

New leads emerging in Satanist murders

by Harley Schlanger

With startling revelations emerging daily from the investigation into the networks involved in the Matamoros narco-Satanic murders, eyebrows are being raised at the pattern of lost opportunities to crack this ring years ago. The investigations stem from the discovery on April 11 of a dozen horribly mutilated bodies in Matamoros, a Mexican border town near Brownsville, Texas.

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) officials and FBI agents have admitted that they had been aware of the involvement of the Matamoros gang in drug trafficking since 1977! Houston police have known of the Colombian drug-trafficking connection in Houston, operating out of Matamoros, complete with the practice of Satanist rituals, since 1987! Why was nothing done?

The narco-Satanist gang operating out of the Rancho Santa Elena in Matamoros can be traced back to Saúl Hernández, who is known to have been running 1,000-2,000 pounds of marijuana per week into the United States, beginning in 1977. Hernández, who was assassinated in 1987, was one of the sons of Brígido Hernández, the owner of the ranch where the murdered bodies were found. Though U.S. law enforcement officials blame corruption among Mexican officials for the failure to crack down on this operation, there is evidence that U.S. officials also missed at least one opportunity to do so. On Feb. 4, 1987, Serafín Hernández Rivera, brother of Saúl Hernández, was arrested with five others in Grimes County, Texas, as part of a major drug bust. He was released on \$25,000 bail; his case has not yet been brought to trial. A source tried to explain this by saying, "It is part of an ongoing investigation." (Hernández Rivera was arrested in Houston the week of April 17 for his role in the Matamoros gang.)

The Hernández gang seems to have followed a similar pattern to many of the other drug gangs on the border. Beginning in 1981-82, as the War on Drugs task force zeroed in on cocaine traffic in Florida, smuggling operations run out of Medellín and Cali, Colombia, turned to Mexico as an entry point to the U.S. market. The two favorite entry points were the Brownsville area and El Paso. Drugs entering the United States in Brownsville were then shipped through Houston.

The huge amounts of cocaine seized by law enforcement officials demonstrated this pattern. In September 1985 alone, 800 pounds of cocaine were seized in Hebbronville, in south Texas; 138 pounds in McAllen, a border town near Brown-

ville; and 694 pounds in Brownsville. The volume of the seizures increased dramatically, as the infrastructure for shipments from Colombia was consolidated. In June 1987, police seized 1,660 pounds of cocaine in Brownsville; in September 1987, more than 3,500 pounds were seized in El Paso. For all of 1987, more than 10,000 pounds were seized in Texas. This more than doubled, to 22,000 pounds, in 1988.

Additional evidence of the Colombian connection was available in Houston. Houston Police Department (HPD) officer Jaime Escalante reported that his first evidence of Colombian networks operating in the city was in 1982. Their presence grew rapidly, as did the violence. In a five-month period in mid-1987, there were 11 confirmed murders of competing Colombian gangs in Houston.

Satanic aspect ignored

During this time, the first evidence of occult and Satanist practices emerged in Houston. "I was baffled about the teeth marks on the victims' tongues," Escalante said, reporting that there were also bite marks on the ears of the victims, and fingernails pulled out of the bodies. Sergeant Webb of the HPD Narcotics Department said that it was not unusual to find altars, candles, and other ritual paraphernalia at the sites of drug busts; he said there have been "hundreds" of such cases. In a drug bust on Aug. 18, 1987, a skull was found in a safe house, indicating the practice of the deadly Palo Mayombe rituals, similar to those practiced in Matamoros.

When Saúl Hernández was assassinated in 1987, another son of Brígido, Elio Hernández Rivera, took over. He was soon replaced by the Cuban-born Adolfo de Jesús Constanzo, who became the group's "Godfather." Constanzo was directly involved in the group's Houston operations. FBI agent Johnie Joyce said, "We've been aware of him being in and out of Houston for some time." He added that they had observed this gang's activities in Houston "for some years."

A series of drug busts during 1988 shows how active they were. On June 21, HPD and DEA agents confiscated 436 pounds of cocaine at a safe house in northwest Houston, believed to be run by the Matamoros gang. In the house, police found an altar and candles. A July 15 raid in Corpus Christi netted another 235 pounds; five days later, 182 pounds were seized in Pasadena, a Houston suburb.

The failure to put this whole picture together is baffling to one former HPD investigator. "It's all there," he said. "I don't think the investigating officers had any doubt. I can't see why something wasn't done."

With the news from Mexico City that Constanzo moved in a crowd that included actors and musicians from the Televisa TV network, which promotes Satanism in its programming, and that he is also active in the homosexual community, investigators might want to look into any possible connections with Houston- and Acapulco-based Baron Enrico "Ricky" di Portanova, especially in light of the Baron's close association with Henry Kissinger.