But he said, *Would you like to come over to Vienna and we could discuss this?* which I did in October of 2013. And from there on, he said, *Gee, this is really a great story*, and he wanted to film it and put it in a movie. So from there one, we started doing the movie.

WOODS: Apparently, the documentary claims that the ThinThread system, which maybe you might comment on, would have prevented the September 11th attacks. Can you elaborate on that?

BINNEY: Yes. In fact, that was basically proven by Tom Drake after we left NSA. He was finally given an opportunity to run the entire NSA database through the ThinThread program and it picked out all kinds of material that they didn't even know they had, including the dispersal patterns of people after the attack and also warning of the attack, plus I think they gave the date and the time also in that data of the attack before the attack, so that meant that – Of course it picked out the calls from all the fellows who came in from Kuala Lumpur into San Diego. It picked up all the calls that they made back to the Yemen al-Qaeda facility. And all that material was pulled out by ThinThread, and they didn't seem to know about it.

WOODS: Wow. Well, that's rather an indictment too, especially because the claim seems to be the more intrusive we are, the better the intelligence results will be.

BINNEY: Well, you see, the problem here is the people in charge of these agencies are mentally warped. They think collected data is intelligence, and it's only intelligence once you understand it. And if you collect so much that you can't understand it, you fail. And that's what's been happening.

WOODS: You've continued to comment on current events over the years, and one that is of particular interest to me involves this whole question of Russia. Now, we've just had these indictments handed down over the past day or so, so we'll no doubt have to make mention of that, but I'm interested in this so-called assessment from January of this year. Because the claim is that the Russians hacked into the DNC, got their emails, and then – this is the key thing – turned them over to Wikileaks.

And now you have been I guess involved with the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, which is a group name that I've always loved ever since they started it. And you

guys did some work that contradicts this so-called assessment. Now, first of all, in the assessment, what was the evidence – I suppose this is a loaded question. What was the evidence they brought forth for this claim?

BINNEY: There wasn't any. It was just, "We have high confidence they did it." That's all. It was a manufactured assertion without any factual base. We actually found – the only evidence we really found to really look at and analyze was in the Guccifer 2.0 attack on the 5th of July 2016. I mean, he announced publicly on the 4th that he was going to go get more data. On the 5th, this download occurred, and on the 6th, he said he got more data of July of that last year.

So we looked at that, and it turned out basically to be in two segments. Within a 14-minute period, there were two segments of transmissions for a total of 87 seconds, and he downloaded almost 16 gigabits of data during that period, which meant – and the high speed was 38 megabytes per second, which is, you know, close to 500 megabits per second – or you multiply by eight and you'll get the answer to that. But the point was, all the people we had that were technically smart about the network and so on said that this is not possible to do. The network can't support that kind of transmission at that rate.

And in fact, but the rate came across at the standard rate for a download to a thumb drive. And it made a lot of sense to me, because at the time, I was buying 16 gigabit thumb drives, and if you're downloading almost 16 gigabits, you don't want to do it all on one thumb drive because you might miss something, so you've got to split it up on two. And that's why it came in two segments, in my opinion, simply because he divided the data into two parts, then took the first part down in the first segment and took the second part down in the second segment on two separate thumb drives. That is, put one in, download, take it out, put one in, find out where you left off, then start downloading from there. That's why we had that time gap in the middle, in my view.

WOODS: So in light of what you found looking at all this stuff, what is your working hypothesis as to what happened?

BINNEY: It was a local download by somebody who connected into the network, the DNC network. Because you could download at that rate on a local network, but you can't send it across the Internet. I mean, we actually physically tried to do that. We tried to move about a gigabit of data and see how fast can you move that across the Atlantic to somewhere in Europe. The fastest speed we got was between a data center in New Jersey and one data center in the UK, and that got up to 12 megabytes per second, and that's roughly one-fourth the speed necessary to send the data itself without any overhead. If you put the overhead on, it's probably about double that, so it's about one-eighth the capacity you'd need to get that transmission across the Atlantic to somewhere in Europe. But as we went further east in Europe, like Albania or Belgrade, the whole system degraded to basically a dial-up, I guess, something that you couldn't even consider. It was worthless to even try to do a download in those locations.

WOODS: Is there anything to the claim that the – I don't know. I mean, I'm so tech non-savvy with this stuff. I'm almost not even sure how to word my question. But there was some attempt made to make it appear as though this activity had Russian origins.

BINNEY: Yeah, they used a template and they plugged data into a template, and they put data in there that made it appear to be Cyrillic, for example, and the names to try to associate it with the Russians. But that was all a rouse and a fake, and it was pretty clear to our people who were looking at it that that was going on.

WOODS: Would you say then that the Russians have no fingerprints anywhere on anything? I mean, what are you saying about the whole question of Russian hacking or involvement in the election?

BINNEY: We haven't been able to find any evidence that they did anything.

WOODS: And yet, now we've just had these indictments handed down by – let's see, I guess as you and I are speaking it was just within 24 hours. And it's two – I guess it's three people. But what's the significance of these indictments as far as you've been able to determine?

BINNEY: Well, what they are being accused of they did from 2006 to 2012, well before the election and campaign and so on, so when it comes to the campaign, I don't know what the association is. When it comes to money and so on and manipulating money, I think that's the issue there.

WOODS: So why do you think there is this campaign to taint the Trump campaign with Russian influence and to demonize the Russians? Where is this coming from and what's the motivation?

BINNEY: Well, I think the motivation is from politicians. Trump is not a politician, and you can't have someone come in as the president of the United States that's not a politician and succeed and make them look pretty silly, as he has been doing. I think he's made them economically look like amateurs, and that's one of the things they want to avoid. They don't want someone from outside the political arena to look really good while they look really bad. And that's their fundamental, founding motivation, I believe. Other than that, they want to make his administration impotent and not be able to do anything, and that will succeed that way politically in the votes in the next election, and it will satisfy their need not to look bad.

WOODS: All right, here's my last question for you. When you hear the phrase "deep state," what do you think? What does that mean?

BINNEY: Well, the deep state to me, I mean, I look at the shadow government, which is the intelligence community and their associated affiliates in the U.S. government. But the deep state means all of the corporations, banks, and technical companies that are a part of putting up this empire and dependency on government spending and government contracts. That's what I view the deep state to be.

WOODS: Is there any way – I had Ron Paul on the show last week, and I asked him why couldn't a really ambitious president come into power and say to the heads of all these various organizations, *You're all dismissed. I'm appointing people who are not going to be running a shadow government but who are allies of mine and who are going to*

clean house there. And that's the end of this. The president and the elected people are in charge once again. What would stop him from doing something like that?

BINNEY: Only the will to do it. I mean, that's what he should do, in my view. But if he doesn't have the will and the backing of his cabinet, for example, to do that kind of thing, then he probably won't.

WOODS: And of course, there's Trump's big problem, is that he's so ideologically confused, in my opinion – not that he's not a smart guy in his own way, but he's not ideologically consistent. I wouldn't say he has a political philosophy or anything. He's surrounded himself by people who by and large are really not sympathetic to him. It's completely bizarre to me. The Democrats don't do that. They're all going to be absolute loyalists to their nominee. He's surrounded by sharks, and that's of his own doing.

BINNEY: Yeah, and that's part of the problem with every president, really. I mean that the bureaucrats are still there no matter what the president is. So they are the ones – I call them the Praetorian Guard. You know, they kind of determine who the emperor is and what the emperor does. I mean, that's why Senator Schumer was warning President Trump that attacking the intelligence community is a very dangerous thing. They have many ways of getting back at you, and what he's doing is experiencing some of them now.

WOODS: And yet, our kids in school continue to learn about, through *Schoolhouse Rock*, how a bill becomes a law and what the textbook operation of the U.S. government is. I'd much rather have my kids know the actual operation of the U.S. government that we read about in the papers or that a lot of times we don't know about.

BINNEY: Yeah, I think Goethe captured it many years ago in a statement he made. He said, "No one is more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe their free."

WOODS: Amen. Absolutely. Now, before I let you go, tell me about the website you and I were talking about before we started recording that you're working on now.

BINNEY: Actually, Kirk Wiebe and I moved to – we've started a company with partners in Amsterdam in the Netherlands to resurrect and do the kinds of smart things we thought we'd do with data back in the 1990s, because this government and the deep state, as well as the shadow government, didn't want us doing that here. So we're over there doing it.

WOODS: And what is the website?

BINNEY: Oh, the website is at – actually, the name of the company is PGK, or Pretty Good Knowledge, and the website is PrettyGoodKnowledge.eu, and you could Google it on the web and you'll find it.

WOODS: Okay, I'm typing it in right now. So yeah, it's PGKnowledge.eu.

BINNEY: Yep.

WOODS: Yeah, there it is, okay. All right, good. All right, that sounds very interesting. I'm going to link to that and to the documentary at TomWoods.com/1029. I think I have more or less kept to our deal in terms of the time I would keep you, and I'm grateful to you because it was a great conversation. I know other people like me are going to want to go on a Binney binge online, so thanks so much.

BINNEY: All right, thank you.