

DEA Museum Lecture Series, The Intelligence Division's Role in Tracing the Rise and Fall of the Colombian Cartels, 11-17-11. Craig Estancona, Ben Sanborn, Jay Cliff & Pat Kerner.

Sean Fearn: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Good afternoon and thank you for joining us as we kick off our fall lecture series, here at the DEA Museum. On behalf of all of us on the museum staff, we want to welcome you. This is our ninth year for this program taking an insider's look at parts of DEA's history and the broader issues of drug trafficking and drug abuse for the benefit, not only of our employees, but also for the public in general. For this fall series, we're going to take a look at the DEA intelligence division and the work of DEA intelligence analysts. Our sincere gratitude to chief of DEA intelligence Rodney Benson as well as Doug Poole and especially Marilyn Wankel for their support and assistance with this fall series.

Two quick housekeeping items before we start. Out of courtesy to our panel and to your fellow audience members, if I could please ask you to silence your electronic devices. And then second, at the end of the panel discussion that we have this afternoon, we'll open it up for questions from our in-house audience. Please wait for a microphone from one of the museum staff to come to you, before you ask your question both so that, folks that are watching live on the internet throughout the world have a chance to hear what you're asking as well as so that we have the question for the transcript. Thank you for both of those.

The role of intelligence in drug law enforcement is critical, but it is a part of DEA that the public doesn't hear much about. Toiling largely behind the scenes, it is an unsung highlight of DEA. Arguably one of DEA's strongest assets is its global intelligence network. The DEA intelligence program helps initiate new investigations of major drug organizations, strengthens ongoing ones and subsequent prosecutions, develops information that leads to seizures and arrests and provides policy makers with drug trend information upon which programmatic decisions can be based.

Recently, DEA administrator Leonhart said it best at a graduation of intelligence analysts when she said, our intel analysts are “tracking national drug trends with research that is informed us on why, where and how we’re impacting traffickers and is helping us to assess trends that we’re in front of them anticipating next moves.” They’re making major breakthroughs in how we measure the time it takes to produce, transport and distribute cocaine. These new insights are producing results that allow us to attack the cocaine trade where it is most vulnerable. And side by side with special agents, intelligence analysts have debriefed sources and developed leads on financial networks that have laundered billions of dollars in drug proceeds annually.

Intelligence analysts have been an indispensable part of major operations in Mexico and along the southwest border. And finally, analysts are making the case against facilitators who help drug traffickers in business. The DEA intelligence program has grown and evolved significantly since its inception. From only a handful of intelligence analysts in domestic offices when DEA was created in 1973, the total number of analysts working worldwide is now over 800. Whether it’s tactical intelligence, investigative intelligence or strategic intelligence, DEA analysts are working daily. Today we’re going to go back in history for a little lessons learned opportunity and explore the role of DEA intelligence in the dismantling both the notorious Medellin and Cali drug cartels in South America in the 1980s and 1990s.

Joining us today are a group of panelist of four supervisory intelligence analysts who will walk us through these historic efforts against the Colombian cartels. And also how what was learned back then has influenced our intelligence efforts since. Together, and forgive me guys I’m going to throw you under the bus here, these four gentlemen represent over 110 years of DEA experience. Wow. So, let me introduce them to you before we get started. From our left, Ben Sanborn. Ben Sanborn began his career at DEA in July of 1979 in DEA’s office of intelligence.

In May of '86, reassigned to the New York field division unified intelligence division. June 1991, promoted to intelligence group supervisor in New York becoming

the first supervisory intelligence analyst in a domestic field division. In June of 1999 was promoted to become DEA's first field intelligence manager. In July 2004, Ben was transferred back to DEA headquarters to the office of special intelligence. And most recently, in July of 2010, reassigned to the DEA's office of national security intelligence. And he holds a degree in criminal justice from Northeastern University.

To his left, Craig Estancona. His first job with DEA was as a courier in Caracas, Venezuela, then called region 18 in 1975. After a break in service, he began as a library assistant at the DEA library in 1978. In 1983, he became an intelligence analyst in the cocaine investigations section here at DEA headquarters. He's also held positions in the financial investigations section, the targeted kingpin operations section, the office of special intelligence, the special operations division, the organized crime drug enforcement task force fusion center and now currently as a chief in the office of special intelligence at the fusion center.

To his left is Jay Cliff. Intelligence analyst Jay Cliff graduated from Sheppard University in 1983 with a master's degree at Virginia Tech in 1985. In '88, Jay was hired by DEA as a contractor and then subsequently entered on duty as an intelligence analyst back in 1990. Initially signed to DEA headquarters financial intelligence section, his subsequent assignments included the kingpin intelligence unit, the interagency policy unit, the methamphetamine and dangerous drugs unit and the office of special intelligence.

Finally last, but not least on our far left Patrick, my far left your far right, Patrick Kerner, who began his government service in 1979 as a second Lieutenant in the United States Army. He served in several units including the U.S. army intelligence school and the 10th and 7th special forces groups. Mr. [Kerner] joined the DEA in January 1991 and continued to serve in the U.S. Army Reserve. His first DEA assignment was to the Columbia cocaine intelligence unit at headquarters, uh, where he followed the Medellin cartel. I'm sure we're going to hear more about that today. When the targeted kingpin program began, Mr. [Kerner] was assigned to the Medellin cartel

unit, also served in the domestic cocaine investigations unit, the southwest border cocaine intelligence unit and in 1998 promoted to supervisory intelligence research specialist, unit chief at the southwest border cocaine intelligence unit.

Later selected to be the group's supervisor in the Washington field divisions, HIDTA investigative intelligence group and in December of 2006 Mr. Kerner retired from the U.S. Army Reserves as a Lieutenant Colonel and then in 2008 was selected for his current position as the Washington field division's field intelligence manager. I'm going to ask Ben to get us started and also remind you to please hold your questions to the end. Thank you.

Ben: Thank you. The one of the things I would like to say just starting right off is, you've heard from the experience of the panel is that for the intelligence side in analysts, we're just four of the many hundreds of people who would be up here. And really what we're going to have to do is sort of talk about our personal recollections. I think speaking for our panel members, we don't claim to be the four people who were instrumental in the cartels and, again, hundreds of intel analysts and thousands of people at DEA who are all part of that. But we need sort of like the sort of like our personal recollection in.

One of the ones that I'd like to start off with is going back as mentioned when you heard I started in DEA in the 1979. I was assigned to what was called at that time the operational intelligence section, the cocaine cannabis unit. Because back at that time marijuana was one of the two real drugs that DEA was looking at were, uh, marijuana and, uh, heroine with especially marijuana coming off the north coast of Colombia. And then cocaine because it was also Colombian were together in one unit. And that's just as the, uh, the cartels were really starting to expand. And eventually expanded out a little bit.

But, uh, at that time sort of setting the stage, it was just as cocaine was just becoming known as a drug going on through. And this, there were numerous challenges

again in that, the -- as an up and coming drug analyst like, we've seen as drugs have come up, sort of the challenges as we're starting to see the size of the cartels coming up. I think Craig can talk a little bit more about the sizes coming in.

Craig: Uh, yeah, uh, thank you, uh, to the DEA Museum for setting this up. And thank you for all attending. Uh, as Ben said, we're just, we're basically the, I don't want to say that dinosaurs going back to the, the, the '80's, but, uh, we are. And a lot of the -- as Ben once said, I think he said, "We've, we've been around since the Dead Sea was only sick." And so, it's a good thing to get some of these down for, for posterity. Hopefully, the newer generations of analysts, will take something, something from it if, if not to realize that, you know, things are, are going pretty well now. They're going in the right direction.

It wasn't always so, so much in the, where we were being overtaken in the early days. Um, in the introduction they mentioned I started out with DEA the first time with DEA, in Caracas, Venezuela as a courier. Let me clarify that. I was one of the good couriers. I was one of the guys who walked around with the handcuffs and briefcase and took around the classified documents. And that's when I first started to get a feel for DEA. DEA had only been in existence for two years. Uh, but I liked it. I, I liked the attitude. I like the way they did business. I, I like the way that even though we were the size of a postage stamp, nothing was too, too big to work on. And, and I think that's always stuck in my mind.

So, when I started looking for a real job after college, DEA was, pretty much my first choice. When I was first hired, they were hiring analysts, one by one. You basically had to wait. There were no bulk announcements or anything. You, you basically had to wait for someone, to retire or to get fired or to die, before a job opening, existed. And, I was fortunate enough to get one of those jobs. And, of course, I had grown up in Latin America. I spoke Spanish. So, DEA Intel promptly put me in the Southeast Asia strategic unit where I lasted one day and then they moved me over to the cocaine,

intelligence unit. And I've been involved with cocaine investigations pretty much since then since 1983 when I became an analyst.

Ben had mentioned in early years how we were geared up. Let say from the get go, uh, during those years '83 and, and before that heroine was still king. DEA was pretty much geared up to do heroine investigations. Uh, for lack of a better word, cocaine was treated as a kiddy drug and I don't mean that kids were using it, but it was like a junior drug to heroine. Uh, it wasn't even on the same drug schedule. It was glamorized in the media. It was, it was a rich man's drug. And there were a lot of these misconceptions that needed to be addressed. We knew very, very little about the Colombian traffickers, and yet we were getting flooded with information.

We also didn't have offices in some of the key cities, for example Medellin. Until Mike Cain opened up the office in Medellin we really weren't able to get too much information out of Medellin and, and that's where a lot of these traffickers were operating out of. And we also, we, we suffered from a lack of, of Spanish speakers. So, all of this the preconceptions, the atmosphere so to speak, in DEA and outside of DEA really weren't geared up to deal, uh, with the onslaught that we were about to face.

Ben: And it's and, uh -- but the one advantage that DEA did have which really helped out especially, we'll keep coming back to, within as intelligence analysts, is when the DEA was initially set up we had the central file room and was set up as a very user friendly. Of course, this is long before computerization. But one computer that we really had was a centralized indexing system where the names were indexed to let you know a file that you could find them in. But basically other than that, there was a whole lot of digging through files. But the advantage was everything in one place.

And I think that's probably one of the huge differences comparing that day to today is, most of the analysts were here in headquarters at the time because this is where the information was. There were numerous agents and analysts out in the field doing debriefings, but all the information ended up here. So, this is the one place where

you could look across files. It was long before there were any computers. There was, there was no file room where you could pull files from other offices. So, this was really the central area. As a, uh, I guess as an example, when I was TDY for a month in Bogota in 1983 there were only two intel analysts assigned to Bogota. And their centralized indexing system was actually on microfiche which got refreshed once every six months.

And, so, obviously with the office in Bogota would be aware of everything that was done down there would have their files. But they wouldn't be able to see files of activities of Colombian traffickers in New York, in Los Angeles, in Miami at a log that was put together in headquarters at the time. So, that's what a lot of the headquarters analysts worked on was just literally tons of paper trying to organize and categorize that paper. One of the things I talked about the differences for the 32 years that I've been on, about the first 16 were trying to get as much information as you could because information was dearly valuable.

The last 16 since computerization is trying to sort through all of the mountains and mounds of stuff that's available to find out what's truly valuable out of the needles and in, the needles out of a stack of needles so to speak. But the -- one of the things going back to when we first started realizing, there were some watershed moments that had come up. Uh, one of the things were spoken by the museum's series early was when Dick Bly spoke about Tranquilandia was definitely, you know, a place we had two labs that put out over 20 tons of cocaine was definitely a watershed.

And then in, within the United States for those who have heard of the Dadeland massacre, uh, with the 1979 where some traffickers were basically an armed war wagon pulled up and assassinated some other Colombian traffickers at Dadeland mall, the largest mall in Florida. And that's when people started really taking a look that this is an up and coming problem. We've got to start gathering information. And, again, Craig was one of the people who worked on a lot of the gathering of the info.

Craig: The system that we had back then it, it, it was called Pathfinder. Uh, and, uh, it was all a go back then. You could put in 10 names at a time and that would be at about, uh, 8:30 in the morning. Then you could go and have your coffee. You could go to lunch. You can come back in mid-afternoon and those 10 names, uh, would run. Uh, and then you would look at the, the, uh, whatever you had gotten out of the system, uh, and the job was just starting. As Ben said, now what you had to do was go downstairs. We had central files.

There was no electronic file room or anything like that. Uh, we would go down and you would get the files that you needed, literally bring them back to your desk, stack them up and start, start reading. Um, it was, uh, uh, it was, it was pretty laborious especially when you were, er, starting to work on someone, uh, like Jorge Ochoa or Pablo Escobar. And they were spread out over hundreds and hundreds of files and you had to dig them out and put them together when, when nobody else had previously done that.

Ben: Yeah, just having working with some of those files is a -- I put together several of them working with some of the other analysts. And one of the reasons we actually with the Pathfinder terminal he mentioned was sort of slow was entering into -- that was really DEA's first relational database where we could put in overt acts and would allow somebody, again, in the Los Angeles or Miami or Bogota, where they can actually log on also and see the over acts. But we would be primarily doing the entry here in headquarters. And, uh, since I was a horrible typist, I was one of the people who put together the IFR's, which is just combing through, uh, in the case of one of the Ochoa's at the time where in, uh, well I think well over 200 case files.

And then you would pull out every, every report that they were on, copy that report and then go through and have a separate section what was called an intelligence file review. One section was of just the associates so that could all be looked in one area. One section of just the, uh, the addresses associated with them. One section of the -- well, telecommunications back then there was one phone company. It was AT&T.

So, that was a little bit easier back then. And, uh, but it was in events where something, again, I guess I'll set the stage that, uh, you do right now where, uh, you would drop down, you would electronically download to, uh, Excel and you'd be done. What would take several analysts three and four weeks would be done in about 20 minutes now.

And that was one of the key manpower changes. And, again, down at headquarters because that's where the information is. And one of the things we started seeing again is as we do more and more of the debriefings out in the field is really the size of the extent of the organization who is -- when you look at especially Cali and Medellin cartels, they were just nothing even in the heroin world. There was just nothing of that size and scope and vertical integration. And, again, for the --

Craig: Uh, the, uh, the, again, going back to '83, '84, uh, I really enjoyed doing, uh, uh, debriefings probably above everything else. The alternative was [unintelligible] Pathfinder and be entering data. So, it was like, you know, debriefing, Pathfinder, who is not going to take the debriefing? And we did a lot of those. Um, and these were guys who -- in the beginning the debriefings that we did some of them were, were, uh, domestic, but most of them were, were overseas in Colombia, in, in third, uh, other countries. Um, but we started to build a, a picture. And what really stuck out, uh, in, in our minds was how far long in their wealth and their power, uh, the Colombian traffickers had become and we were, were basically unaware of the, the total, total scope.

We were hearing stories and, and -- the, the mainstream media, I believe Forbes and Newsweek, caught on to this a few years later. But we were, we were putting together stories that would have put virtually any of these guys, uh, as in the, you know, top 10 if not the top five, richest people in the world and nobody had ever heard of them. Uh, even, even the, the Colombians and Colombian law enforcement hadn't really heard of these people. We were getting stories from the debriefings as they were -- "Oh, yeah, you, you, that's a matter of fact. You know, he owns the world's largest branch or he owns, you know, he just bought a nine million dollar condominium in Miami Beach or in -- at first poo- pood these things, but you know what?"

Every single time when we started digging in the files, these stories that they were telling is like, "Oh yeah, you know, he's got 20 horses." They, they turned out to be absolutely true. It was a real eye-opener for us.

Ben: And then, going into some of that with just the immense -- well, you talk about Pablo Escobar's zoo or the Ochoa's was where their palomino horses and all that. It was just an immense wealth coming in. And we saw also that with the Cali cartel, which came along a little bit later with and Jay and Pat did a lot of work with the Cali cartel. He will probably explain a little bit about the same thing with their wealth. Plus they had a little bit of a twist that Jay can talk about.

Jay: Yeah, part of the Cali cartel was the Grajales faction. And that was two families that come together through a marriage and they were very different families. The Urdinolas clan was pretty much a typical Colombian family I believe. Whereas the Grajales family was this really, really well established business entity. Um, previous generations of that family had started a number of businesses in Colombia that proved to be very successful as legitimate businesses. And then as a new generation in that family came to be and began to grow into positions of authority within the family business structure, they started eyeball and drugs as a way to make more money.

And so, this younger generation sort of corrupted or hijacked some of the legitimate family businesses for trafficking purposes. And so, here we had folks that were wealthy at the time of birth, but still gravitated into the drug trade for, you know, more wealth. Whereas, I think you look at most of the kingpins from the '80's and '90's, most of them started with pretty humble beginnings. But the Grajales stand out as, as something very different from that. Pretty privileged upbringing, but still unable to resist the temptation to get into the narcotics trade and, of course, you know, they are masking more wealth through their drug dealing.

Ben: With that in the, uh, sort of the mention of the Cali and the Medellin cartels, there were -- one of the Medellin cartel there was a lot of, uh -- they ultimately were both, uh, obviously existed for as much profit as possible, but they worked a little bit differently in that, when I was here in headquarters having worked in some of the Medellin cartel, and especially another watershed moment was the murder of the Colombian minister of justice, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, when he was killed in 1984 - this was not that long after Tranquilandia - was really the first shot of the bow of the Medellin traffickers actively challenging the Colombian government. And there were numerous, uh -- basically what we refer to now as terroristic acts against the Colombian government.

And, as opposed to the Medellin cartel, excuse me, the Cali cartel was sort of a little bit more silent. They walked a little bit quieter. They were -- the term is sometimes more businesslike. Both operated like businesses, but they were, they really didn't want the notoriety. They'd rather sort of operate in anonymity and control the money. The Cali cartel, by then I'd moved up to New York and I saw from New York was sort of interesting, is they were very commanding and control oriented in terms of the United States operations. One of the things that was very interesting for them is I guess the Achilles weakness in one of the ways we were able to actually affect the Cali cartel, and, again, when I say we I mean all of DEA, not myself and a few colleagues, is, uh, the, uh, virtually the Cali cartel, the cells in New York, the only, the cell heads only knew each other.

None of the people in the cell knew anybody else in the other cell. But they were -- it was interesting. They were very tightly controlled even in terms of money. They would literally have to fax nightly. There each cell would have to fax back down into Cali what was going on, their expenditures. For instance, one of the common drops of the Cali people would do was with they would trade keys. It would be, uh, one car with a load of money, one car with a load of dope. The two drivers would meet and exchange keys in a diner somewhere and then they would each take the other car and that was the exchange. Very low key. They would actually account for the value of the car -- they would account for the salaries of the people and that would be going down.

In the very beginning, one of the things that the Cali people were not aware of is they didn't think that DEA had the ability to intercept faxes, although we did. And we were literally intercepting the nightly faxes, uh, coming out of New York. And what it really did was it really laid out the organization. They were so organized and made them a little bit easier to take down. The, uh, other thing that was sort of interesting -- I guess this is sort of trade craft from long ago that won't ever happen again is back in the days of beepers, uh, when you decide to beep where you can get the number, one of the things that, uh, virtually every group in the office in New York was working in Cali group with a cloned beeper. And, uh, and Intel what we had, we had the -- it was precious, uh, very precious to us for the phone company.

We had the reverse directory of pay telephones in New York. So, a call would come into the cloned beeper. Uh, the agents were, "Hey, where is this pay phone?" They'd said, "It's at the corner of 21st Boulevard and, and 18th Street in Queens." And a couple of agents would go racing out to location just start getting pictures of who those people were, again, to build up the dossier on everybody who was there. That was sort of like the Intel work actually supporting tactically the agents in the field working on that.

Craig: Oh, not to belabor the point about that, but '84 and '85 were, pretty big eye-openers and a lot happened in '84 and '85. We, in '85 we had to take over the minister of justice building in Colombia. Uh, now we know that a lot of that was done at the, the request of the traffickers in order to get their, their records, uh, out of there. We, we had Tranquilandia, which the Museum had a briefing on before. We had the Barry Seal investigation, which showed how the Medellin cartel was able to pretty much buyout entire, uh, governments outside of Colombia.

Uh, there were a lot of things that stuck out, but, uh, domestically we were seeing -- uh, I remember that DEA Miami had an investigation in, in '84 where they, they went into a warehouse and they found a 17 year old kid and he was running the computers for one of the, the Medellin cartel cells. And it real- - back then they, you know,

computers were about the size of a Volkswagen and you used the mag cards, uh, uh, and he was 17. He's the only one that knew how to use them. And he immediately flipped and he gave over the records for just that one cell. Now remember, Medellin cartel could have had many 10 cells in Miami, 40 in Los Angeles, you know, three in New York, but this was just one cell. And he gave over the records, which were accounts.

Within that one cell there were 107 accounts and the Medellin cartel was taking in about \$500,000.00 a week in 1984 from that one cell. Um, I did another investigation where we, from one of the, uh, cartel leaders, we got the a major credit card, the records from a major credit card. Um, it was under an assumed name, but, uh, when we looked at the records -- you and I when we, when Visa, MasterCard, American Express, when, when we get a, a card, they tell us what are credit limit is. They'll tell you \$25,000.00, \$50,000.00, whatever. Uh, this, the company had written the, the cartel leader a letter saying, "Because of your, your credit and your deposits, what would you like your credit limit to be?" And he put down five million dollars." Which is what he had.

He had five million dollar, uh, credit card, which he used. Uh, they were doing things like buying, uh, entire two entire floors, in casinos, in Las Vegas at a time for, for, you know, two or three weeks. And the credit card was paid absolutely up to date. So, it didn't raise any eyebrows. The average payment was about \$30,000.00 a month on the, on the credit card. And just to give you an idea -- and these are not extreme examples. These are examples that we were getting, uh, pretty much every week.

Ben: I can throw in for the money, uh, going back to the the Cali cartel is the most money that I've ever seen in one location, and I must say I didn't have anything to do with seizing it, but we did see it before the press conference, was in, uh, a Cali cartel investigation in New York in 1989 keyed on a company called Zoom Furniture, which was the front which was moving money for the cartel. And, the New York drug enforcement task force, hit with a search warrant and out of the Zoom Furniture truck, they took 19, uh, 19.8 I believe million dollars, 19 plus million dollars and got some more

money in the locations for a little bit over 20 million dollars, which was then just piled out of the press conference in New York. I'm sure there are plenty of pictures of it around. But, again, the, uh -- and it was a watershed in terms of the traffickers did learn from that is not to put 20 million dollars in one place.

They had to be a little bit more circumspect about the piles up. But, uh, uh, the, it's -- I don't talk a lot about my work in the outside with friends and relatives, but I can say that I've seen 20 million dollars in one place in person. And, uh, again, it gives an idea. It's, uh, it's funny when you see it. You just sort of lose sense for the, uh, agents and analysts out here who had been worked, this kind of stuff every day. You see that kind of money just, it sort of loses reference to an end. But one of the things that Craig alluded to also was the, was the records. And, uh, all of us here worked extensively with these, with seized records, which is along with the debriefings is probably as a part of anything else we've got. And I know that both Craig and Pat worked with tons of records.

Patrick: Surely after I began in 1991, uh, they began doing raids on the cartels. Uh, they were U.S. government agencies in conjunction with the Colombian national police. Uh, they would go in to targeted locations, seize as many records as they could. Uh, they'd ship those out to DEA headquarters, would copy them, catalogue them and then would spend weeks, teams of analysts poring through these documents. And, again, everything was by hand. Nothing was scanned or electronic at all. And would just look for accounts, anything that was actionable that we could then feed to somebody to take some kind of action against those cartels. One raid I think had about 10 boxes of documents.

Jay: Yeah, and this actually goes back to something Craig said earlier about the number of Spanish speakers. So, you can picture, you know, just boxes of documents removed from a lawyer's office or a banker's office or from just a drug trafficker's home. Boxes and boxes of random documents and they're coming up here on a plane and they're hustled over here and they're doled out to the analysts to pore through them.

And most of us don't speak a lick of Spanish, okay? And we're sitting here trying to make heads or tails out of this stuff and we're constantly running to people like Craig, you know, "What does this mean? What does this say?" It was kind of a difficult thing for us. We had this great windfall of information and yet we sort of really lacked the infrastructure to exploit it well.

And we did the best we could with it. We, we did get a lot of great stuff out of it I think each and every time we did one of these things, but, I think each and every time we did one of these things. But it just kind of goes to show the growing pains. You know, we really weren't set up to do that sort of thing.

But as an agency, we just kind of plowed through it. And I think we learned some really valuable lessons about the, the importance of disrupting the normal course of business for these organizations. We weren't trying to arrest anybody. We weren't trying to seize any dope. We were just trying to get into their, their business and take documents and let them wonder, "What is it that we now know? What is it that we have in front of us that we're exploiting?" And I think it really caused these organizations an awful lot of heartburn. Uh, maybe not so much they knew that they had people like me trying to read Spanish, but, uh, I think it, it was a valuable lesson for DEA that that disruption of these criminal organizations was as valuable sometimes as seizing dope or making, you know, some arrests.

Craig: The proof was in the pudding. So, okay, in one year, um, I believe it was '89, '87, DEA had a domestic seizure that was a record in Sylmar, California. They seized about 20 tons of cocaine, out of a warehouse. And, of course, we're doing the, the victory dance, you know, we were putting the cartels out of business. And, there was hardly a peep, out of the -- it was like they didn't care like, uh, you know, "Hey, we'll make more. Don't worry about it." Um, and yet the, the raids that, uh, Jay were, is talking about targeted primarily money launderers in Colombia. They were well thought out.

They weren't high-level money launders because the idea was just to, uh, to, for, to disrupt. And, uh, you would have thought that we, we set off a nuclear, the DEA set off a nuclear explosion. The airwaves were buzzing. Uh, people couldn't believe it. You know, the -- well, imagine coming into your office in the morning and you're, all your drawers are empty and your overheads are empty and you don't even know who to call or who, in the case of a, a money launder, who to pay. The disruption was, uh, was fantastic and, and actually very satisfied to tell you the truth. Um, and it kind of paved the way for raids of that kind, in the future.

Ben: I think, again, where Craig brings up a good point, and now it's, you know, everybody knows now follow the money. It's almost, you know, drilled right into everybody from the first day of the, of whichever academy you attend. But, uh, back at that time it's realizing, again, there was such a focus and take away dope that will hurt them, that you realize it's, it's not the dope. It's the taking the records, hit the infrastructure and then, of course, one you started, especially the money launderers, once you really started pinning on the money that hurt twice as bad because that's why the reason they're in the business in, in the first place.

And I think one of the things that came out of this there's, there's lots of it was mentioned starting off with lessons learned, was when we started getting those volumes of documents is -- it wasn't long after that then DEA started creating basically doc x teams, the teams to come in examine documents would have the right skills, the right equipment. And then it was probably one of the most important things to help justify additional relational databases, some of the systems that we have now either the ones we created ourselves or the ones that we've adapted from, uh, off the shelf software. And that, again, because it wasn't changing, it wasn't say a small heroin organization where everything was cash hand to hand and they went out of the way to not keep records that way.

They couldn't -- there wouldn't be anything to talk about to huge corporate level cartels that like any other huge bureaucracy had to keep lots of records, had to have

lots of operators. And we found out that was, that was extremely effective of hitting them as opposed to you would have a small operator wouldn't have something like that.

Patrick: And that's a major change from how it is today because everything is electronic. It's very easy to hide those records where it was, it was difficult to hide a box of, you know, file cabinets full of records back then. So, it's, it's more difficult in some respects today even though there is more technology to attack those kinds of things.

Ben: Yeah. In fact, probably it wasn't the first doc x teams and the stuff you guys were working on. You could probably put all those records, boxes of records and a maybe like two cell phones now and then encrypt it, lock it and then put on a special thing that if somebody tries to break in, it disappears. So, you don't have that advantage of you can't stop somebody from hauling records out of your office. So, technology helps us on one side, but then it hurts on the other when the bad guys adopt it. Yeah, that's definitely one of the changes I'm seeing. And also, a lot of this was at this time there were not a lot of wire taps as opposed to, uh, in this day and age when, uh, so much is coordinated through SOD.

Most of this was still being done through DEA headquarters because there was a wiretap centric. It was all either debriefing information and centric ending up in headquarters the mentioning stuff like all the records and stuff, the copies and everything would come into headquarters because most of the analysts were here. Then we figure 25, 30 years from now there will be a presentation about SOD back in the days when we used to run all those wires and deconflict and, uh, but that's just, uh, - again, it's sort of an explanation of how intel did it at a different time. One of the things that one of the things we want to talk about was what was watershed moments, things that we really saw change.

And this was, again, really not as much about Intel, but probably the single biggest change that we saw was as DEA became effective against the cartels and they were starting to get indicted within the United States and some were actually captured

and serving trial, was the one thing that they really feared was extradition. Uh, they, they did not want to do time in the United States. One of the things that's just as a side - Uh, I'll steal some of your thunder here that I saw with Cali up in New York. One of the things that Cali did, because that was just started to use some of the first wires were being done on the Cali cells. Or if you had a really good source would go in and you could get undercover deeply into one of the cells. If everybody in the cell got indicted, they'd all get locked up and all have, you know, very high bails.

One poor fool got the short straw. The Cali people, at least in New York, they always made one person go to trial so that the government would have to lay out its entire case. How did they get into us? Did they have a wire? Who was the snitch? What did they do? How did they get in? So, we -- they were very, very practiced that counter intelligence in that way trying to figure out what we were doing and always exposes. So, the government had to lay everything out instead of everybody's [pleaing]. Now, the other ones were bailed out, you know, like they took off on their multi-million dollar bail. But there was somebody who always with the government had to lay out the case. And, uh, but the -- as we moved on, again, just sort of, uh, fearing extradition, there was a, a huge amount of violence in Colombia so there wouldn't be extradition. But that really sort of changed the landscape of the Colombians wanting to deal in the United States.

Craig: And, uh, and, uh, that was one of the things we heard in every debriefing and every, every time they would have, have a pro- offer, uh, even very publicly there -- I still have a poster somewhere, where the extraditable basically threatened Colombia. And what would happen to Colombia they would withdraw their funds from the country. They would move to other countries. They would create violence. But it, it came out in the newspapers in Colombia, if they passed extradition -- extradition in Columbia has a history. It was on. It was off. It was on. Now, they're, of course extraditing individuals from Colombia. But, I, we were hearing in virtually every debriefing, that, that was their worst nightmare. They knew that if they got put in in jail in, in anywhere, but the U.S., chances are pretty good that their life wouldn't change much at all.

Uh, as a matter of fact, it might have even saved them some money because now they had their security paid for. But if they came to the States, they knew that law enforcement they really weren't going to cut any major deals and they were going to serve some serious time. Uh, and that, that drove a lot of their actions everything from the violence to their movements. Um, we even noticed entire geographic shifts. When I first started working investigations almost everything was coming through the, through the Caribbean. That was the shortest distance between two points a straight line. That's what they were doing at the end of the States.

Um, when they found out, DEA was beefing up it's presence and, that we were working with the governments in the Caribbean, they shifted to Central America. And you can -- it's almost a very visible shift because things started drying up in the Caribbean as far as their roots that, that they had. Uh, when things -- they're like mercury. You press on them here and they go somewhere else. Uh, when things got hot in the Caribbean they moved up to Mexico. And that in itself was a, a major shift. We, again, from debriefings, we know, that the major traffickers they were, they were sick of having their pictures in the paper.

They were sick of Colombia getting a bad rap. They were, they were, you know, sick of being targeted and it was a, a concern of decision on their part to say, "Alright, you know what we're going to do? We're going to take our loads into Mexico and if anybody wants to come down from the United States and pick them up or if anybody wants to go from Mexico and take it to the United States, so be it. At least it's not going to be our pictures in the newspaper anymore." And that was actually very successful.

Ben: And that is another watershed, you know, as we started to see that as a little bit of a shift. And DEA also began building a lot of momentum in terms of created a different, a different strategies and going on. And also, not just DEA, but also the U.S. government. And both Jay and Pat worked on a -- they were the first coming in working on as the ground floor in the kingpin strategy.

Patrick: When I, again, when I started at DEA I was in just a regular cocaine unit before the TKO, days emerged. And so, when I walked in, the Medellin cartel was kind of on the run. Uh, two of their primary members had been killed in the last year and a half. And the Ochoa's were getting ready to surrender. Uh, there was talk about Pablo Escobar perhaps surrendering. And and so, the focus shifted dramatically in our unit to starting to look real heavily at the Cali cartel. And, in fact, I was the only analyst at that point looking at the Medellin cartel.

Well, Pablo Escobar eventually turned himself in, went to a very nice prison that he had built and then he spent some months there and decided he didn't like it so he left. Uh, and then the Medellin cartel became busy again. And that's why during the TKO days, there was a unit dedicated towards following the Medellin cartel. Uh, Pablo Escobar spent about 16 months on the run from authorities before he was actually finally killed. Uh, and that was kind of the beginning of the TKO days for me.

Jay: Yeah. For me, I started out in the financial intelligence group, which, kind of like Craig, going to strategic Asia. On the first day on the job, I went to my boss and said, "What am I doing here? You know, I got a couple of college degrees. I never took a single class in accounting or anything to do with finance. What am I doing here?" And that was lesson one for liking DEA and I was told by my boss, "I scream the loudest so I got the next person in the door which was you. So, you know, welcome." So, I actually had the, the benefit of working the Cali cartel from the financial side prior to the formation of the TKO strategy.

So, aside from getting over the shock of having to do financial intelligence and not knowing what the heck it was, afterwards it was, it was sort of a real boom for me because I had worked these targets before. I had seen the different side of their organizations before TKO came along. And once it did, I sort of shifted a little bit, worked the same organizations and, but got to see some, some other aspects of it. So, for me, it was a very, you know, fortuitous thing, getting into that. I got to say this though that back in those days it seemed like headquarters reorganized every two to

three years like clockwork. So, you could be doing heroin, you know, for a couple of years and then we'd have a huge reorganization where everybody sort of got shuffled and put into new groups with new focuses and things that sort of complement the current strategy.

And you might find yourself doing methamphetamine, you know, a year later or you might find yourself doing financially [unintelligible]. So, I sort of fell into the TKO thing just by virtue of one of these reorganizations. But, again, for me it was a very fortunate thing because I knew some of the players. Um, but I think at that time, you know, we knew the top, the very top echelons of the Cali cartel as being a Rodriguez Orejuela brothers and Jose Santa Cruz. And everybody else was sort of a second tier player. And I think we weren't quite as knowledgeable about the second tier players as we would have like to have been.

And so, even though we knew who the top, the absolute top guys were, once you started going down that ladder, uh, a rung or two things started getting increasingly fuzzy. And that was one of the things that sort of came out of TKO. We, we began to learn who these people were and what their roles where and who they were more closely aligned with and who they had issues with within the Cali cartel.

Ben: Again, I think that was one of the advantages of the, uh, of course, with any strategy, but especially coming out of the lessons learned out of both Medellin and Cali cartels is that you really got to take out, and it takes a lot time, but develop and, you know, what has gone into, uh, the way that we categorize organizations now where you look to the whole organization. Obviously you were aware of who was at the top, but, - and, and, again, it goes like years ago, everyone wanted to pick off the top guy. You know, hopefully you'd get promoted.

You pick off the -- we realized too that these organizations are vertically integrated enough so that you really want to take out as much as you can, not only the top, top leadership, but you want to do more than just create promotional opportunities

for the mid-level leadership, but also take them out, take out the distribution, uh, cells. And that's really, again, going into, going into today with some of the ways we categorize the top trafficking organizations and the way that a multi-agency special operations division really organizes and tries to take out the entire organization and deconflict so that all agencies work in the same players throughout the now literally throughout the world. And I think that's probably one of the key lessons that we've learned that so much information available and to take all of that out. But a lot of it was learned over a great length of time.

And there is a -- looking back on myself as far as the -- it's just nothing when you get into an organization that's big, there is nothing you can just do a few wire taps and get out and, uh, take down. I think it was probably the thing is when you see one of these global organizations is there is just so much to them that, uh, again, we can work quicker now with, uh, automation. But also, they can work a lot more efficiently too especially with global communications at the, press of a button as opposed to the way they had to communicate 20 and 30 years ago. It would sort of be one of the lessons learned. I'd turn around for everybody else for the, you know, what they sort of learned from their experience.

Patrick: I think -- our focus was different. It was more on who the members were I think rather than how they communicate. It was -- and we relied a lot on debriefings and, and document analysis. Whereas, today, I think we focus a lot on the technology piece. And, and that's important because they're moving much quicker. Uh, members are perhaps less important. Uh, you know, names come and go. I think, but the communications are what gets us there immediately. Um, but I'm not sure that we -- I mean, the informants and talking to sources is still really an important tool.

Jay: I think this goes back to what Ben said earlier about, you know, the first half of your career you're looking for information and the second half of your career you're trying to find useful tidbits in the amount of information. It's like instantly available to you today. Um, and that was, you know, that was true back then. Back then we didn't have

as much information, you know, by far compared to what's available to us today. And that's kind of like it's one of the lessons learned is back then we had what we had and we focused on what we had. And today we have so much available to us, that it's almost like, you know, we have to kind of reset our compass a little bit I think and try to bring all the intel out of what's available to us already.

You know, people are always asking about, "Hey, I heard this agency has this database or I heard this is a, a service that's available." It's almost like everybody's got data envy that if I only had somebody else's dataset, I could do great things. If I only had access to something else, I could, I could solve the world's problems. And I think one of the things that we might want to think about once in a while is going back to what we have readily available to us and asking ourselves the tougher questions. You know, what can I get out of this and what can I do with this? Not what can I get access to, you know, by agitating for it with, you know, higher ups. Because we're really focused on what was essentially physically in the file room here.

You would go down a hallway here and analysts would just have literally stacks of case files in their pods that they would be attaching paperclips to and stickies or things they thought were important. You know, it was a very paper driven, very manual process. But, you know, people really did make an awful lot of connections based on that stuff and they did determine things, not because they, they had a bazillion, you know, gigabytes of data at their fingertips, but because they took what was available to them and they really, really looked at it closely. I think that's something that we really learned in the TKO process because there were many, many, many questions we couldn't answer about these organizations. We knew who the players were for many instances, but how they were doing it and maybe some of the, uh, other things that these guys were, were considering doing, we had a lot of questions.

But you go back to debriefings and you read through those things and here were all these clues about where these guys were thinking about expanding to, or how they were thinking about establishing a, new route, you know, through some, you know,

portion of the world. And it was all right there, but you really had to look at it and, and distill it. And that's kind of hard to make yourself sit and distill information from the data that's available to you today because there is just more stuff to look at constantly.

Craig: In talking about, you know, these investigations, they really -- what we found out, uh, they really are long term investigations. Just as an example, Pat and I, with the Escobar investigation, that, that was, from the DEA's perspective, that was about a decade long investigation. Uh, it actually went back farther, but I'm talking about from the time he was first indicted. Um, and even the way the cartels, the way the prosecutors handled the indictments on the cartels were different. In the case of the Medellin cartel, they decided that they waited until they could have one indictment, one invaluable indictment against all the heads of the cartel and include them in there.

A lot of that had to do with they were trying to avoid discovery issues and everything else. In the case of the Cali cartel, there were various indictments against the heads of the cartels. But the point is, it's a very long term thing if you're going after, someone of, that, the [unintelligible] and has that many people at his disposal. Um, some of the things that, that we learned is there is no such thing as a case on a plate when it comes to a, a [sea plot] or a cartel or later a TKO. Uh, you're not going to get something where just, you know, poof you decimated the organization. It's a methodical thing and very rarely does it go from the top down as, as Ben and -- sometimes that just creates a promotional opportunity for someone. If they got Escobar right from the start, it wouldn't have done away with the organization.

They would have continued in one way shape or form. So, we had to target basically from the bottom up so that we came up through the lieutenants and, and through the, his trusted advisors and through his family members until we actually he, we rode all of the support they had and then the Cali cartel and the Colombian national police were, were all enemies of his, uh, as well. But even with, with that massive

amount of, uh, manpower and resources dedicated to one individual and one organization, it still took about a decade.

Ben: Yeah. And I think just to, to follow up and, again, the lessons learned from theirs. I think there is one lesson also that, uh, in which should always be remembered as, as things change. Again, we're sort of in an age of instant communication and instant gratification. And, uh, how many years of experience did you say we had up here together?

Facilitator: 110.

Ben: And some of the people here in this room who have the misfortune to be part of my section have to hear every now and then was, "When I started there were no cell phones. There were no personal computers. There was only one phone company." And obviously, the world has evolved since then. But probably one of the single biggest things that gave us the information to take down all these cartels were the detailed debriefings. So, it wasn't -- not everybody was looking up to, uh, get their 11, 12 and 13 by setting up a wire instantly. It's, uh -- upstairs in my office if I could find it, I have a 102 page debriefing from years ago. The reason I saved it is somewhere down the road nobody will ever believe that somebody actually sat down and did a debriefing that was 102 pages on an investigative report.

I think that's one of the things, and that goes back to the sources, that is, as many -- the life blood of the agency always has been a drug law enforcement from the very get go has been your sources because they're really letting you know what's going on. You can go back into the old adages of better to have one person in the enemies camp than 1,000 soldiers outside of it. That sort of thing. And I think that's one of the things the DEA will always need to remember that that's really the bread and butter for taking down any organization is being able to know from the inside. And that means sources and that means strong debriefings of those sources. And one thing we sort of

like to finish up with, we sort of talked about a long of, uh, what advice would we give to the analysts who are coming along after us?

And one would be again, sort of an age where you can pretty much get, uh, 110 channels on TV instantly, would be the sort of the advice that I would offer out. Well, for one, it's a good gig. I mean, if I had to look back over 32 years and I don't think I've done the same thing every day twice. There, you know, some days are better than others, but there, there are some of those days of great interest. Like I said, I can still tell the story about seeing, 20 million dollars on a table. Uh, not related to this, but I was actually in the room on the first meeting when I was doing drug related terrorism, of Kiki Camarena is missing. It's a day that I will never forget. And so, it's a great job. You'll work in some things and then you're working some things that seem like they're going to take forever. But if, uh, it's the kind of thing where if you stick with it, you'll find that it's extremely rewarding.

Craig: Words of advice I'd give to newer analysts would be the same words I first got from my very first boss except I'll, I'll cut out the dirty words. He basically said, "What we all know anyway - we're all over, you know, 21. He said, "Do the right thing." He said, "In your heart of hearts if it doesn't feel right, then, then don't do it. Take that high road and, always know that, uh, you're, you're in the side of good. There really is a good and an evil. We're the good guys. They're the evil guys. We're going to win in the end." He said, "Have a little bit of patience and have a little bit of innovation and always do the right thing." And that's have some passion for your work. That's what I would advise newer analysts.

Jay: Yeah. I have to, to agree with both what Ben and Craig have said. I know I didn't, I didn't grow up saying, "Boy, on day I want to be an intel analyst for DEA." Um, I backed into this job. I didn't even know these positions existed. I just sort of fell into it. And am eternally grateful that I did because I've had a lot of fun. I've had a lot of opportunity to do things, things I never imagined I would be able to do in a government job. DEA has held those opportunities out to me. And I suspect, you know, you're all

going to find yourselves in similar positions. Um, my only advice would be when you have an opportunity offered up, if you're not sure what to do, my advice would be, you know, throw caution into the wind and take it.

Some of my best experiences have, have been situations where, you know, I was sitting on the fence or, and I was "volun-told" I was doing it. There is no longer it was an opportunity. But, you know, you learn things. You meet people. You go places. And if, if you do that and you, you take the high road, like Craig says, when you're done with your career you can look back on it and say, "You know, I'm proud of what I did." I have something that I can point to and say I was a part of that. And I think that really counts for something as opposed to getting to the end of the career going, "I don't know what I did with the last 30 years, but I'm glad I'm done." You know, that's not a position anybody wants to find themselves in.

Patrick: I would say that DEA is a very different organization than when I joined a little over 20 years ago. Uh, it's changed and it continues to change. Uh, some of it because of technology. Some of it because we've had to change. Uh, but, you know, I've seen over the years people very reluctant to accept that change or to get on board. And that, so, that would be my advice is embrace the change, go with it. You know, make the best of it. And we don't always make the right decision, but, you know, eventually we get there.

Ben: I was going to say, and I just like to, uh, something if you want to catch either Craig or I in the hallway offline, we'd be more than happy to tell you about nwhen we had to go up brief administrator [unintelligible] instantly on a phone call on the Pablo, Pablo Escobar, Nicaragua case. It's a good story. And once the camera is off we can tell it. But with that, I would like to open up if there is anything for the panel or if you have any questions for anybody here on the panel.

Male Voice: Were the analysts leading the direction of what you were doing or did it come from the top or did they have any special knowledge or -- how did you figure out which way you were going or how you were doing what you were doing?

Ben: I would say to start off it was, it was teamwork in terms of everybody had their role. I mean, certainly as analysts we can't, you know, we never try to take credit for all the things that the special agents were doing out in the field. But, you know, through the jungles of Colombia or, uh, all the people who were assigned to Bogota. I only spent 30 days in Bogota so I can't claim to all of the work there. But for basically it was, uh, at the higher levels with the, uh, with the operations division working with Intel would have an idea. And it, it was also, especially the field offices, the analysts would work closely with the agents. Uh, here in headquarters we worked a little bit differently, but it was always in support of what the, in the operations division.

So, it's, it's sort of -- it's funny because the -- and someone especially once you get on the TKO, there is a whole strategy down and these are the main targets. Then everybody would focus their efforts at Intel. We might be looking at books and records. Whereas, on the of the agents on their side of the house, of course, would be what would be formulating enforcement strategies and how they were actually -- because they were the pointy end of the stick how they're actually going to go get them if they're domestic or work with the counterparts to get them foreign. And then we would try to work and say, uh, like with the TKO, provide as much information as possible for them to have available to them. I don't know if you take that as a characterization as --

Jay: Yeah. I think that the teamwork thing was definitely - especially during TKO, the teamwork thing really was sort of the mantra because the way the TKO units were, were organized was that you had basically a group of agents and you had an intel group. And they really just worked together as one large group on their particular target. And so, you were colocated with one another and everything that Intel was doing was being done hand and glove with the agents and vice versa. It really was, uh -- you know, I got to say flat out. You know, I'd be sorry if I didn't. It was a great time to be at in Intel, at

headquarters. Uh, there was a real energy to it all. Um, things were happening virtually every day. It, but it was based on the fact that everybody was on the same page.

Male Voice: You talked about the situation where they didn't want to be extradited to the U.S. Could you comment on the impact that being designated under the IEPA program had and how intel played a role in that.

Craig: Oh, yeah. Act -- actually I had that in my notes and didn't get around to it. Um, uh, IE and some of the other treasury department, -- the DEA was very involved with setting up IEPA, which, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe IEPA was set up primarily to target the businesses or the domestic businesses so that they could not do, conduct transactions with any of the trafficker owned businesses. It was actually sanctions against domestic companies, but primary Colombia. And then, uh, there was a, a successor to that. The one that's reported to the president every year that, uh, kind of opened it up to traffickers and terrorists.

From our point of view, and from the things that we heard from wire taps, from debriefings, from all, it was very, very successful, pleasantly successful. We had even some of the family members like the, the Cali cartel, uh, in more open forums complaining because they couldn't even cash a check say to buy auto parts at the dealership that they were working on or new supplies for the pharmacies that they, that they owned. Uh, so, uh, from my point of view, and then having been in financial, I, IEPA was a very, very pleasant surprise as was most of those treasury department programs.

Jay: And actually, if I could jump in here for just a second, I think this kind of goes back to that idea, uh, that we discussed a little bit with the raids, with the disrupting these organizations. You can't always just grab these people. And so, I think we've learned and we've gotten better and better at it over the years that if you can't just grab them, then you got to find ways to, to limit their maneuvering room and IEPA certainly was, uh, was one of those things. And I think we just got smarter about, you know,

either crashing some other tools for toolbox or sort of using the ones that were already in there in a more effective way. Uh, that's a, that's a very good question. That's an, uh, important point.

Ben: Alright. Everybody's had enough.

Facilitator: Last call, no one else has any questions? Well, Ben, Craig, Jay, Pat, thank you very much for taking time today to, talk to us about the Medellin and Cali cartels. We have a small token of appreciation that the DEA educational foundation, has provided, CFC 17-007. Let me offer an invitation both for those who are here in the audience today as well as those watching on the worldwide web that two weeks from today on December 1st we will hold the second of our fall lectures on the intelligence program. December 1st 11:00 Eastern time. Again, gentlemen, thank you for your time and you all have a good day.

End of recording.