



1985–1990



During the late 1980s, international drug trafficking organizations grew more powerful as the cocaine trade dominated the Western Hemisphere. Mafias headquartered in the Colombian cities of Medellín and Cali wielded enormous influence and employed bribery, intimidation, and murder to further their criminal goals. Many U.S. communities experienced violence stemming from the drug trade. At first, the most dramatic examples of drug-related violence occurred in Miami, where cocaine traffickers fought open battles on city streets.

The Medellín cartel was also at the height of its power and controlled cocaine trafficking from the conversion and packaging process in Colombia to the transportation and wholesale distribution of the drug to U.S. communities. Despite the Medellín cartel's foothold in the United States, its rival, the Cali mafia, began to dominate markets in northeastern communities. The Cali mafia was less visible, less violent, and more businesslike than the Medellín cartel. Operating through a system of cells, where members were insulated from one another, the Cali mafia steadily established far-reaching networks that dominated the cocaine trade well into the 1990s.

With the influx of traffickers and cocaine, South Florida became a principal area for “conversion laboratories” that transformed cocaine base into cocaine hydrochloride (HCl), the form in which powder cocaine is sold. Though most of these labs were in South Florida, they also appeared in other parts of the country, indicating the expansion of Colombian trafficking. For example, in 1985, four conversion laboratories were seized in New York State, four in California, two in Virginia, and one each in North Carolina and Arizona. One year later, 23 more conversion labs were seized in the United States.

Later, in 1985, a crack “epidemic” hit the United States, resulting in escalating violence among drug dealers in other U.S. cities. By 1989, DAWN data showed a 28-fold increase in cocaine-related hospital emergency room admissions over a 4-year period. Policymakers considered illicit drug use the most important issue facing the nation.

Crack Cocaine

Most cocaine shipped to the United States in the early 1980s went through the Bahamas. The glut of cocaine powder on the islands caused an 80 percent drop in the drug's price. Faced with shrinking profits, drug dealers made a shrewd marketing decision to convert the powder to “crack,” a smokable form of cocaine. It was cheap, simple to produce, ready to use, and highly profitable for dealers to develop. While the exact originator of crack is unknown, global traffickers and Caribbean immigrants taught people in Miami how to produce the

drug, and they in turn went into business in the United States. As early as 1981, reports of crack appeared in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Houston.

Crack cocaine altered the drug trafficking landscape, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. While powder cocaine was popular among the more affluent, dealers marketed cheaper crack toward poor communities of color. News of a “crack epidemic” swept the nation. Although the media exaggerated reports that rapid addiction to crack caused crime waves, the extreme violence from street dealers devastated many communities. In response, policymakers passed laws setting longer prison sentences for people who manufactured, distributed, and possessed crack versus those who manufactured, distributed, and possessed powder cocaine.

Powder cocaine was available on the street at an average of 55 percent purity for \$100 per gram. In contrast, crack was sold at average purity levels of 80 percent or higher for the same price. In some major cities, like New York, Detroit, and Philadelphia, one dosage unit of crack could be purchased for as little as \$2.50. Never before had any form of cocaine been available at such low prices and at such high purity. Though, powder and crack generally affect the body in the same way.

The first crack house, or location where crack is purchased, used, and sometimes produced, was discovered in Miami in 1982. However, the drug was not reported as a major health and safety threat because middle-class people primarily consumed the drug, and most Americans did not associate them with cocaine addiction. In fact, crack was initially considered a purely Miami phenomenon until its use spread to New York City in December 1983. There it was estimated that more than three-fourths of early crack consumers were white professionals or middle-class youngsters from Long Island, suburban New Jersey, or upper-class Westchester County. However, partly because crack sold for as little as \$5 a rock, it ultimately spread to less affluent neighborhoods.

The number of Americans addicted to cocaine increased dramatically following crack’s introduction. In 1985, people who admitted using cocaine on a routine

basis rose from 4.2 million to 5.8 million, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service’s National Household Survey. Likewise, cocaine-related hospital emergencies continued to go up nationwide during 1985 and 1986. According to DAWN statistics, in 1985, cocaine-related hospital emergencies rose by 12 percent, from 23,500 to 26,300; and in 1986, they increased 110 percent, from 26,300 to 55,200. Between 1984 and 1987, cocaine incidents increased fourfold.

By early 1986, crack use permeated New York City’s lower income neighborhoods; the drug’s market was dominated by traffickers and dealers from the Dominican Republic. Crack distribution and use exploded in 1986, and by year-end it was available in 28 states and the District of Columbia. According to the 1985-1986 National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee Report, crack appeared in several major cities, including Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Kansas City, Miami, New York City, Newark, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, Dallas, Denver, Minneapolis, and Phoenix.

A year later, crack was reported to be available in the District of Columbia and all but four U.S. states. It was abundantly available in at least 19 cities in 13 states: Texas (Dallas), Oklahoma (Tulsa, Oklahoma City), Michigan (Detroit), California (Los Angeles, Riverside, Santa Barbara), Florida (Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Tampa), New York (New York City), Oregon (Portland), Washington (Seattle), Missouri (Kansas City), Minnesota (Minneapolis), Colorado (Denver), Nevada (Las Vegas), and Maryland (Hagerstown, Salisbury). By 1988, crack had replaced heroin as the greatest illicit drug use problem in Detroit, and it was available in Los Angeles in multikilogram quantities.

Meanwhile, wholesale and retail prices for cocaine had declined, while purity levels for kilogram amounts had remained at 90 percent or higher. Street-level gram purity rose from 25 percent in 1981, to 55 percent in 1987, to 70 percent in 1988. By the late 1980s, over 10,000 gang members were dealing drugs in some 50 cities from Baltimore to Seattle. The crack trade had created a violent sub-world, and crack-related murders in many large cities were skyrocketing. For example, a 1988 study by the Bureau of



Approximately 5,000 pounds of cocaine, valued at \$250 million, were seized in Chicago in July 1987. The cocaine was smuggled in 130 banana boxes. Pictured in front of the seized cocaine are (from left): Chicago ASAC John T. Peoples; Police Superintendent Fred Rice; Attorney General Edwin Meese III; Chicago SAC Philip V. Fisher; and ASAC Garfield Hammonds, Jr.

Justice Statistics found that in New York City, crack use was tied to 32 percent of all homicides and 60 percent of drug-related homicides. On a daily basis, the evening news reported the violence of drive-by shootings and people trying to obtain money to continue using crack. Smokable crack appealed to new groups of Americans, especially women, because its use did not carry the stigma associated with needles or heroin. Many mistakenly equated smokable crack with marijuana. In October 1986, Attorney General Edwin Meese explained the U.S. anti-crack strategy: “The most effective long-term way to reduce crack trafficking is to reduce the amount of cocaine entering this country. The federal government’s main priorities against cocaine are reducing production in source countries, interdicting shipments entering the United States, and disrupting major trafficking rings.” Thus, DEA targeted major trafficking organizations, primarily the Medellín and Cali cartels,

which were producing cocaine and smuggling it into the United States.

To support this strategy, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 allocated \$8 million for domestic cocaine enforcement. A portion of the budget was used to establish DEA Crack Teams. Each of these teams consisted of two DEA special agents who assisted state and local law enforcement agencies in the investigation of large-scale violators and interstate trafficking networks. The agents either worked with existing DEA-funded state and local task forces or with local law enforcement agencies that had established their own special crack groups. DEA Crack Teams were also deployed to states experiencing extensive problems with crack use and trafficking. Examples included Arizona, which was vulnerable to a rapid influx of crack dealers from Los Angeles street groups, and Louisiana, where traffickers from Haiti dealt the drug to migrant workers in rural areas.

Another significant source of support for the DEA Crack Teams was the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 that provided for asset forfeiture sharing with state and local law enforcement agencies.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 later provided \$44 million to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) grant program for urban law enforcement agencies, and \$1.5 million was made available for the establishment of five Crack Task Forces. By the late 1980s, DEA's domestic crack cocaine enforcement activities were conducted through three multi-agency initiatives: DEA Crack Teams, Department of Justice's BJA Crack Task Forces, and state and local task forces. Cocaine investigations dominated DEA enforcement activities, as cocaine arrests accounted for nearly 65 percent of the agency's total arrests in 1988. Simultaneously, DEA seizures substantially increased. DEA had seized only 200 kilograms of cocaine in 1977; by 1988 the number jumped to 60,000 kilograms.

Trafficking via Mexico

The mid-to-late 1980s witnessed a dramatic increase in drug traffickers moving product through or basing operations in Mexico. The country's strategic location (midway between source and consumer nations) and a growing international drug mafia headquartered there made it an ideal transit point for South American-produced cocaine. Mexico's topography offered several seaports along its Pacific and Gulf coasts. Countless airstrips scattered across its interior allowed for quick and easy vessel and aircraft refueling. Equally significant was Mexico's 2,000-mile land border with the United States, over 95 percent of which had no fences or barricades. Moreover, numerous remote border areas made patrolling and surveillance exceedingly difficult. Cocaine traffickers from Colombia expanded their trafficking routes to include Mexico, increasingly using it as a shipping point.

Meanwhile, the Guadalajara mafia formed in Mexico—with close ties to the Colombian mafia—to ship heroin, marijuana, and cocaine into the United States. Shipments included smaller quantities of Mexican black tar or brown powder heroin piggybacked on larger Colombian drug

loads. Drug-laden private aircraft from Colombia began using thousands of registered and unregistered airstrips in Mexico to deliver their product. However, the preferred method of smuggling drugs remained overland routes, and 90 percent of cocaine seizures made by U.S. law enforcement on the southwest border in 1989 were land seizures. Cocaine seizures made by U.S. law enforcement increased from under 2,000 kilograms in 1985 to over 40,000 kilograms in 1989.

Employee Assistance Program Expanded (1985)

Recognizing the importance of meeting the unique needs of its agents, support personnel, and families, DEA created an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in 1978, which it expanded in 1985. By April 1986, EAP provided each of DEA's field divisions with access to an area clinician (and at least one backup), making all employees and their families eligible to receive professional, confidential assistance in marital, family, parenting, and relationship concerns; alcohol and drug counseling; job-related stress and other emotional/psychological support; as well as guidance regarding financial and legal concerns. DEA also implemented a program whereby each division had a team of personnel trained to assist employees and their families following traumatic incidents related to the dangers of drug law enforcement. The Trauma Team program was originally established in 1978, when Yvonne Conner, the head of EAP, conducted extensive research to determine the special needs of DEA personnel. She used her findings to design a professional and confidential program uniquely responsive to DEA employees and their families.

Drug-Free Workplace (1986)

On September 15, 1986, President Reagan issued Executive Order 12564, the Drug-Free Federal Workplace Program. He called on all federal employees to refuse drugs and instructed each federal agency to set up programs to “test for the use of illegal drugs by employees in sensitive positions.”

By March 1988, DEA established its own Drug-Free Workplace Program. The Drug Deterrence staff, along with

a state-of-the-art contract laboratory, conducted almost 2,000 drug tests at 51 DEA sites. Over 1,600 of those tests were conducted by the unannounced, random test method that used a computer-generated program to select employees for testing.

National Security Decision Directive 221

On April 8, 1986, President Reagan proclaimed that drug production and trafficking constituted a threat to the security of the United States and extended executive sanction to an active war on drugs with National Security Decision Directive 221.

The Murder of DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena

The 1985 abduction and murder of DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena in Mexico led to the most comprehensive homicide investigation ever undertaken by the agency. Investigators uncovered corruption and complicity by numerous Mexican officials. The special agent's death gripped the agency, and his sacrifice inspired the grassroots Red Ribbon Campaign encouraging Americans to pledge to live drug free.

Known as “Kiki” to his friends, Special Agent Camarena had a reputation for believing that the actions of each and every individual made a difference in the drug war. He was assigned to DEA's Guadalajara Resident Office in Mexico and was working to identify drug trafficking kingpins when he left his office to meet his wife for lunch on February 7, 1985. A late-model car pulled up beside Camarena and four men grabbed him, threw him into the back of the car, and sped off. Hours later, Alfredo Zavala Avelar, a Mexican Agriculture Department pilot working with antidrug authorities, was also abducted.

Immediately after Mrs. Camarena reported her husband missing, the DEA Guadalajara Resident Office made every effort to locate him. After determining that Special Agent Camarena's disappearance had no innocent explanation, Resident Agent in Charge James Kuykendall promptly notified his superiors and began attempting to enlist the support of the Mexican police. Meanwhile,

special agents assigned to the Guadalajara Resident Office queried confidential informants and police contacts for information about the whereabouts of Special Agent Camarena. Mexico Country Attaché Edward Heath then requested assistance from U.S. Ambassador John Gavin, who called the Mexican Attorney General and requested his assistance in resolving the disappearance of the special agent. Notifications of the agent's disappearance went out to all DEA domestic SACs and country attachés in Latin America (who were also requested to query all sources knowledgeable about Mexican trafficking organizations for any intelligence that might lead to his rescue). DEA headquarters then quickly established a special group to coordinate the investigation and sent 25 special agents to Guadalajara to assist in the search.

Throughout February 1985, DEA continued its efforts to locate Special Agent Camarena. Witnesses were interviewed and numerous leads were followed. Searches of



SA Enrique “Kiki” Camarena

several residences and ranches in Mexico took place. Based on the information that was developed, DEA requested the Mexican Federal Judicial Police (MFJP) to consider Rafael Caro-Quintero, Miguel Felix-Gallardo, and Ernesto Fonseca-Carrillo as suspects in the kidnapping. All three were notorious narcotics traffickers based in Guadalajara believed to have the resources and motive to commit such an act.

On February 9, 1985, MFJP officers confronted Rafael Caro-Quintero at the Guadalajara Airport as he was preparing to leave on a private jet with several of his associates. After an armed stand-off, the Mexican officer in charge, an MFJP comandante, spoke privately with Caro-Quintero and then allowed him and his associates to depart.

Subsequently, a local farm worker discovered two bodies in a field adjacent to a busy road about one kilometer from a ranch in Michoacán, Mexico. The bodies, which apparently had been dumped there, were identified as



Administrator Lawn comforts Geneva Camarena, widow of SA Enrique Camarena.

those of Special Agent Camarena and Captain Zavala. Soil samples taken from the two bodies by FBI special agents in Mexico proved they had previously been buried elsewhere and then moved. On March 7 and 8, 1985, a U.S. pathologist and forensic team analyzed the discovery site and performed an autopsy. The pathologist's findings made positive identifications and indicated that death in both cases was due to blunt force injuries to the head.

On March 8, 1985, Special Agent Camarena's body was returned to the United States for burial. His violent death brought the American public face-to-face with drug trafficking's vicious brutality. DEA responded with renewed efforts to stop drug traffickers (and the international officials who supported their activities), while many Americans, especially in Special Agent Camarena's hometown, created new drug use prevention programs in the fallen agent's name.

Camarena Investigation Leads to Operation Leyenda

On March 14, 1985, MFJP officials notified DEA they had taken into custody five Jalisco State Police officers who were believed to have participated in the abduction of Special Agent Camarena. However, DEA was neither advised in advance of this operation nor invited to participate in the subsequent interviews of the suspected Jalisco State Police officers.

Under Mexican police questioning, the Jalisco officers gave statements implicating themselves and others in the abduction of Special Agent Camarena. One suspect died during the interrogation. The statements of the Jalisco officers implicated Caro-Quintero and Fonseca-Carrillo, among others, in planning and ordering the abduction of Special Agent Camarena.

On March 17, 1985, Mexican newspapers reported that the MFJP had arrested 11 individuals for the kidnapping of Special Agent Camarena. Arrest orders were also issued for seven international drug traffickers, including Caro-Quintero, on kidnapping and murder charges.

DEA subsequently discovered that Caro-Quintero was in Costa Rica. On April 4, 1985, the DEA Office in

San Jose, in conjunction with local authorities in Costa Rica, located and apprehended Caro-Quintero and seven of his associates. The Mexican Government then sent MFJP officials to Costa Rica after persuading the Costa Rican Government to expel Caro-Quintero to Mexico on immigration violations. On April 5, 1985, Caro-Quintero and those arrested with him left Costa Rica for Mexico aboard two jets belonging to the Mexican government. In Mexico City, Caro-Quintero was interrogated for several days by police officials. Ultimately, he gave a statement implicating himself and others in the abduction of Special Agent Camarena.

But Caro-Quintero denied any knowledge of who actually killed Special Agent Camarena or how he died. He also denied any knowledge of the abduction and death of Captain Zavala.

On April 7, 1985, Mexican police officials and military forces arrested drug trafficker Ernesto Fonseca-Carrillo and several of his bodyguards in Puerto Vallarta and took them to Mexico City for questioning. Fonseca and his right-hand man, Samuel Ramirez-Razo, gave statements to the MFJP implicating themselves in the abduction of Special Agent Camarena. However, neither individual admitted having any knowledge of Camarena's death or Captain Zavala's abduction.

Although there were some discrepancies in the testimony of Caro-Quintero, Fonseca-Carrillo, and Ramirez-Razo, all claimed they had nothing to do with the death of DEA's agent and further stated these crimes were probably the work of another narcotics trafficker, Miguel Angel Felix-Gallardo.

Meanwhile, in April 1985, DEA learned that certain members of the Mexican government possessed a series of audiotapes of Camarena's torture and interrogation. Mexican military authorities allegedly seized the tapes from Fonseca during his arrest in Puerto Vallarta. When DEA confirmed the voice on the tape was Camarena, the Mexican government, after great pressure from the U.S. Government, turned over copies of all five tapes.

On April 12, 1985, a team of one DEA and four FBI agents arrived in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, via DEA

aircraft. These agents were advised that MFJP had located the house in Guadalajara where Special Agent Camarena was alleged to have been taken after his abduction.

DEA established a new investigative team on May 3, 1985, to coordinate and investigate the abduction of Camarena and Zavala (their investigation was named Operation Leyenda—Spanish for “lawman”). Through evidence gained from cooperating individuals and relentless investigative pursuit, this team ascertained that five individuals abducted Special Agent Camarena and took him to a house at 881 Lope de Vega in Guadalajara on February 7, 1985. Ultimately, the agents successfully secured the indictments of several individuals connected to the abduction and murder. The hard work, long hours, and total agency commitment yielded positive results.

In retrospect, Operation Leyenda was a long and complex investigation, made more difficult by the fact the crime was committed on foreign soil and involved major drug traffickers and government officials from Mexico. It took several years to develop the facts, to apprehend the perpetrators, and to finally bring them to justice.

Red Ribbon Campaign

Special Agent Camarena's murder sparked the National Red Ribbon Campaign. Within weeks of his death in March of 1985, Camarena's congressman, Duncan Hunter, and high school friend Henry Lozano launched “Camarena Clubs” in Imperial Valley, California, Camarena's hometown. Hundreds of club members pledged to lead drug-free lives to honor the sacrifices made by Camarena and others on behalf of all Americans. That spring, two club members presented the “Camarena Club Proclamation” to then-First Lady Nancy Reagan, bringing the program national attention. That summer, parent groups in California, Illinois, and Virginia began to expand the Camarena Club program and promoted the wearing of red ribbons nationwide during one week in late October. In 1988 the National Federation of Parents organized the first National Red Ribbon Week, an eight-day event proclaimed by the U.S. Congress and chaired by President and Mrs. Reagan. The Red Ribbon Campaign also became a symbol of support for

DEA's efforts to reduce demand for drugs through prevention and education programs.

Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986

In 1986, Congress approved a significant bill authorizing \$6 billion over three years for interdiction and enforcement measures, demand reduction education, and treatment programs. On the enforcement side, Congress passed increases in criminal penalties as part of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. Mandatory prison sentences for large scale marijuana distribution were reinstated and federal drug control scheduling was expanded to include analogues (like designer drugs). A federal grant program for state drug enforcement was also created to assist local efforts at thwarting traffickers. On the demand side, federal funds were allocated for prevention and treatment programs, giving these programs a larger share of federal drug control funds than did previous laws. The law further expanded prevention efforts by creating the White House Conference for a Drug-Free America and the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP), aimed at community prevention strategies. In the international arena, the law established a requirement that foreign assistance be withheld from countries if the President could not certify they had cooperated fully with the United States or taken adequate steps on their own to prevent drug production, drug trafficking, and drug-related money laundering.

The Certification Process (1986)

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended by the Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988, required the President to make yearly determinations and file a report to Congress regarding the progress of drug producing and/or drug transit countries' efforts to eliminate the drug threat.

After the President's certification of a country for fully

cooperating in counterdrug efforts, decertification for noncooperation, or decertification with a waiver for vital U.S. national interests, Congress had 30 days to disapprove of the President's certification decisions by a simple majority vote before they took effect. If the President vetoed a disapproval action, Congress could override the veto with a two-thirds vote. Decertification resulted in reduction of foreign aid by 50 percent and U.S. opposition to loans from any international agency, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

For those countries not certified, the act required that most forms of U.S. foreign assistance, with the exception of counter-narcotics assistance and humanitarian aid, be withheld, and further required the United States to vote against bank lending to noncertified countries.

As part of the certification process, the U.S. Department of State, through its Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, presented findings on the drug strategies and policies, as well as current drug trafficking and use situations in every country listed as a major drug producing and/or drug transit country, precursor chemical source country, or money laundering country. This Department of State report, known as the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, provided an objective basis for certification determinations and was issued at the same time as the list of certifications.



Agents of DEA's Phoenix Field Division and the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) pose with 700 pounds of cocaine seized in 1987. The seizure, which took place 50 miles south of Phoenix, was the result of a joint DEA, U.S. Customs Service, and Arizona DPS investigation.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 also required that every certified country have a treaty in effect with the United States addressing drug eradication, interdiction, demand reduction, chemical control, and cooperation with U.S. drug law enforcement agencies. DEA's role in the certification process is limited to providing the Attorney General and other U.S. policymakers with an assessment of the level of cooperation between DEA and foreign law enforcement counterparts.

Operation Snowcap (1987)

The success of Operation Blast Furnace, which targeted cocaine laboratories in Bolivia with 160 Army personnel and helicopter support in 1986, set the stage for one of DEA's most extensive and unprecedented enforcement efforts: Operation Snowcap. DEA and the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters (INM) developed this initiative in 1987 to disrupt growing, processing, and transportation systems supporting the cocaine industry.

DEA and INM coordinated Operation Snowcap operations in 12 countries: Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and Mexico. The Department of Defense and the U.S. Border Patrol also participated. Most Snowcap activity was concentrated in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador because of the prevalence of coca processing in these nations.

Planning for Operation Snowcap began in September 1986, two months before Operation Blast Furnace concluded. When the 1987 operation launched, there was a smooth transition of responsibility for air operations from the U.S. Army to the government of Bolivia. Six Bell UH-1 Huey helicopters, loaned by the U.S. Army to the INM, and a U.S. Army training team arrived on the same C5-A transport that withdrew the Blast Furnace equipment from Bolivia.

Besides coca suppression operations, the Snowcap strategy included chemical control, vehicular interdiction, and marine law enforcement interdiction operations. The marine law enforcement and vehicular interdiction concepts mirrored successful programs in the United States.

The marine law enforcement operations grew from DEA's close coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard, while vehicular interdiction originated from DEA's Operation Pipeline, EPIC's national highway interdiction program.

Operation Snowcap depended on agents who volunteered for temporary assignments in foreign countries. These special agents left domestic field divisions for temporary tour of duty assignments to work closely with host country law enforcement counterparts. As envisioned, Operation Snowcap was designed to be a temporary program to assist law enforcement entities in Latin America with training and investigative work.



Operation Snowcap, 1987.

Carlos Lehder Extradition (1987)

In 1981, Carlos Lehder was indicted on U.S. federal charges in Jacksonville, Florida, and a request for his extradition was formally presented in 1983 to the Colombian government, which had never honored extradition requests. Lehder, a major cocaine trafficker, had formed his own political party and adopted a platform that was vehemently opposed to extradition. He viewed cocaine as a very powerful weapon that could be used against the United States and referred to the drug as an atomic bomb. Lehder also claimed he was allied with the Colombian guerilla movement, M-19, to protect Colombian sovereignty.

Fanatical in his efforts to prevent extradition, Lehder forced a political debate on the merits of extradition and publicly faced off against Colombia's Justice Minister, Rodrigo Lara-Bonilla. When Lara-Bonilla was suddenly murdered in 1984, Lehder and the Medellín cartel, who had hidden behind the pseudonym "The Extraditables," were suspected.

Embarrassed and outraged by the Medellín organization's terrorist tactics, the Colombian government turned Lehder over to DEA and extradited him to the United States in February 1987. Lehder was convicted and sentenced to 135 years in federal prison. He subsequently cooperated in



Carlos Lehder conceived the idea of transporting loads of cocaine from Colombia to the United States. Courtesy, Wikimedia Commons



At the 1987 National High School Athletic Coaches Association Convention, Nancy Reagan greets Jacquelyn D. Rice, an assistant in DEA's Demand Reduction Section, as Administrator Lawn looks on.

the U.S. investigation of Panama dictator Manuel Noriega and received a reduced sentence in return for his testimony. However, the Medellín reign of terror did not end. The cartel was responsible for the murders of many Colombian government officials, including Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos Jiminéz in 1988 and presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán in 1989.

Demand Reduction Section (1987)

In 1987, DEA took another step forward in the demand reduction arena by establishing the Demand Reduction Section. "If we are truly the leaders in drug efforts," said DEA Administrator Jack Lawn, "we must also establish a leadership role in drug education efforts . . . I believe . . . that our personnel can do more to direct the attitudes of young people than can many other professions because our personnel know the reality of drugs."

DEA's Demand Reduction Program provided leadership, coordination, and resources for drug use prevention and education. Each of DEA's domestic field divisions was assigned a demand reduction coordinator who would provide leadership and support to local agencies and organizations as they developed drug education and prevention programs. The program soon evolved from a few drug awareness presentations into a nationwide effort that

worked to change attitudes about drugs in sports, schools, and communities across the nation.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988

The 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act increased criminal penalties for offenses related to drug trafficking and created new federal offenses and regulatory drug control requirements. The law also bolstered federal funding for state and local drug enforcement grant programs.

The 1988 act expanded a change to the certification process established by the 1986 act. The latter required all certified countries to sign a treaty with the United States addressing drug eradication, interdiction, demand reduction, chemical control, and cooperation with U.S. drug law enforcement agencies. The 1988 act went a step further and made it unlawful to certify a country's compliance unless it had signed such a treaty.

Another requirement called for the Secretary of the Treasury to initiate negotiations with governments whose banks were known to engage in significant U.S. dollar transactions. This obligation helped identify money laundering and illicit drug transaction funds.

Perhaps the most significant provision created the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and its director, the "Drug Czar." ONDCP was charged with setting national priorities and implementing a National Drug Control Strategy. Its director ensured the national drug control strategy was research-based, contained long-range goals and measurable objectives, and sought to reduce drug abuse, drug trafficking, and their consequences.

In 1993, Executive Orders No. 12880 and 12992 (and eventually No. 13023 in 1996) extended ONDCP as the leading entity for drug control policy. The Executive Orders also created the President's Drug Policy Council. In 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act extended ONDCP's mission to assessing budgets and resources related to the National Drug Control Strategy. It also established specific reporting requirements in the areas of drug use, availability, consequences, and treatment.

Colombian Government Helps Seize Gacha Funds (1989)

In 1989, a successful international cooperative effort helped bring down one of the highest-ranking members of the Medellín drug cartel: José Rodríguez Gacha, the right-hand man of cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar. First, Colombia's government provided the investigation and enforcement actions that revealed the extent and location of Gacha's drug assets. These efforts also uncovered documents disclosing that some of Gacha's assets were hidden in accounts in Switzerland and elsewhere.

Next, DEA and other law enforcement agencies in Europe and Latin America, working closely with the Colombian National Police, froze over \$80 million of Gacha's assets in bank accounts throughout the world. Large amounts of Gacha's financial empire were forfeited and disbursed to governments aiding in the cooperative effort to bring him down. Over \$1.5 million was allotted to Colombia's government. This investigation and seizure represented one of the largest financial efforts in DEA's history and underscored the importance of attacking a cartel's financial holdings as well as its physical assets.

Rescheduling of Marijuana Denied (1989)

During the late 1980s, a small, but vocal, minority began supporting the wholesale legalization of drugs, particularly marijuana. However, in December 1989, DEA Administrator Jack Lawn overruled the decision of one administrative law judge who had agreed with marijuana advocates that the drug should be moved from Schedule I to Schedule II of the CSA. This proposed rescheduling would have allowed physicians to prescribe the smoking of marijuana as a legal treatment for some forms of illness.

Administrator Lawn maintained there was no medicinal benefit to smoking marijuana. While some believed that smoking marijuana alleviated vomiting and nausea experienced by cancer patients undergoing radiation treatment, scientific studies indicated otherwise. They showed that smoking marijuana did not benefit patients suffering

from glaucoma or multiple sclerosis. Additionally, it was found that smoking marijuana might further weaken the immune systems of patients undergoing radiation and speed up, rather than slow down, the loss of eyesight in glaucoma patients.

Research did show that pure delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), one of 400 chemicals commonly found in marijuana, had some effect on controlling nausea and vomiting. However, pure THC was already available for use by the medical community in a capsule trade named Marinol. For these reasons, and the fact that no valid scientific studies offered proof of any medicinal value to smoking marijuana, Administrator Lawn maintained the drug should remain a Schedule I controlled substance.

Operation Polar Cap (1989)

Operation Polar Cap involved two international organizations that were laundering the proceeds of cocaine sales by using false gold sales and wholesale jewelry businesses as cover. Between 1988 and 1990, the organizations laundered almost \$1.2 billion in drug proceeds. Operation Polar Cap led to the first conviction of a foreign financial institution, Banco de Occidente/Panama, for violating U.S. money laundering laws. As a result of the operation, over 100 people were arrested and more than \$105 million in assets, including currency, bank accounts, real estate, jewelry, gold, and vehicles, was seized. The money forfeited by the Banco de Occidente/Panama was shared with other governments, including Canada and Switzerland, which each received \$1 million.

Sylmar Seizure (1989)

On September 29, 1989, DEA raided a warehouse in Sylmar, California, seizing 21.5 tons of cocaine. The discovery presented the American public with irrefutable evidence of the enormous volume of cocaine coming into the country. The Sylmar warehouse amassed the huge stash because of a conflict between Colombia-based distributors and the Mexico-based group they had hired to transport the drug. The group from Mexico continuously transported cocaine to the warehouse but refused

to release it to the Colombian distributors until they were paid for their transportation services.

The Sylmar bust was the largest cocaine seizure in U.S. history. Colombian drug traffickers responded to the staggering seizure by changing the way they compensated transportation groups from Mexico; they began to pay Mexico-based smuggling organizations up to 50 percent of each cocaine shipment in product rather than cash. This compensatory shift radically changed the role and sphere of influence of Mexico-based trafficking organizations in the U.S. cocaine trade. Criminal groups from Mexico became transporters and distributors of cocaine.

DEA Headquarters Relocated (1989)

By the late 1980s, DEA's headquarters building at 1405 "Eye" Street, NW, in Washington, DC, was no longer large enough to house its increasing staff. In fact, many of the 1,500 Headquarters employees were already dispersed to 13 nearby buildings to accommodate the agency's continued growth.

The search for a new headquarters location included an evaluation of land in Arkansas and Mississippi, as well as abandoned military bases around the country. However, Attorney General Edwin Meese determined that DEA Headquarters must be located in close proximity to the Attorney General's offices. Thus, the location selected was Army Navy Drive in Arlington, Virginia. The new facility consisted of two buildings that provided 292,000 square feet of available space.

The relocation of Headquarters was the largest non-enforcement-related project ever undertaken by DEA or its predecessor agencies. The physical relocation began in May 1988.

Arrest of Noriega (1989)

Manuel A. Noriega and 15 defendants were indicted by a grand jury in Miami, Florida, on February 4, 1989. The structure of the RICO indictment alleged that Noriega was a drug facilitator for the Medellín cartel. He had used his position as commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces and the ruler of Panama to assist the Medellín cartel in



New DEA Headquarters, 1989.

shipping cocaine; procuring precursor chemicals for the manufacture of cocaine; providing a safe haven for cartel members following the assassination of Colombian Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara-Bonilla on April 30, 1984; and sponsoring the laundering of narco-proceeds in Panamanian banks.

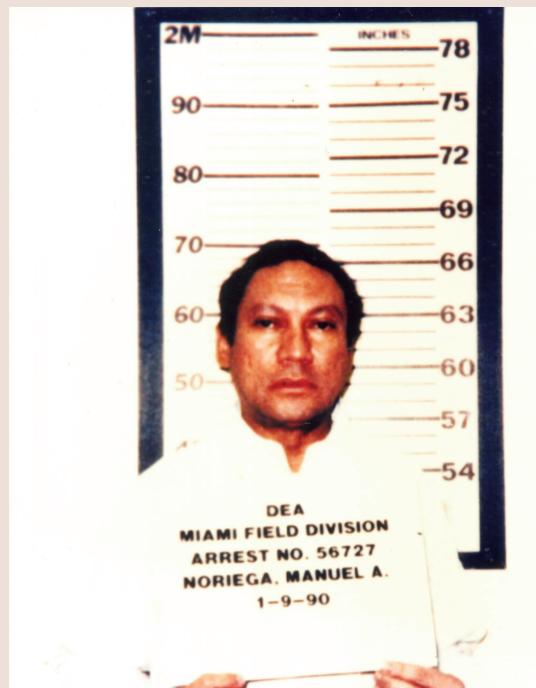
When the United States invaded Panama on December 20, 1989, Noriega eluded capture by the U.S. military for several weeks. Finally, he surrendered to DEA and was immediately transported to Miami to answer the indictment. Over the next 21 months, Enforcement Group 9 in Miami interviewed hundreds of individuals and reviewed reams of seized papers in the United States and Panama. In September 1991, the drug “Trial of the Century” began.

During the next 8 months, over 100 prosecution witnesses testified, including Carlos Lehder; former DEA Administrators Bensinger, Mullen, and Lawn; an ex-Panamanian attorney general; cartel leader Pepe Cabrera; and others. In supporting the prosecution, DEA had special agents deployed in 15 countries around the world, including

Panama, Colombia, Spain, Luxembourg, Germany, France, and Cuba.

Finally, on April 9, 1992, the jury returned a verdict of guilty on 8 of the 10 counts in the indictment. Noriega, who had become Panama’s political leader in 1988 after President Eric Arturo Delvalle was ousted, was convicted on racketeering and cocaine trafficking charges for protecting Colombian smugglers who had routed drugs through Panama. On July 9, 1992, Manuel Noriega was sentenced to 40 years in federal prison.

Nearly five years later, on April 6, 1998, Noriega failed to overturn his drug trafficking conviction and the 40-year prison sentence. His appeal contended that the drug cartel had paid \$1.25 million to a witness to falsely testify against him, and that the government must be held responsible for the alleged bribe. The U.S. Supreme Court, acting without comment, let stand a ruling that Noriega received a fair trial. The Noriega case, the most notorious drug trial in U.S. history, demonstrated to the American public the global scope of corruption that accompanied international drug smuggling.



General Manuel Antonio Noriega surrendered to U.S. authorities on January 3, 1990.

Aviation

DEA's Air Wing program expanded rapidly for nearly two decades. From 1975 to 1985, the number of Air Wing planes doubled, rising from 30 to 61. After a budget increase from \$1,310,00 in 1980 to \$3,760,000 in 1985, the Aviation Division anticipated purchasing more aircraft and increasing the Air Wing's staff.

With the Air Wing's swift growth, the Addison facility quickly became inadequate. Operations had been separated among several buildings and security was a problem; the airport was located right on a street with public access to several ramps. In addition, airplanes were parked in the open, subject to vandalism. From 1986 to 1988, DEA's Air Wing searched for a secure location in Texas that would be equally accessible to DEA officials located on the east and west coasts. Texas was also an ideal location because of its proximity to Central and South America, where many Air Wing support operations were performed. The 12.3-acre site chosen for the new facility was adjacent to Alliance Airport, north of Fort Worth, Texas. It was spacious and accommodated future expansion. The new facility also offered greater security and included a guarded fence.

Training

Although DEA training had been conducted at FLETC in Glynco, Georgia, since 1981, Administrator Lawn wanted DEA to establish a unique training facility that focused specifically on drug law enforcement. Because FBI and DEA agents cooperated on many cases and would benefit from a degree of shared training, Administrator Lawn decided that a new training center should be located near the FBI Training Academy in Quantico, Virginia. Ultimately, he acquired 155 acres of land adjacent to the FBI Academy from U.S. Marine Corps Commandant Alfred M. Gray.

Originally the move was expected to take several months, with new classes not beginning until January 1986, but a special appropriation from Congress was earmarked for agent classes starting in 1985. Consequently, the move's pace was accelerated and DEA's Office of Training officially moved to Quantico on October 1, 1985.



Pictured at the EPIC groundbreaking ceremony in September 1987 are, from right to left: William I. Norsworthy, EPIC staff assistant; Larry L. Orton, EPIC SAC; Thomas G. Byrne, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Intelligence; and Fort Bliss staff.

Laboratories

In 1989, the Western Field Laboratory, under the leadership of Robert Sager, moved to a new location in San Francisco, California. The new laboratory featured 17,000 square feet of floor space and had benches for 16 chemists, special purpose instrument rooms, and natural light from several windows.

Technology

DEA's first office automation (OA) system was procured in 1986 for a contract cost of \$36 million. The operating system of this computer network provided DEA employees with email, word processing, spreadsheets, and other standard desktop tools. Based on its experience with the OA system, DEA grew to rely on automation tools to assist in all facets of the agency's day-to-day operations. The agency's computerization produced increased demands for more capabilities through the OA infrastructure.

El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) Dedication (1989)

To celebrate the opening of a new facility, EPIC held a dedication ceremony on February 22, 1989, in Ft. Bliss, Texas. The new installation was dedicated to slain DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena. Heartfelt remarks made by Dora Camarena, his mother, were the highlight of the ceremony.