

Probe role of DEA's Mullen in coverup of Camarena murder

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Law enforcement and intelligence professionals on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border have informed *EIR* that former U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration chief and Federal Bureau of Investigations Deputy Director Francis "Bud" Mullen is considered a principal figure in an elaborate, ongoing effort to cover up the conspiracy behind the kidnappings and assassinations of DEA agent Enrique Camarena Salazar and his Mexican pilot Alfredo Zavala Avelar in Guadalajara Feb. 7.

EIR's independent cross-checking of the leads from these sources has established a strong circumstantial case for a serious investigation into the Mullen role in this coverup, a role that saw the just-"retired" DEA chief run a virtual one-man wrecking operation against U.S.-Mexican cooperation in the war on drugs.

Fortunately, beginning with Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid's Feb. 23 personal telephone call to President Reagan, and carrying through the March 22 Washington, D.C. "summit meeting" between Mexican Attorney General Sergio García Ramírez and his U.S. counterpart, Edwin Meese, collaboration between the two nations has been re-established and prospects of an increase in joint anti-drug actions are considered good.

Beginning in January 1981, Francis Mullen's confirmation as chief of the DEA was held up for months when the senior FBI agent was linked to a multimillion-dollar bank-fraud scheme financing marijuana shipments into Louisiana.

According to a series of articles published in 1981 in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, the Chicago *Tribune* and the Los Angeles *Times*, Mullen received a series of loans from the Hibernia National Bank of New Orleans in 1978 while he was Special Agent in Charge of the FBI office in that city. The loans were approved by Victor Lota, a Hibernia Bank vice-president who was convicted in 1980 of approving over \$5 million in fraudulent loans, at least \$1.7 million of which went to convicted marijuana smuggler Ciro Callico, Sr. to finance drug buys.

The 31-page bill of indictment handed down on July 25, 1980 in the United States District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana (Docket number 80-332) accused Lota of 21 separate counts of conspiracy, misapplication of bank funds, false statements, and obstruction of justice.

In the course of a second series of trials in January 1981 focusing on Lota's 17 previously unindicted co-conspirators,

Lota confessed that he was personally promised a \$1 million "commission" for his role in one large pot purchase in the summer of 1979. That shipment was busted by police in Hammond, Louisiana and led to the indictments of Callico and 16 others for their role in a nationwide pot smuggling ring, reported to be one of the five largest drug-running organizations operating in the United States at the time.

All 17 of the dope runners were additionally suspected of being behind the May 1979 assassination of Judge Wood, one of the nation's toughest narcotics fighters on the federal bench. Based in San Antonio, a primary transshipment point for Mexican and Colombian pot "connections," Wood had been a target of intensive public attack by the dope lobby's *High Times* magazine prior to his assassination.

Mullen's links to this dope and bank-fraud ring were withheld in the FBI's "background report" to the Senate Judiciary Committee considering Mullen's confirmation as DEA chief, an incredible omission, given that Mullen left the post of New Orleans FBI to become deputy assistant director of the FBI in charge of all white-collar and organized-crime investigations in September 1978.

According to both U.S. and Mexican confidential sources interviewed by *EIR*, the Camarena-Zavala kidnappings, carried out by Mexican police officials serving as well-paid "informants" for the dope mafia, were believed to have been ordered by high-ranking officials at FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. who believed that Camarena was unraveling the entire web of "citizens above suspicion" in the United States, Mexico, and Colombia controlling and protecting dope traffickers.

According to the sources, Camarena, a Mexican national who was one of the DEA's top field agents, had established an extensive network of informants ranging from honest police officials to arms traffickers in possession of inside information on the dope trade. Through these sources, he had reportedly played a pivotal role in the November 1984 smashing of a Colombian and Mexican marijuana ring in the state of Chihuahua. As a result of a series of raids on pot plantations and warehouses, an estimated \$10 billion (street value) worth of marijuana of both Mexican and Colombian origin had been destroyed and 7,000 peasants working the marijuana fields under slave-labor conditions had been freed.

Just prior to his kidnapping, Camarena had reportedly been in Colombia for three months pursuing leads on con-

nections to Mexican and U.S. dope runners.

Reportedly, the flow of cable traffic back to Washington, D.C. headquarters under Camarena's signature had prompted drug mafia-contaminated elements in the FBI hierarchy to label the agent "the most dangerous man in the Western Hemisphere."

Provocative intervention

According to the sources, Francis Mullen's abrupt trip to Mexico City within days of the Camarena-Zavala disappearances was actually to organize the coverup of the crime in consultation with his Mexican collaborators. The circumstances around the discovery of the tortured bodies of Camarena and Zavala and the arrests that followed lend some credence to the source reports.

- On Feb. 7, four Mexican police officials in the city of Guadalajara kidnapped Camarena and Zavala. According to information reported in the Mexican press, the DEA agent and his pilot were taken to a Guadalajara safehouse of drug czar Manuel Caro Quintero. Later the same day, Caro Quintero and Juan Matta Ballesteros, a Honduran national identified as a "Colombian connection" to the Mexican narco-traffickers, escaped from Guadalajara to Caborca, Sonora. Both U.S. FBI and Mexican federal security personnel have been implicated in the escape.

- On Feb. 9, the kidnappings of Camarena and Zavala were publicly reported for the first time in Mexico.

- On Feb. 11, Mullen arrived in Mexico City. According to the Mexican press, Mullen issued a string of "corruption" accusations against the Mexican government that were designed to create a diplomatic incident—and block any effective U.S.-Mexican collaboration in cracking the kidnappings. The same day, U.S. Border and Customs officials unilaterally began "Operation Interceptor," virtually shutting the border in certain transshipment points known to be frequented by drug and gun smugglers.

- On Feb. 23, the worsening conflict between Mexico City and Washington triggered by Mullen's bullish tactics was abated when Mexican President de la Madrid placed a personal call to Ronald Reagan to reassert the commitment of Mexico to cooperate in any way necessary in the war against drugs. The two presidents resolved to have their respective attorneys general meet to iron out details of a joint anti-drug campaign and set a heads of state meeting for the end of the year. U.S. Ambassador John Gavin flew back to Washington following the Reagan-de la Madrid phone chat to confer directly with the President.

- The very next day, Feb. 24, Mullen issued a renewed attack against the Mexican government on national television, accusing the Mexican federal police of gross corruption in allowing Caro Quintero to escape from Guadalajara to his Caborca Valley stronghold. Mullen said Manuel Ibarra, a personal investigator of Mexican Attorney General García Ramírez, was complicit in the escape.

- Feb. 26, Ambassador Gavin, back from Washington, issued a statement countering Mullen's latest inflammatory intervention and supporting the efforts of de la Madrid and the ruling PRI party in combatting the drug trade: "I believe, my President believes, my secretary of state believes, our government believes, that President Miguel de la Madrid is an honest man. . . . We have faith in him, we have faith in his program."

- On March 4, Mexican state and federal police raided a ranch in Michoacán owned by the Bravo family. In the gun battle that ensued, all the occupants of the ranch were killed, and several Mexican police were killed and wounded. According to Mexican and American sources, the raid was precipitated by "anonymous" information provided to local police indicating that Camarena and Zavala were being held at the ranch. Thirty minutes before the raiding party arrived, according to the sources, the Bravo ranch also received an anonymous call warning that a police raid was about to occur and that the officers were drug mafia-linked and under orders to shoot to kill. The Bravo family were known local gun runners, but not known to have any direct involvement in the drug trade. They were reportedly prime informants for Camarena in his drug investigations and possible sources of information on the kidnappings. Thus, the manipulated raid was part of an overall effort to destroy evidence of the kidnappings and of Camarena's investigative findings.

- The next day, peasants working one of the fields of the Bravo ranch "discovered" the badly beaten bodies of the two anti-drug agents. U.S. Embassy officials and Mexican government sources reported their suspicions that Camarena and Zavala had been killed elsewhere and dumped at the ranch after the raid.

- On March 12, the Mexican Attorney General's office announced the arrest of 13 individuals, all charged with involvement in the kidnappings and murders. Six of the arrested men were state, local, and federal police agents. One of the 13, Commander Gabriel Gonzales Gonzales, head of the homicide division of the state judicial police of Jalisco (Guadalajara) died March 14 in prison. Confessions of the six police officers identified the men as "informants" for drug lords Caro Quintero, Miguel Felix Gallardo, Ernesto Fonsaca Garillo, and Manuel Salcido Uzueta—all middle-level dope mafia figures.

- On March 15, both Mexican and U.S. government officials announced personnel shifts in the Guadalajara area reflecting an upgraded anti-drug deployment. Gen. Vinicio Santoya Faría, chief of the general staff of the Mexican Army, was transferred to the directorship of the Guadalajara Military Zone; and Mexican Attorney General García Ramírez named Commander Florentino Ventura to head the Federal Judicial Police branch in Guadalajara. Ventura was one of the leading Mexican officials directing the mid-1970s "Operation Condor," a joint Mexican-American assault against the drug mafia that broke the back of the Mexican heroin and marijuana connection for years.