

The Washington Post

Mayhem Crosses the Border With Informers

U.S. Agents Recruiting Mexican Drug Figures

By William Booth
Washington Post Foreign Service
Thursday, August 27, 2009

EL PASO -- José Daniel González was living the sweet life in America. He bought the \$365,000 two-story Mediterranean with the tile roof and swimming pool. He started a trucking company, was raising a family. But on a Friday night in May, he was executed in his front yard -- eight shots, tight pattern, close range.

According to police detectives, González knew the man who ordered his killing. He also knew the man who stood on his lawn and watched him die. These things are often personal, especially among high-level drug traffickers.

A gangland-style slaying is no big news across the river in Ciudad Juarez, the bloodiest city in [Mexico](#), where more than 1,300 people have been killed this year and only a handful of cases have been solved, despite the presence of 10,000 soldiers and federal police officers as part of President Felipe Calderón's war on drug cartels.

But in El Paso, where local leaders boast how safe their city is and the 12 homicides this year have almost all been solved, the González slaying was as disturbing as it was sensational. For people here, the blood splashed on a pretty American street was a jarring sign that Mexico's drug violence is spilling across the border into U.S. suburbia.

Most unsettling for many, especially El Paso police officials, was that both González and the man accused of ordering his killing turned out to be ranking drug traffickers from the notorious Juarez cartel, as well as informers for the U.S. government.

"So this is how these people end up in our country," said El Paso police Lt. Alfred Lowe, the lead homicide detective and a 29-year veteran whose team made the arrests in the González case. "We bring them here."

As a spectacular wave of drug violence washes over Mexico, the Obama administration, the U.S. Congress and leaders in the Southwest states are spending billions of dollars and massing thousands of agents to keep the chaos from crossing the border. But in order to fight the drug traffickers, federal anti-narcotics agents have brought Mexican cartel members north of the border, to use them to gather intelligence and build cases.

That has also led to friction between U.S. law enforcement agencies. El Paso Police Chief Greg Allen, who lives close to the González home and heard the shots the night of the slaying, said he has complained to federal counterparts about a lack of cooperation and information sharing. Allen told reporters that he raised those complaints in meetings with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, known as ICE, which, according to police and charging documents, arranged for González's visa so he could live in the United States.

Lowe said ICE agents were uncooperative during the investigation, misleading El Paso officers by failing to provide accurate names, photographs of suspects and timely intelligence that might have helped solve the homicide more quickly.

"We've never worked well with ICE," Lowe said.

ICE officials declined to comment on the specifics of the González case or the conduct and cooperation of their agents. "As a matter of policy, we don't confirm or deny confidential sources or sources of information," said Richard Rocha, spokesman for ICE in Washington. "All allegations of misconduct are taken seriously and, if reported, will be fully reviewed."

As the investigation into the González killing progressed this summer, police said they were further surprised to learn that the man charged with orchestrating the slaying was a fellow drug cartel member, a specialist in assassination -- and a federal informer for ICE living in El Paso.

Rubén Rodríguez Dorado, a Mexican citizen, was detained this month and charged with murder in the González case. Before he was a suspect, police detectives said, they were introduced to Rodríguez by ICE agents, who presented him as an informer who might be able to help on the case.

When he met with El Paso police, who said they were not given his name, Rodríguez bragged that he was "the main man in El Paso" for the Juarez cartel. Detectives said they later learned that his specialty was arranging hits for hire. "He told us that he was high in the food chain and that he'd ask around and see what he could find and that he would let us know. Of course, he didn't let us know anything," Lowe said.

El Paso police arrested three American teenagers they said Rodríguez recruited to his crew: U.S. Army Pfc. Michael Jackson Apodaca, 18, who allegedly pulled the trigger; Chris Duran, 17, who drove the getaway car, according to the court papers; and a 16-year-old who police said did surveillance for the gang. Apodaca and Duran were charged as adults with murder. The name of the youngest teenager is being withheld.

Rodríguez's attorney did not respond to telephone messages. Attorneys for the teenagers could not be located.

Lowe said that during the investigation, ICE agents introduced local police to other federal informers. One man was a cartel assassin. "His role was very brutal in Juarez. But here he is, just another cooperating witness, and we thought, if *this* guy is living here, how many more of them are there? This man is a known threat," Lowe said. "We should be informed, not only for our safety but the safety of the community."

El Paso police said they have evidence that González continued to work with the cartel while he was a federal informer in El Paso. While Rodríguez was cooperating with federal agents, he was arrested and charged in May with trying to steal an 18-wheeler filled with flat-screen televisions.

Law enforcement officials said El Paso is home to many cartel members and their families.

"Without a doubt, there are a lot of cartel members among us," said Robert Almonte, executive director of the Texas Narcotic Officers Association and a retired deputy chief of the El Paso police. "They've been here for a long time. They come for the same reasons as you or me. It's safer here. And if they have wives and kids, this is the place to be."

Joseph M. Arabit, special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's office here, said that El Paso serves as an important staging point for Mexican drug trafficking but that violence is rare north of the border because cartel members "don't want to face justice in the United States."

Ranchos del Sol, the east-side El Paso neighborhood where the cartel hit occurred, is invitingly neat. On each block are new stucco homes painted in sand and sunset colors inspired by the desert. From the top of Bob Hope Drive, Ciudad Juarez can be seen in the hazy distance.

A number of residents in the neighborhood declined to give their names for publication, saying they were nervous about becoming targets.

A grandmother inspected plants outside her daughter's home after picking up the mail. "I'm afraid that other people will be executed Juarez-style here in El Paso," she said.

Three blocks away, Veronica Ortiz was getting ready to go on a drive with her husband and small children. "It doesn't really affect us," she said about the killing on Pony Trail Place. "I don't think they go against innocent people."

Advertisement » Your Ad Here



going out guide
from *The Washington Post*

- Best Cheap Eats
- Best Pizza
- Best Burgers AND MORE

See More Best Bets!

Another neighbor, a father of two, said he rode his bike past the cul-de-sac the night of the hit, moments before police arrived. "I would be outraged to know if the federal government owned that house and put a snitch in my neighborhood," he said.

"We live in a city of don't ask, don't tell," said Tony Payan, a professor at the University of Texas at El Paso who studies the drug trade. "The city is filled with stash houses, money laundering, shipments. Trucks come. Trucks go. Garage doors open and close. But the perception and reality of safety must be maintained at all costs. Leaders are obsessed with our ranking as the second or third safest city in America."

Before González was shot dead in front of his house, he knew that he was in danger, police said. In May 2008, a leader of the Juarez cartel was arrested in Mexico. El Paso detectives said they read news accounts reporting that the tip had come from González. That kind of public disclosure is a potential death sentence in Juarez.

El Paso police said that González fled north sometime in 2008 and that ICE agents knew he was in trouble with the cartel.

According to police investigators, shortly before his death, González told his wife that if she ever heard from a man called El Dorado -- Rodríguez's street name -- to warn him immediately, and that if anything happened to him, she was to call a telephone number he gave her. Police said the number was for his handler at ICE.

Researcher Monica Ortiz Uribe contributed to this report.

Post a Comment

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

Add a comment (max 5000 characters)

Submit

Comments that include profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material will be removed from the site. Additionally, entries that are unsigned or contain "signatures" by someone other than the actual author will be removed. Finally, we will take steps to block users who violate any of our posting standards, terms of use or privacy policies or any other policies governing this site. Please review the [full rules](#) governing commentaries and discussions. You are fully responsible for the content that you post.

Ads by Google

Amazing Deals at JCPenney

Hot Buys at Your Washington DC Store. Grab Them While They Last!
JCPenney.com

© 2009 The Washington Post Company