

October 17, 2007

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MEMORANDUM TO: Assistant Director
Field Operations

FROM: Special Agent in Charge
Houston Field Division

SUBJECT: Request to Create/Open Firearms Trafficking Group

The purpose of this memorandum is to request approval for the creation of an additional criminal enforcement group within the Houston Field Division dedicated to firearms trafficking investigations. This group would be located within the Houston metropolitan area, possibly co-located with the DEA OCDETF Strike Force.

It has been written on a number of occasions that the Mexican government has stated that the United States must do more to stop weapons from being smuggled into the hands of drug traffickers who are using them to kill Mexican soldiers and police. The creation of an enforcement group dedicated to investigating firearms trafficking cases would be a step towards reducing the number of weapons smuggled from the Houston metropolitan area into Mexico.

The National Tracing Center, using the Firearms Tracing System (FTS) looked at firearm traces for guns recovered in Mexico that were successfully traced back to a United States individual purchaser with a purchase date from June 1, 2002 to May 15, 2007 was analyzed for individual State(s) or Field Division impact. The study consisted of ATF firearms recovered in Mexico, which were successfully traced to an individual (first) purchaser, within the time frame of June 1, 2002 to May 15, 2007. A total of ATF individual purchasers were identified.

The Houston Field Division covers 99 counties within the State of Texas. Eight (8) of those 99 counties lie directly on the border with Mexico. Of the 644 firearms recovered in Mexico, ATF of those firearms were purchased within the Houston Field Divisions area of responsibility. This means that ATF firearms recovered in Mexico, purchased between June 1, 2002 and May 15, 2007, were purchased from within the Houston Field Divisions area of responsibility.

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The study identified a total of [ATF] different firearms purchasers, located throughout the United States. There were [ATF] individual purchasers located with the Houston Field Division area of responsibility, this accounts [ATF] of all firearms purchasers identified.

The study used NFORCE to determine if the individual purchaser's activities had been recognized and addressed by the ATF offices within the Houston Field Division. Of the [ATF] purchasers identified within the Houston area of responsibility, 62 suspects or purchasers were found within NFORCE as part of a criminal investigation. This amounts to [ATF] which were already documented within NFORCE, either under active, pending or closed investigations. These [ATF] purchasers were entered in [ATF] separate cases accounted for [ATF] firearms.

In order to examine the extent of the problem within the Houston metropolitan area the Houston Field Division initiated a 90 day detail and pulled three (3) special agents from existing enforcement groups, and one Industry Operations Investigator (IOI) from within the Houston area to work on nothing but firearms trafficking investigations. The following is an example of the types of investigations that were opened in a 90 period, utilizing only three (3) special agents and one IOI:

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ATF

ATF

The above are just a few examples of the types of cases that can be made by a group of special agents and IOI's dedicated to nothing but firearms trafficking investigations. During this 90-day period, it was further confirmed that Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) utilize their money laundering, distribution, and transportation infrastructures to acquire, transport, and distribute firearms in Mexico.

It was also learned that often times, a seemingly insignificant one time, two gun purchase led to a major investigation. Straw purchasing conspiracies are often directed by a single trafficker that recruits numerous straw purchasers to make one time buys to avoid detection. Because of the drug turf war raging in Mexico, assault rifles and riot shotguns are in high demand and traffickers stockpiling these long guns are not ordinarily detectable through the multiple sales reports but do become detectable when they make a one time, two gun purchase.

This 90 day period revealed that every firearms trafficking investigation should have the phone numbers from the suspects and the 4473 sent to DEA's Special Operations Division (SOD) to look for links to ongoing investigations of a DTO. It was further learned that DEA is typically

ATF

Even though no gun shows were attended during this period, we were able to confirm that gun shows continue to be a hot bed of criminal activity concerning firearms. Many leads were received that people suspected of dealing in firearms were doing so at the gun shows without obtaining an FFL.

Mexican gun recoveries referred to Houston during this 90-day period confirmed that many of the firearms being recovered from Mexican drug traffickers are acquired in the secondary market, primarily at gun shows and pawn shops confounding the tracing process. Many of the guns accumulated by non-licensed gun show dealers are acquired from pawn shops as well. Because of this, it becomes necessary to routinely canvass pawn shops and gun dealers that sell second hand guns to completely investigate a Mexican DTO gun recovery and develop leads into active Mexican DTO gun traffickers.

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Therefore, it is recommended that approval be granted to establish a firearms trafficking group within the Houston Field Division located in the Houston Metropolitan area. This group should be staffed by one (1) Group Supervisor, **ATF** Special Agents, **ATF** Industry Operations Investigators and one (1) Investigative Analyst.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter please feel free to contact me at (281) 372-2900.

James Dewey Webb