

1990-1994

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Americans considered the drug issue a major concern, and public awareness about drug trafficking and drug abuse increased significantly. The media had provided the American people with critical information about the damage caused by drugs.

President George Bush began immediately to focus national efforts on a comprehensive drug enforcement strategy that targeted both supply and demand reduction. On one hand, his strategy

called for the DEA and other federal agencies to work with our counterparts overseas and at home to reduce the supply of drugs in the country. At the same time, complementary efforts were directed at reducing the demand for drugs through prevention, education, and treatment, including a comprehensive advertising program launched by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America.

Cocaine and crack remained the number one drug challenge facing law enforcement, and the Colombian cartels and their cells were



Robert C. Bonner was sworn in as DEA's Fifth Administrator in August 1990. Attending the ceremony at headquarters were (from left): Administrator Bonner, Mrs. Bonner, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, and Attorney General Dick Thornburgh.





firmly entrenched in virtually every U.S. city and in many countries around the globe. Both the Medellin Cartel and the Cali mafia had a devastating impact on U.S. communities. In the Northeast, especially the New York area, the Cali mafia had quietly established a network of cells to carry out all of the mafia's various tasks involving the shipment of cocaine, its storage, communications between Colombia and the U.S., and the return of profits to Colombia. The Cali mafia sent armies of surrogates into the U.S. to ensure that the cocaine business was run smoothly and profitably.

In 1992, DEA instituted the Kingpin Strategy to attack the drug organizations at their most vulnerable areas—the chemicals needed to process the drugs, their finances, transportation, communications, and leadership infrastructure here in the U.S. The Kingpin program essentially controlled investigations from DEA headquarters and selected a finite number of targets for intensive investigative activity.

Because extradition of Colombian nationals to the U.S. was prohibited by Colombia's 1991 constitution, it was essential that Colombian drug lords were arrested, prosecuted, and incarcerated in their own country. With the help of law enforcement counterparts overseas and at home, most notably the Colombian National Police (CNP), one by one the Medellin leaders were toppled. By the time Pablo Escobar, the most notorious and murderous drug lord of the Medellin Cartel, was killed by the CNP on a Colombian rooftop in 1993, the cartel had already been severely damaged. But there would be no rest, because waiting to emerge on the world scene was the Cali mafia, which over the years had been less visible, but no less formidable than its Medellin counterpart.

Decline of the Medellin Cartel and the Rise of the Cali Mafia

In the early 1990s the Medellin Cartel was waging a campaign of terror and bribery to pressure the Colombian government to prohibit the extradition of native Colombians. Pablo Escobar and several other Medellin leaders, labeled "The Extraditables," took increasingly violent measures to try to force the government to accept legislation that would protect them from extradition. The cartel was responsible for the assassinations of dozens of government officials, and the bribery of many more. When, in July 1991, the Colombian congress adopted a new constitution that prohibited the extradition of the Colombian natives, it was considered a major victory for the Medellin Cartel.

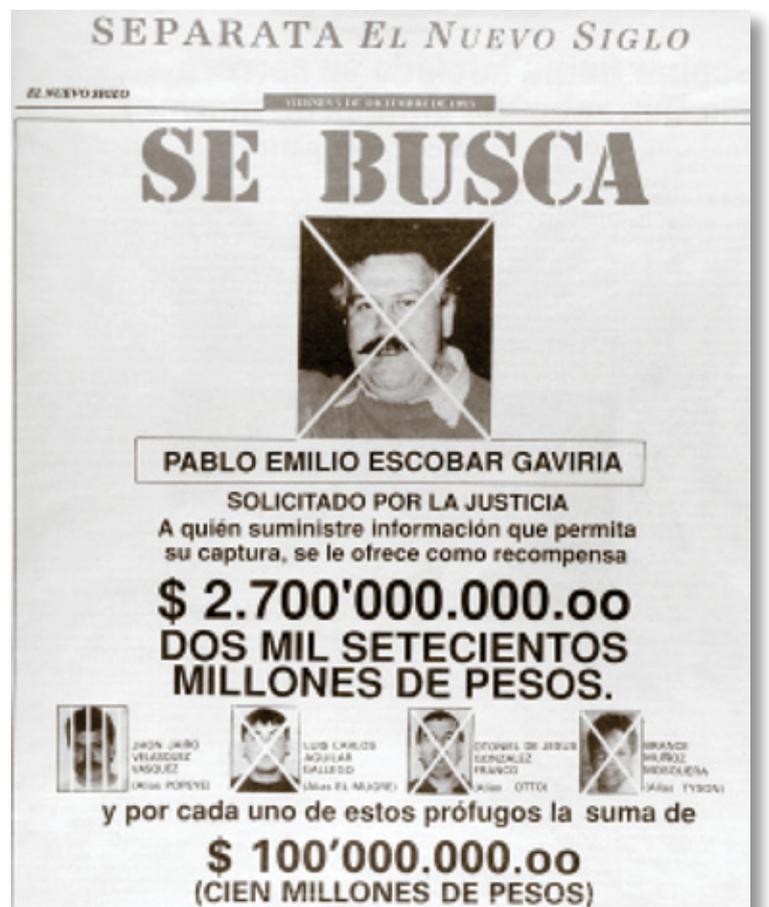
However, the many law enforcement efforts to topple the Medellin cartel were resulting in numerous surrenders and arrests that eventually led to the cartel's demise. For example, in December 1990, cartel leader Fabio Ochoa surrendered to authorities near Medellin. Shortly after, in January 1991, Fabio Ochoa's brother, Jorge Luis, also turned himself into the CNP. The brothers, along with Pablo Escobar, had been the top leaders of the cartel. Also, in January 1991, the CNP killed David Ricardo Prisco Lopera, Pablo Escobar's top assassin, along with his younger brother, Armando Alberto Prisco. The Priscos were wanted for ordering the murders of 50 Medellin police officers, for several terrorist bombings, and for nine assassinations, including that of a Colombian Justice Minister in 1984. In February 1991, a third Ochoa brother, Juan David surrendered.

Law enforcement efforts were increasingly directed at Pablo Escobar, the kingpin of the Medellin cartel. In June 1991, Escobar surrendered to authorities, and was put in Envigado prison.

However, the Colombian government had agreed in Escobar's surrender negotiations that security at Envigado prison would be the responsibility of Army guards and Escobar's own, handpicked bodyguards. In reality, Envigado prison protected, rather than incarcerated him. Escobar's period at the prison was considered his "Golden Age," during which time he ran his drug empire without fear of being hunted by the Colombian Government or assassinated by his rivals.

In July 1992, Escobar "escaped" from Envigado prison in order to avoid being transferred to a Bogota jail after it was confirmed that Escobar had ordered the murder of some 22 of his own drug mafia associates. One or two of Escobar's victims were even tortured, killed, and buried on the grounds of Envigado prison. Escobar clearly had prior warning of the plan to transfer him to a more secure prison, and 28 guards were later charged with aiding and abetting Escobar's "break out." For 17 months, Escobar was the target of the largest manhunt in Colombian history. In December 1993, the CNP killed Escobar in a fire fight at a private residence in downtown Medellin. Escobar's death, along with the surrender and arrest of the Ochoa brothers marked the decline of the Medellin cartel.

The Cali mafia had been formed in the early 1970s by Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela and Jose Santacruz-Londono, and rose quietly alongside its violent rival, the Medellin Cartel. But while the Medellin Cartel gained an international reputation for brutality and murder, the Cali traffickers posed as legitimate businessmen. This unique criminal enterprise initially involved itself in counterfeiting and kidnapping, but gradually expanded into smuggling cocaine base from Peru and Bolivia to Colombia for conversion into powder cocaine.



Pablo Escobar "Wanted" poster with faces crossed out signifying that he and his entourage had been killed or captured.



On December 2, 1993, Escobar's exact location was determined using electronic, directional-finding equipment. With authorities closing in, a firefight with Escobar and his bodyguard ensued. The two fugitives attempted to escape by running across the roofs adjoining houses to reach a back street, but both were shot and killed by Colombian National Police.

Up through the early 1990s, the Medellín Cartel had dominated the drug trade, but its reign of relentless public terror against the Colombian government had driven Colombian authorities to serious action that led to their ultimate defeat. By the early 1990s, the Medellín drug lords were either killed or incarcerated. Having observed the fate of the brutal and violent Medellín Cartel, the Cali leaders passed themselves off as law-abiding businessmen, investing in their country's future, earning public respect, and taking economic control of the Cali region. Because they operated in a less violent manner, the government did not aggressively pursue them, thereby allowing the Cali mafia leaders to operate and grow in wealth and power with virtual impunity.

In the global arena, the cartels began expanding their markets to Europe. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990, they quickly moved into Eastern Europe, taking advantage of the political and economic chaos by using these newly-created democracies as the "backdoor" to transit their cocaine to Western Europe. For example in 1992, large loads of cocaine were seized in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. In 1993, Russian authorities seized 1.1 tons of cocaine hidden in cans of corned beef hash. This shipment originated in Cali, Colombia, and was destined for the Netherlands, via St. Petersburg, Russia.

In the new, post-Cold War Europe, without border controls and an eastern border sealed against communism, international businesses and world governments were threatened by the drug cartels from Colombia.

In the early 1990s, DEA estimated that these cartels collectively produced and exported from Colombia between 500 and 800 tons of cocaine a year. The organizations were structured and operated much like major international corporations. They had enormous financial resources, with which they could afford to buy the best legal minds, the most sophisticated technology, and the most skilled financial experts.

Among the major Cali drug lords, the Rodríguez-Orejuela brothers—Gilberto and his younger brother, Miguel—were known as the transportation specialists who moved cocaine out of Colombia into the U.S. and other countries. Gilberto was responsible for the strategic, long-term planning of the organization. Miguel was the hands-on manager who ran the day-to-day operations. José Santacruz-Londoño was responsible for establishing distribution cells in the U.S.

These Cali leaders ran an incredibly sophisticated, highly-structured drug trafficking organization that was tightly controlled by its leaders in Cali. Each day, details of loads and money shipments were electronically dictated to heads of cocaine cells operating within the U.S. The Cali drug lords knew the how, when, and where of every cocaine shipment, down to the markings on the packages. The Cali bosses set production targets for the cocaine they sold and were intimately involved in every phase of the business—production, transportation, financing, and communications.

Each organization had its own hierarchy of leaders, its own distribution networks, and customers in nations around the world. The operations were divided into separate cells. Each cell was run by a cell director—always a Colombian national—who reported directly to the drug lords in Colombia. These organizations were truly international operations run with efficiency and geared for huge profits. The massive scale of their trafficking operations dwarfed law enforcement efforts in Colombia, in the U.S., and in the transit nations between them.

Heroin

During the 1980s, worldwide illicit opium production had doubled, with Southeast Asia then emerging as the major source of the world's heroin supply. In Burma, self-styled rebels, like drug lord Khun Sa, financed private armies and generated an estimated \$200 million gross profits per year from his heroin and opium enterprises. This wealth made him so powerful that the Burmese government allowed him to operate with impunity, and he controlled most of the Shan State of Burma.

In the early 1990s, the U.S. was faced with a resurgence of heroin. As the decade progressed, the heroin became purer and cheaper than ever before in U.S. history. New traffickers and new sources for the drug also contributed to the tide of heroin abuse. In South America, the Colombian cocaine cartels were beginning to diversify into the production and distribution of heroin. Colombian heroin seizures in the U.S. began to rise. It was estimated that the Colombian cartels had financed the cultivation of up to 25,000 hectares. That made Colombia one of the largest cultivators of illicit opium, behind Burma and Laos, but ahead of the traditional opium-producing nations, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Lebanon. In February 1992, the first heroin lab was seized and destroyed in Colombia, and in that year, the Colombian National Police eradicated more than 10,000 hectares of opium poppies.



More heroin was available in the U.S. than ever before, and this drove prices down and purity up. The national average purity level of an ounce of heroin being sold on U.S. streets was 66 percent in 1993, compared to less than 5 percent in the early 1980s. In some cases, DEA seized heroin that was 95 percent pure. Aggressive international heroin traffickers, such as those based in Nigeria, emerged to join the traditional heroin trafficking organizations based in China, Turkey, and the Middle East.

In 1991, DEA made the largest seizure of heroin in U.S. history when over 1,000 pounds of Southeast Asian white heroin, with an estimated wholesale value of more than \$1 billion, was seized in San Francisco. Agents from San Francisco, Sacramento, and New York monitored a controlled delivery of the heroin 24-hours-a-day for nearly a month prior to the arrest of five suspects. The heroin was found in 59 of 1,360 cartons of plastic produce bags imported from Taiwan. Each of the 59 cartons contained two cylinders of heroin coated in white wax or wrapped in “happy birthday” paper. By 1993, Southeast Asian heroin, which was smuggled by both China and Nigeria/West Africa-based traffickers, was one of the greatest threats to the U.S. At that time, roughly 68 percent of the heroin seized in the U.S. came from Southeast Asia’s Golden Triangle—Burma, Laos, and Thailand. China-based traffickers controlled sophisticated international networks that smuggled multi-hundred kilo quantities of heroin in commercial cargo on a regular basis.

Marijuana

With the explosion in the use of crack, cocaine, and heroin in the 1980s, public concern about marijuana was diminished, despite the fact that marijuana continued to be the most commonly used illegal drug in the U.S. According to the 1991 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 13 percent of young adults, age 18 to 25, were regular users of marijuana. In addition, 4 percent of youth, age 12-17, and 10 percent of older adults, age 26 to 34, reported using marijuana regularly.

The marijuana of the early 1990s was an entirely different drug from the version that was available in the 1960s or 1970s. Due to modern sophisticated cultivation techniques, U.S.-grown marijuana became one of the most potent and highly-prized cannabis products in the world. While the THC (the psychoactive ingredient) content of marijuana averaged 1.5 percent in 1970, by the 1990s it was 7.6 percent. The sinsemilla (seedless) variety ranged from 8 to 19 percent, and marijuana seizures in Alaska registered a THC potency of almost 30 percent.

In addition, marijuana growers continued to encroach on national forests and parks and to threaten the environment by using harmful pesticides. With the wholesale price of high-quality sinsemilla averaging between \$3,000 and \$8,000 a pound, marijuana cultivation became big business. It was estimated that domestically grown marijuana constituted 25 percent of the supply for the U.S.

In recognition of the growing threat from marijuana, by the 1990s, all 50 states were actively participating in the Domestic Can-

nabis Eradication and Suppression Program. With the marijuana market increasing, the program looked for more efficient ways to eradicate the plant. Along with the traditional “whack and stack” method, DEA added herbicidal eradication. One of the first herbicidal eradication efforts, Operation Wipe Out in Hawaii, was an overwhelming success. In the summer of 1990, almost 90 percent of Hawaii’s cannabis crop was eradicated. Half of the crop was destroyed by spot herbicidal spraying, a new and more efficient eradication technique, which had little, if any, environmental impact.

Nationwide eradication efforts, such as Wipe Out, put so much pressure on growers that many abandoned their outdoor cultivation on public and private land for the safety of indoor cultivation. Indoor cultivated marijuana created new concerns for law enforcement; it was of such high quality and potency that American marijuana became the most sought-after cannabis in the world.

One of the most important enforcement tools that had developed during the late 1980s was thermal imagery, which was used to identify indoor marijuana operations. With the availability of this new heat-seeking technology, seizure records for indoor grows jumped from 951 in 1985 to 3,849 in 1992.

Throughout the early 1990s, DEA closed down thousands of indoor marijuana grows. For example, in August 1993 at the Advance Mine site in northern California, investigators found sinsemilla plants, which ounce for ounce, could produce extremely high-grade marijuana. The mine, which had been an operational gold mine during the late 1800s and the early 1900s, contained everything needed to grow more than 3,000 marijuana plants. The 8-section complex included five rooms for growing plants, and a pumping system that continually supplied water and nutrients to the marijuana plants.

The total value of the plants found inside the mine was estimated to be between \$6 and \$9 million. Four people were arrested. It took 40 DEA, U.S. Forest Service, and county law enforcement personnel two days to remove more than five tons of marijuana cultivation equipment from inside the mine.



The Advance Mine was one of the largest marijuana growing operations discovered in California. Special agents removed 2,394 cannabis plants from the former gold mine, 1993.

Steroids

In the 1980s and 1990s, abuse of steroids, particularly by young athletes, became a problem. Trafficking in steroids had become increasingly common, and as the market expanded, use of steroids was seen in younger and younger populations. Steroid sources included doctors, trainers, and foreign suppliers. A Government Accounting Office (GAO) study of the problem, published in 1989, reviewed 15 separate studies and reported one which showed that more than six percent of male high school seniors, mostly athletes, used or had used steroids. Another survey indicated that 20 percent of athletes in five colleges surveyed used steroids. It also reported on the significant side effects of steroid use. The GAO supported federal and state efforts to exercise greater control over steroid distribution and use. A 1990 study by the Inspector General of Health and Human Services reported that over a quarter of a million adolescents used steroids.

Congress responded to the steroid problem by passing The Anabolic Steroid Enforcement Act of 1990, which placed certain anabolic steroids in Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA). Previously, steroids had been unscheduled and controlled only by state and local laws. The Anabolic Steroid Enforcement Act brought anabolic steroids under the record-keeping, reporting, security, prescribing, import and export controls of the CSA. Because steroids were now classified as a Schedule III substance, all manufacturers and distributors of steroids were required to register with DEA.

This legislation, combined with an aggressive enforcement effort, virtually eliminated domestic sources of illicit steroid use and provided the legal authority to attack the smuggling of steroids from foreign sources. In order to heighten international awareness of the steroid problem, DEA sponsored an international conference that was attended by nations where steroids were produced, as well as nations concerned with steroid abuse. This conference was also attended by scientific experts in the field of steroids and representatives of the U.S. and the International Olympic Committees.

Operation Man (1990)

Through the 1980s and early 1990s, the forfeiture of traffickers' assets became an important and effective tool for law enforcement. In 1991, President Bush signed a bill expanding DEA's authority to administratively forfeit assets from \$100,000 to an unlimited amount with respect to financial instruments, including cash, CD's and bonds; and \$100,000 to \$500,000 on all other items except real estate. One of DEA's most successful financial cases was Operation Man, where agents tracked and forfeited drug assets laundered through banks based in the British Isle of Man, off the West Coast of England. Assets seized from this operation included a \$9.5 million bank account and the Bicycle Club, a gambling establishment in Bell Gardens, CA, valued at \$150 million. In April 1990, after a club partner was convicted of smuggling marijuana, the U.S. Government seized the club, believed to be the world's largest card casino, assumed 30 percent ownership in the club, and received almost \$600,000 a month in profits.

Operation REDRUM (1991)

The REDRUM (*murder* spelled backwards) program had been established in 1985 to create a multi-agency operational force to



DEA agents are shown making an arrest during Operation REDRUM.

pursue investigations that demonstrated an association between drug trafficking and the violence that it fostered. The primary goals of the program were the identification of major drug traffickers and organizations; the seizure of drugs and assets; and the analysis of strategic intelligence provided by informants.

On Jan. 1, 1991, a Metropolitan Area Drug Enforcement Task Force (MATF), was formed as a pilot project under Operation REDRUM and addressed the influx of illegal drugs and accompanying violence associated with drug trafficking in Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and the contiguous suburban Maryland counties. The MATF was divided into several operational units designed to focus on different aspects of the drug problem. This 90-day project investigated individuals based in New York City who were responsible for drug-related homicides in the Washington, D.C., area. In addition to 15 state and local agencies working to reduce violent drug-related crime, participating federal agencies included DEA, FBI, INS, and the Marshals Service. According to Attorney General Richard Thornburgh in April 1991, "The urgency of the nation's war on drugs has intensified the need for information on innovative programs and approaches to counter illicit drug trafficking and its related violence. This project will test and evaluate a promising cooperative enforcement initiative that can be replicated by state and local law enforcement agencies nationwide."

Because of the success of this operation and other REDRUM pilot projects, Administrator Bonner in April 1992 expanded Operation REDRUM to include drug-related homicide investigative units or task forces in Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. REDRUM, based in DEA headquarters, provided the divisional task forces with the funding for their investigations. In 1990, the program was initially funded with \$48,000, and during the ensuing years the funds increased to a high in 1993 of \$189,000.

LSD Conference (1991)

The early 1990s saw a resurgence of the popular 1960s and 1970s drug, LSD. While the use of most other illegal drugs had



declined, LSD use was on the rise and was particularly popular among teenagers, as evidenced by rising emergency-room mentions for LSD as well as LSD-related arrests and violence. For example in 1991, LSD led to violence in Fairfax County, VA, where a high school student who allegedly had taken six or more hits of LSD shot a police officer, wounding her seriously. In San Marcos, TX, a college student used a rifle to kill two acquaintances and wound his girlfriend after taking several hits of LSD.

To call attention to increasing abuse of the drug and to emphasize the need for stronger cooperative law enforcement and a commitment to reduce demand, Administrator Bonner held an LSD Conference in San Francisco in December 1991. This conference was held in California because it was a major source for LSD production and was attended by demand reduction experts from across the nation as well as law enforcement representatives from local, state, and federal levels.

Medical Use of Marijuana Denied (1992)

In 1989, former Administrator Lawn had officially denied the petition of the National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) to reschedule marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule II of the Controlled Substances Act. When NORML appealed that decision, Administrator Bonner had to review the issue and assess whether or not marijuana had any medicinal value. In order to develop a concrete, objective means of determining if marijuana should be rescheduled, Administrator Bonner relied on a five-point test, based somewhat on the criteria Congress had used to decide if certain drugs should be rescheduled. If the drug failed to meet just one of the five criteria, it could not be rescheduled, asserted Administrator Bonner. Marijuana failed to meet all five. The criteria consisted of:

1. The drug's chemistry must be known and reproducible.
2. Adequate safety studies must have been performed on the drug.
3. There must have been adequate and well-controlled studies proving the drug's efficacy.
4. The drug's medicinal value must be accepted by qualified experts.
5. The scientific evidence of the drug's safety and efficacy must be widely available.

Administrator Bonner ruled that marijuana had no currently accepted medical use on March 26, 1992.

DEA Special Agent Promotion Program

In 1992, the DEA implemented the Special Agent Promotion Program (SAP), a bias-free system for testing and promoting its special agents. It was based upon an objective identification of the most qualified candidates, regardless of their race or gender. The SAP resulted in important gains for female employees, in addition to African-American and Hispanic employees.

Operation Green Ice (1992)

By the late 1980s, DEA's financial investigative skills had evolved to such a high degree that the agency set up its own bank



In May 1992, Philadelphia Division ASAC Lewis Rice (left) briefed President George Bush and Philadelphia Police Commissioner Willie L. Williams (center) on the division's strategy to dismatle neighborhood drug gangs and street organizations.

to lure drug traffickers looking to launder their profits. In 1989, the investigative team created Trans America Ventures Associates (TARA) and established its credentials in the financial community. The result was so convincing that *Hispanic Business Weekly* listed TARA as one of the top 500 Hispanic Corporations in America. Undercover agents then posed as money launderers and offered to pick up funds anywhere in the world. They used informants to identify drug money brokers from Colombia who acted as middlemen between Cali mafia kingpins and money laundering operations in the U.S.

Beginning in San Diego and Los Angeles, the investigations took undercover agents to Houston, Ft. Lauderdale, Miami, Chicago, and New York to pick up money and to establish "fronts," such as leather goods shops, in these cities. During the course of the investigation, DEA agents laundered more than \$20 million for the Colombia-based cartels. As the investigation developed, cartel operatives asked the undercover agents to provide money laundering services in Europe, Canada, and the Caribbean. Consequently, Operation Green Ice was expanded into a coordinated international law enforcement effort involving Canada, the Cayman Islands, Colombia, Costa Rica, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.

In September 1992, undercover agents finally arranged a meeting with top-ranking Cali financial managers at locations in the U.S., Italy, Spain, and Costa Rica. The drug lords arrived, expecting to discuss plans for their criminal business, but instead were arrested. Operation Green Ice was an unprecedented collaboration of talent and financial expertise that successfully formed the first international task force to attack the monetary networks of the Cali mafia. Operation Green Ice led to the arrest of seven of the Cali maifa's top financial managers, the seizure of more than \$50 million in assets worldwide, and the arrest of 177 persons, including 44 in the U.S.

Creation of the Intelligence Division (1992)

For most of its first 20 years, the DEA's headquarters intelligence function and responsibility for managing DEA's intelligence program was located in the Operations Division. DEA was responsible for managing a National Narcotics Intelligence System with federal, state, local, and foreign officials, and coordinating the collection, analysis, and dissemination of drug intelligence. However, as drug trafficking around the world increased and more law enforcement, intelligence, and military entities joined in the anti-drug effort, it became clear that DEA had to focus additional resources and attention on drug intelligence. In August 1992, the Office of Intelligence became the Intelligence Division. The primary purposes of the change in status was to bring together all intelligence functions within DEA, enhance the profile of DEA's entire intelligence program, place increased emphasis on DEA's intelligence mission, and improve the span of control of senior management.

Federal drug efforts and the demands of the law enforcement, intelligence, and defense communities were growing at a rapid and sometimes uncoordinated manner. Their demands on the DEA intelligence program were increasing dramatically at a time when DEA was barely able to meet its own intelligence needs. The information collected by DEA special agents around the world constitutes one of the richest sources of federal drug information. Programs needed to be established to ensure that the information was properly shared and that other agencies dedicated and focused resources to add to that information for law enforcement purposes. More and better analysis had to be conducted in order to provide the details that could link apparently unrelated cases and support the development of successful prosecutions.

By establishing the Intelligence Division, DEA sought to achieve a uniformity of purpose among federal drug intelligence efforts, establish intelligence program and policy functions, and provide a more proactive direction for DEA's intelligence program. Intelligence management resources were expanded to ensure that the intelligence programs of the interagency drug community were addressing the tactical, operational, and strategic needs of DEA.

The Intelligence Division included three entities: the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), the Office of Investigative Support, and the Office of Intelligence Policy and Liaison. EPIC continued to expand its support to law enforcement officers across the country with its Pipeline and Jetway Programs, and the timely provision of information from the Watch. The Office of Investigative Support, collocated with its enforcement counterparts, provided intelligence support to the Kingpin Strategy. Functions of the Office of Intelligence Policy and Liaison included: establishing programs and policies to ensure support from the interagency community; strategic intelligence; planning, policy analysis, and program development; and, the Special Field Intelligence Program (SFIP). Although a separate entity, the functions and programs of the Intelligence Division remained focused on supporting DEA's enforcement mission.

The Kingpin Strategy (1992)

In 1992, DEA instituted the Kingpin Strategy that focused investigative and enforcement efforts on specific drug trafficking organizations. DEA planned to disable major organizations by attacking their most vulnerable areas—the chemicals needed

to process the drugs, their finances, communications, transportation, and leadership structure.

The Kingpin Strategy held that the greatest impact on the drug trade took place when major drug organizations were disrupted, weakened, and destroyed. This strategy focused enforcement efforts and resources against the highest-level traffickers and their organizations, and provided a systematic way of attacking the various vulnerabilities of the organizations. By systematically attacking each of these vulnerabilities, the strategy aimed to destroy the entire organization, and with it, the organization's capacity to finance, produce, and distribute massive amounts of illegal drugs. Each blow weakened the organization and improved the prospects for arresting and prosecuting the leaders and managers of the organizations.

The Kingpin Strategy evolved from DEA's domestic and overseas intelligence gathering and investigations. It was a strategy that encompassed DEA's enforcement actions in the U.S., in the transit nations of the Caribbean, Mexico and Central America, and in the source countries of the Andes. DEA also expanded Operation BAT in the Caribbean to include Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and the Lesser Antilles.

Eventually, the Kingpin Strategy would be revised, although DEA retained the emphasis on going after the top level of the international drug trade. When Mr. Constantine became the Administrator, the SACs of DEA field divisions requested greater flexibility within their areas of command to target the major drug trafficking figures who were having a significant impact in their regions. Under the original Kingpin Strategy, DEA headquarters often dictated the selection of Kingpin targets. In response to the SACs' concerns, Administrator Constantine agreed to allow them more latitude in target selection. In conjunction with this decision, he established the Special Operations Division at Newington, VA, in 1994 to coordinate multi-jurisdictional investigations against major drug trafficking organizations responsible for the flow of drugs into the U.S.

In November 1991, DEA destroyed two major distribution cells of Cali Kingpin Helmer "Pacho" Herrera in New York City. Herrera was the primary supplier of cocaine to the New York market, and his organization was shut down through a massive wiretap effort, using as many as 100 simultaneous, court-authorized wiretaps on cellular phones. Almost 100 traffickers were arrested, more than \$20 million in cash and assets were seized, and 2.7 tons of cocaine were taken off the streets. In addition, computerized records of transactions and personnel were seized, providing valuable insight into the Cali distribution cell operations and was an indication that the Cali drug lords were becoming more dependent on computer systems.

In November and December 1991, DEA teamed up with the Colombian National Police (CNP) to carry out the first major raids ever against Cali mafia in Cali, Colombia. As a result, DEA seized important financial records that permitted it to freeze trafficker bank accounts in Colombia, Miami, and London. In addition, during one of these successful raids, the CNP arrested Ivan Urdinola, one of the most violent of the Cali kingpins.

At the close of 1991, collective law enforcement efforts against the cartels resulted in the seizure of more than 300 metric tons of cocaine worldwide. Almost two-thirds of this amount was seized in the Andes and the transit nations, such as Mexico and Guatemala.

In another investigation, DEA, working with the U.S. Customs Service, exposed one of the Cali mafia's principal means of

smuggling cocaine into the U.S. In December of 1991, more than 15 tons of cocaine hidden in cement fence posts were seized in Miami and Texas and five Cali distributors based in the U.S. were arrested. The posts were shipped from Venezuela.

As a follow-up to that investigation, DEA and the U.S. Customs Service seized 7.5 tons of cocaine concealed in shipments of broccoli and okra. Ten members of the organization were arrested in Miami, FL, including one of the Cali mafia's top managers in the U.S. Federal agents also seized \$1.6 million in cartel bank accounts located in Florida, California, New York, and New Jersey.

Finally, in July 1992, Panamanian police and DEA raided a warehouse in Panama and seized 5.3 tons of cocaine concealed in boxes of hollowed-out ceramic tiles.

Brooklyn Clandestine Cocaine Lab Seizures (1992)

The Mid-Hudson Drug Enforcement Task Force, which consisted of three DEA special agents, six New York state troopers, and seven local police officers, conducted an intensive investigation of the Jose Santa Cruz-Londono trafficking organization. The cooperative, year-long operation required multiple wiretaps and sophisticated video surveillance, which was installed inside the warehouse lab and captured several individuals actually going through the cocaine processing procedures. These efforts came to fruition on June 15, 1992, when the Task Force seized two major clandestine cocaine laboratories in Brooklyn, NY. Agents found 100 pounds of cocaine base chemically altered into ceramic floor tiles for smuggling into the U.S. It was believed that each lab was capable of producing 50 to 100 kilograms of cocaine HCl a day, making them two of the largest labs seized during that time period. Unique to these labs was the use of Dupont gun-cleaning solvent in the extraction process as well as the use of an "extractor," a piece of equipment that used dry ice to condense vapors in the laboratory. This device enabled the lab to function in a densely populated area without the presence of strong chemical odors usually associated with clandestine labs. The other lab had been abandoned following an unrelated New York City Police raid of a nearby building. As a result of these seizures, an additional 70 pounds of cocaine were seized on March 3, 1993, when one of the cooperating Brooklyn lab defendants led the task force to a crack cocaine laboratory located in Liberty, New York. In addition, the chemist responsible for the tile method of smuggling was arrested, and one of the Brooklyn arrestees was later charged in the conspiracy to kill an editor of *El Diario*, a Spanish-language newspaper published in New York City. The drug lords from Colombia had threatened the editor's life when the newspaper ran several articles condemning their activities. At the conclusion of these investigations, the labs were traced to the Jose Santa Cruz-Londono trafficking organization and 30 of its members were brought to justice.



Hudson Task Force officers display some of the crushed cocaine "tiles" recovered from the clandestine lab in Liberty, New York.



SA Claude Powers of the San Diego Division Narcotics Task Force posed with the 1948 Tucker automobile seized from a major methamphetamine trafficker in 1992.

Rules of the Game (1993)

For years after DEA first began operating in Mexico in the early 1970s, special agents worked there, as in most countries of the world, without formal regulations other than their own agency's guidelines. This changed in April 1990, when a physician, Dr. Humberto Alvarez Machain, was kidnaped in Guadalajara by four men who identified themselves as members of the Mexican Judicial Police. Machain was then driven to a neighboring state, held overnight in a hotel, and forced to board a plane that took him to U.S.

U.S. authorities maintained that the Guadalajara gynecologist had injected DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena with stimulants to keep him conscious during the final interrogation before his murder in 1985, and they were frustrated by Mexico's failure to arrest Machain after his earlier indictment in Los Angeles. As a result, American officials paid Mexican

bounty hunters to kidnap Machain and take him to El Paso, TX. This fact aroused Mexican furor, and even more so when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June 1992 that the abduction did not violate American law. In 1992, the Government of Mexico imposed the first written regulations that DEA had faced anywhere in the world. The rules capped the number of DEA agents in Mexico, designated a half-dozen cities in which they must live, prohibited them from traveling without written Government of Mexico permission, denied them diplomatic immunity from prosecution, and stipulated that all useful intelligence information “must be immediately transmitted to the competent Mexican authorities.” They also prohibited weapons. Dr. Machain was ultimately released in December 1992 due to a directed verdict of acquittal.

Aviation

In late 1991, the Chief Pilot position was moved out of headquarters and sent to Addison to run operations. By this time, DEA’s Aviation Section had grown to 115 special agent/pilots, 110 DEA-owned aircraft, 152 contractor maintenance technicians, and an operating budget of \$23 million. In the 1990s, about 85 percent of the air fleet was from asset forfeiture and the remainder was from military surplus and newly-purchased aircraft.

In June 1992, ground was broken for the new Aviation Operation Center at the Alliance Airport, which was four times larger than the facility at Addison. The three-story hanger included large bays with an overhead crane for working on every kind of aircraft from small fixed-wing, single-engine planes, to large turbine-powered transports and helicopters. The facilities provided for machine repairs, engine shops, avionics, spare parts, modification work, metal work, and hydraulic repairs.

Air intelligence, photo labs, maintenance, and the operations center and office space were also housed in the new facility. In the connected two-story office building were workstations, training rooms, conference areas, and computer systems.



The new Aviation Operations Center at Alliance Airport, ca. 1992.

Training

When Administrator Robert C. Bonner began his tenure in August 1990, one of the first challenges facing him was the issue of overcrowding at the FBI Training Center at Quantico, VA. The training needs of the FBI had grown to such an extent that there was literally no space to accommodate the DEA training functions that were likewise expanding. As a result, DEA was given notice to find another place to conduct its training.

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, GA, offered to provide DEA some space, but after evaluating a number of facilities in other states, Administrator Bonner determined that it was in DEA’s interest to retain a training facility at Quantico, VA. Mr. Bonner confirmed the U.S. Marine Corps’ offer of land to DEA, and set about to acquire the funding for a DEA training center.

In 1992, with the approval of Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, Administrator Bonner was successful in obtaining \$7 million for architectural plans and an engineering study. However, it was not until FY 1997 that sufficient funds were appropriated to build and complete the DEA Training Center at Quantico.

Office of Investigative Agency Policies (1993)

On Nov. 18, 1993, the Attorney General established the Office of Investigative Agency Policies (OIAP) at the Department of Justice. This new office, reporting directly to the Attorney General, was created to increase efficiency within the Department of Justice by coordinating specified activities of the department’s criminal investigative components that warrant uniform treatment or coordination. Agencies that fell under this program included DEA, FBI, U.S. Marshals Service, and Immigration and Naturalization Service. Some resolutions/issues addressed by this office that affected DEA included drug intelligence (February 1994), wireless communications (April 1994), criminal investigations overseas (May 1994), aviation policy (September 1994), armor piercing ammunition (October 1994), Interagency Laboratory Working Group (June 1995), post-shooting incidents (October 1995), law enforcement training (December 1995), and confidential informants and cooperating witnesses (May 1996).

Technology

Given the evolving sophistication of criminal drug organizations around the world in the 1990s, DEA was challenged to keep pace, particularly technologically. With the cartels’ extensive wealth, these international criminal organizations purchased the latest and most sophisticated state-of-the-art technological equipment, and used this equipment to control every phase of their drug business—production, transportation, financing and communications. Technology provided them with the vital link to their managers and dealers here in the U.S. and around the world, allowing the mafia leaders to maintain total control over every detail of the drug business from their safe havens abroad.

Cellular Phones: Mafia leader surrogates who controlled operations in the U.S. en-



gaged in complicated efforts to avoid having their telephone communications vulnerable to legal wiretaps. These criminal surrogates within the U.S. bought cell phones in lots of 10-20, which were used for a few weeks or even days and then quickly discarded and replaced. This was done in order to evade wiretaps by moving from phone to phone more quickly than law enforcement could keep up.

Digital Pagers: The use of digital pagers also created new problems. Traffickers sent messages, often in code, to set up deliveries, cancel meetings, or warn of problems. But law enforcement's ability to intercept these transmissions was limited. DEA's primary method was to use a clone of a pager used by a suspected trafficker. However in order to set up the clone, specific information was needed from the company providing the paging service, and the suspect was often tipped by the paging service that he was under investigation. In response and with the cooperation of the cellular and paging industries, DEA developed equipment to intercept cellular and paging services.

Debit Telephone Cards: Traffickers also used debit cards to avoid detection by law enforcement. From stores, such as the 7-11, traffickers bought telephone debit cards similar to telephone credit cards that are not billed to any specific person or telephone number and are difficult to trace.

Encryption: Encrypted communications became a major problem for law enforcement in the 1990s. To help counter the threat of criminal organizations exchanging encrypted messages with impunity, Congress approved the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act in 1994. It required telephone companies to ensure that their systems and networks had the capability to accommodate federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies' court-approved intercepts as new technology was developed.

Digital Communications: Another important technological development occurred in the 1990s when new carriers, such as cable television companies and electric companies, entered the "telephone business." Where once a pair of wires carried only one analogue signal conversation, today's communications were sent in pulses of digital information over wires or fiber optic cables, allowing for multiple, simultaneous voice and data transmissions, known as multiplexing. This meant that telephone calls were forwarded to a different location without detection by law enforcement intercept equipment.

Laboratories

The laboratory system marked its 25th anniversary in August 1993. From the original staff of six chemists at the Washington, D.C., BNDD laboratory, the authorized staff had grown to a nationwide staff of 159 bench chemists, 12 latent fingerprint specialists, 36 laboratory managers and supervisors, four headquarters upper managers, 12 headquarters program managers, two hazardous waste specialists, two diversion investigators, and numerous support personnel.