

FRONTLINE

U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

VOL 8 • ISSUE 1

MANHUNT IN NEW YORK

CBP's crucial role in the 22-day
search for two escaped killers



U.S. Customs and Border Protection



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**SECRETARY OF
HOMELAND SECURITY**

Jeh Johnson

**COMMISSIONER, U.S.
CUSTOMS AND BORDER
PROTECTION**

R. Gil Kerlikowske

**ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER,
CBP OFFICE OF PUBLIC
AFFAIRS**

Philip J. LaVelle

EDITOR

Laurel Smith

DEPUTY EDITOR

Susan Holliday

MANAGING EDITOR

Jason McCammack

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Tracie Parker

STAFF WRITERS

Warren Byrd, Paul Koscak,
Dave Long, Marcy Mason

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHERS

Donna Burton, Glenn Fawcett,
James Tourtellotte

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To contact Frontline editors with messages, contributions or delivery concerns:

Email • frontline@cbp.dhs.gov

www.cbp.gov

SKILLS TO SURVIVE



Lifesaving knowledge taught at National Air Training Center

By Paul Koscak, photos by James Tourtellotte

After departing a lonely airport near the U.S. southern border, the Cessna 172 steers to Nebraska. It flies low and long. The small plane makes two stops along the way, but only at desolate airports.

That profile is typical of drug-running aircraft, but just as typical of how pleasure pilots fly. When the Cessna reaches its destination, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine agents may question the pilot and search the aircraft to see if their suspicions are correct.

Training to handle those encounters safely and professionally is provided at CBP's National Air Training Center in Oklahoma City. The center is

where new aviators learn the tactics and procedures that will shape their careers and where seasoned fliers return to keep those skills sharp.

Training the largest law enforcement air force

With more than 650 pilots, CBP's Air and Marine Operations keeps the center busy. Aviators come to the center each year for three days of intense one-on-one refresher training in helicopters or fixed wing aircraft. Survival, ground tactics and sensor operator training is also offered. Center staff conduct interviews and flight evaluations for new pilot positions, as well.



The center is really two buildings. There's a main building with classrooms, conference and planning rooms and administrative offices, nicknamed "The Castle" for its two turret-like structures, and a 67,500 square-foot hangar. The hangar holds the center's nine aircraft, as well as its maintenance facility, multimedia training center and briefing rooms.

The center's mission is to strengthen and standardize procedures, and that improves proficiency and safety, said Tom Salter, the center's director.

"Standardization is the key point we drive home here," he said.

Something just broke

Standardization begins when pilots arrive for recurrent training. They review aircraft systems such as hydraulics, electrical and fuel. They revisit flight performance, weight and balance, and maneuvers. What's reviewed on the ground is later applied in the air.

Pilots also get to practice emergency response scenarios not authorized at their duty stations to stay current with those tasks. "Some of these maneuvers are higher risk," explained instructor John-Paul Ayubi. "That's why we limit who can do them."

One example is a helicopter governor failure. The governor is a mechanical device that maintains a set engine speed by controlling fuel flow. The governor is directed by a computer.

In the simulation, the instructor disconnects the computer, requiring the pilot to manually control the fuel flow with the throttle to maintain the proper rotor blade speed. If the speed gets too low, the rotor won't generate enough lift to keep the helicopter airborne. If the speed gets too high, the centrifugal force can rip the blades from the helicopter.

Without the computer, the throttle also loses its precision and "becomes very touchy," as Ayubi described it.

The throttle is a rotating cylinder attached to the end of the left-hand control stick, called a collective. Moving the stick up or down changes the pitch of the rotor blades. Stick up, helicopter climbs. Stick down, helicopter descends. Turning the cylinder increases or decreases fuel flow and that controls rotor speed.

With a broken computer, the pilot transitions from one movement with the left hand that automatically controls fuel and pitch, to two movements with the left hand to adjust fuel and pitch. "It's a kinesthetic challenge," said Ayubi.

Autorotation is another maneuver. The instructor brings the power to idle, simulating a failed engine.

The aircraft descends, but the upward rushing air keeps the rotors spinning, allowing the aircraft to descend in a controllable glide. As the helicopter nears the ground, the pilot then trades the speed of the rotors for lift by increasing the angle of the blades, affording the pilot a soft landing, said Ayubi.

While everyone gets the same curriculum, it's not rigid. There's time to focus on weaknesses and even options to add extra training days if needed. "It's standard, but flexible," he said.

Not all training is in the sky. Land and water survival, police tactics, pilot certificate inspections and first aid are provided in a five-day reality-based package. Air and Marine Operations agents take this refresher course every five years.

When practicing police tactics, participants use pistols that fire plastic bullets containing paint. Since the bullets can bruise at close range, agents and instructors wear masks and other protective garments. Using non-lethal bullets rather than blanks creates more stress and realism.



CBP pilots in an A-Star helicopter conduct training exercises at CBP's National Air Training Center in Oklahoma City.

Be polite, but cautious

Instructors emphasized treating citizens with respect, but never letting your guard down.

Take pilot certificate inspections. During his training, Chad Smith, an air interdiction agent with 19-years of law enforcement experience, approached the pilot, played by a municipal SWAT (special weapons and tactics) officer. The pilot is standing next to a static Cessna aircraft.

Observing Smith is instructor Mike Tully and James Wilson, an attorney and instructor. Their critique helps agents perfect their skills for approaching an aircraft.

“How are you today?” said Smith, walking toward the aircraft. “Great day to be flying, isn’t it?”

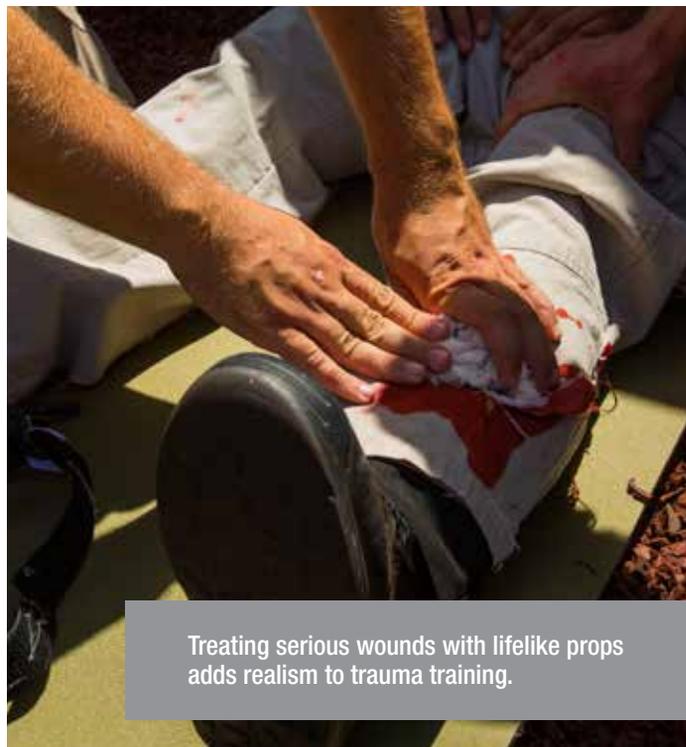
Smith asked to see the pilot and medical certificates. The pilot asked why. He hesitated. He resisted Smith’s disarming demeanor, but handed the documents to Smith.

Smith then asked to inspect the aircraft’s registration and airworthiness certificates, usually stored in a plastic sleeve near the floor by the pilot’s seat.

“Could you please move back to the tail?” Smith first asked, striving to keep a safe distance from the pilot. The pilot grants permission for Smith to inspect inside the aircraft.



Using a static Cessna aircraft on a simulated airport tarmac makes inspecting pilot certificates seem more real.



Treating serious wounds with lifelike props adds realism to trauma training.

Smith reviewed the documents, finds them satisfactory and the inspection is complete.

Tully and Wilson then debriefed Smith on the legal and tactical considerations during pilot certificate inspections. Tully suggested Smith could have improved his safety by standing diagonally from the pilot when the documents are handed to him, known as a bladed stance.

They explained, for instance, that holding a conversation with the pilot not only helps build rapport but could reveal a higher level of suspicion to search further. “Just remember,” Tully concluded. “You’re still a cop. You’re going to be polite, but you’re going home safely.”

There’s also a crash scenario, complete with frantic cries for help and police actors who simulate serious injuries. Agents reviewed how to assess injuries and stabilize the victim. “What are we looking to do?” instructor Craig Ilschner coached one group as they ready a tourniquet. Each victim presents a different calamity.

Water survival training gives agents an opportunity to practice boarding a raft.



All wet and upside down

Surviving at sea is a day in the pool.

“A helicopter crash in the drink is serious,” instructor Chad Warren told several students about to get wet. “Water fills in quickly and the aircraft sinks like a rock.”

They’re about to find out how.

Agents strap themselves into a seat mounted on a floating framework that resembles an aircraft cockpit. The device is flipped over, simulating an aircraft sinking inverted. While inverted, the agent must calmly reach for the mouthpiece on the survival jacket that’s connected to an air bottle, purge the water from the mouthpiece and breathe the compressed air. Then the agent unstraps from the seat, opens the door, swims from the dunker and surfaces.

To recognize up or down while inverted, agents learn to locate a reference point on the dunker. “Hang on to your reference point,” urged Warren. “Never let go.”

“It’s going to be uncomfortable,” he warned. “Water may be going into your nose, but at least you’ll be breathing.”

Before taking the dip, agents practiced using their lifesaving air bottles. About the size of an aerosol can, the air is packed at 3,000 pounds per square inch. Depending on how you breathe, the bottle can give a downed pilot anywhere from four to five minutes of time underwater.

Agents must dive underwater, fetch an air bottle placed on the bottom of the pool, purge the water from the mouthpiece and start breathing. “I don’t want to see your head above the surface until your bottle is empty,” said Warren. About half the group took multiple tries. A few came up coughing.

Water survival also covered how to stay warm, ways to produce fresh water and use a life raft.

“How can you stay afloat?” offered instructor Wade Plant. “Stuff plastic bottles into your flight suit or even blow air into your suit creating a bubble.” He explained how to use an array of survival gear from fishing line to flares to seasickness pills.

Seasickness pills are preventative. “Take them before you expect to get sick,” he said. “They don’t work after you get sick.”

We’re stranded

Moving from wet to dry, the land survival scenario centered on an aircraft forced to make an emergency landing somewhere in the Arizona desert—in this case, some acreage with a pond and a few patches of woods. Agents were allowed to use the survival kits they were issued. About the size of a large wallet, the 98.6 survival kits, as they’re called, can fit into a flight suit pocket.

It’s amazing what can fit into that small pouch: a heavy-duty plastic shelter bag, cord with 200-pound strength, cutting tool, fire starter, whistle, light, mirror, water disinfection tablets, duct tape, lanyard, storage bag and an instruction booklet.

First task: signal the search teams. Lines and angles stand out against natural topography, instructor Ken Vitale pointed out. Fashioning a huge X or V using anything from sticks, stones and debris works well, he said.

The group fashioned a huge X, using strips of blue tarp held in place by pegs and cord. In an interesting procedure, they plucked grass, rolled it into small clumps and wrapped the corners and some edges of the tarp around the balls of turf. This formed a knob, called a button, providing a better grip for the cord.



Creating lines on the ground makes it easier for search teams to spot downed crews.

“Remember this is your ticket home,” Vitale encouraged. “Make it big. Make it good.” Afterward, agents built shelters using plastic sheets, cord, duct tape and the knots they practiced in the classroom.

Fire was next. “Fire is extremely important,” said Vitale. “It purifies water and cooks food.” Taking the group into the woods, Vitale showed them how to properly collect fuel. He then stacked the wood, starting with brittle tinder, then adding heavier kindling and then thick sticks.

Vitale smacked a knife against a magnesium block. Sparks flew into the fibrous tinder, spiked by a cotton ball smeared in petroleum jelly taken from the 98.6 kit. Instantly, fingers of flame shot out.

“Light the bottom of the tinder,” he instructed. “Fire moves upward.”

“Fire is simple,” said Vitale. “But people have trouble because they skip stages — they want to go too big, too soon.”

Facing a terrorist

The active shooter scenarios create perhaps the most intense training. It’s where standardization is really critical.

The center uses a former junior high school and role players from a local municipal SWAT team who pose as crazed shooters. Air and Marine agents practice the same tactics taught to all law enforcement officers.

Standardization is key. “If you show up [at the shooting] it’s likely you will work with someone you’ve never met,” Warren advised the group. That means police from many jurisdictions will likely be converging on the building where a shooter is on the loose and they can only work together safely if they know what’s expected, he explained.



Responders drill, moving as a team to locate and neutralize a school shooter.



A person wearing a black tactical helmet with a clear visor and large goggles is aiming a blue training handgun. They are wearing tan and black tactical gloves. The background shows a hallway with blue lockers and a white ceiling with recessed lights.

Maintaining focus amid the chaos of an active shooting is no easy task.

Tactics are designed to quickly locate and subdue a shooter while keeping responders safe. Agents review how to proceed through a building, what clues to look for, how to communicate as a team and how to identify and clear the occupants.

During the exercise, the agents raided the school three times, the third time in the dark. To make the event more realistic, a high-powered speaker blasted audio of confused and panicked crowds punctuated with screams and gunshots.

Growth and center goals

Aviation training in Oklahoma City began in 1987 when the U.S. Customs Service founded the Customs National Aviation Center. In 2005, the center became the National Aviation Training Center when Air and Marine

Operations merged with elements of the Border Patrol, continuing its mission of training and standardization with a growing cadre of law enforcement aviators.

Under Director Salter's leadership, staff and instructors strive to provide training that enhances both an agent's personal and professional life. And while agents learn the skills to perform their jobs safely and efficiently, it's just as important that they're pleased with the instruction, according to Salter.

"I consider this institution more than a training center," he said. "I want agents to leave here satisfied that they got what they came here for. I want our agents to leave here with the confidence and skill to continue to train, develop and grow into world-class pilots." 



MANHUNT IN NEW YORK

CBP's crucial role in the 22-day search for two escaped killers

By Dave Long, photos by Kristoffer Grogan

On the morning of June 6, 2015, New York State Police alerted law enforcement agencies of a breakout at the Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, New York. After months of preparation, two convicted killers used tools to hack their way through the prison's walls and pipes, crawled through a sewer and climbed through a manhole outside the prison walls to their final escape.

Richard Matt, 48, was serving a 25-year to life sentence for the kidnapping, torture and murder of William Rickerson, a 76 year-old Buffalo businessman. Failing to discover from Rickerson where he kept his money, Matt bent the elderly man's fingers until the bones broke. Later, he broke Rickerson's neck with his bare hands. Matt then used a hacksaw to chop up Rickerson's body and dumped the remains into the Niagara River. Rickerson's dismembered torso was recovered from the river several days later.



Photos courtesy of
New York State Police

David Sweat, 34, was serving a sentence of life without parole for the murder of a Broome County, New York, sheriff's deputy. The deputy had caught Sweat and his cousin moving stolen guns from one car to another. Sweat and his cousin shot the deputy 15 times. As the deputy lay on the road bleeding, Sweat fired two shots into his face, using the deputy's service pistol. Sweat then drove his car over the deputy as he fled the murder scene.

Out of prison and at large in northern New York State, authorities described Matt and Sweat as armed and extremely dangerous.



Outbound inspections of all travelers began at Chateaugay, New York, after the fugitives were reported to be heading toward the port.

At Chateaugay port of entry on the U.S.-Canada border, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Port Director Virgil Farnsworth received news of the escape from state police and learned that the fugitives could be headed in his direction. “We started inspections of all outbound travelers a few minutes after they called us,” Farnsworth said.

Cross-border traffic at Chateaugay and other small ports in northern New York usually consists of farmers and local residents well known to CBP officers. With two criminals on the loose, CBP ramped up outbound inspections at border crossings

at Trout River, Fort Covington, Chateaugay and Cherasusco, New York. “At that point, we didn’t know which direction the escapees were heading,” Farnsworth said. “We kept the outbound operations going continuously, 24/7, for the next 22 days.”

At the Champlain, New York, port of entry on Interstate Highway 87, Assistant Port Director Steve Bronson learned of the escape that day at 7:30 a.m. Champlain is a busy port on I-87 south of Montreal, along with a chain of smaller ports. Outbound inspections began by 7:45 a.m. at Cannon Corners port of entry, nearest to the prison. By 8 a.m., CBP officers were inspecting all outbound traffic at all area ports.

In Buffalo, CBP Acting Director of Field Operations Rose Hilmey began directing outbound inspections at all ports of entry west of the prison. “I wanted to ensure that these individuals did not make it to Canada,” Hilmey said. U.S. Border Patrol sector headquarters at Swanton, Vermont, maintained border security between the ports near the prison. Chief Border Patrol Agent John Pfeifer had received bulletins on the escape of Matt and Sweat and relayed their photos and descriptions to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canada Border Services Agency.



CBP officers at Port of Champlain checked all vehicles for signs of Matt and Sweat.

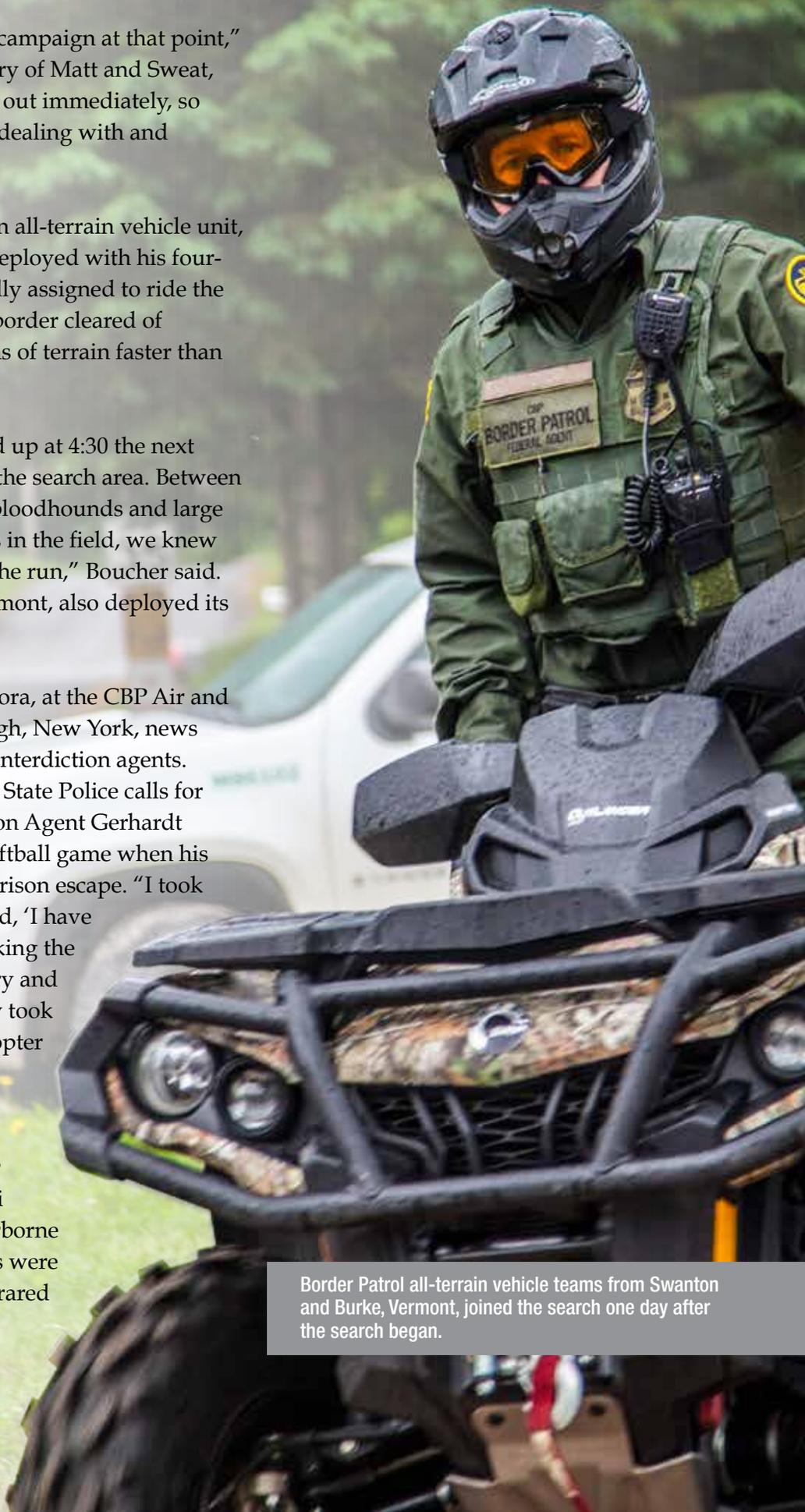
“It was pretty much an information campaign at that point,” said Pfeifer. “Given the violent history of Matt and Sweat, it was critical to get this information out immediately, so people would know who they were dealing with and who to call.”

At Border Patrol’s Champlain Station all-terrain vehicle unit, Border Patrol Agent Jerry Boucher deployed with his four-man crew to the search area. Normally assigned to ride the “slash,” a 20-foot-wide zone on the border cleared of trees, ATVs could search large swaths of terrain faster than foot patrols.

“I had a phone call telling me to load up at 4:30 the next morning and get the ATVs down to the search area. Between the noise from helicopters, barking bloodhounds and large numbers of law enforcement officers in the field, we knew we would have Matt and Sweat on the run,” Boucher said. Border Patrol’s station in Burke, Vermont, also deployed its ATV unit to the New York manhunt.

Thirteen miles southeast of Dannemora, at the CBP Air and Marine Operations base at Plattsburgh, New York, news of the prison escape reached the air interdiction agents. AMO pilots responded to New York State Police calls for all available air assets. Air Interdiction Agent Gerhardt Perry was taking his children to a softball game when his supervisor called with news of the prison escape. “I took the kids to the coach’s house and said, ‘I have to go right now, would you mind taking the kids?’” Perry said. Shortly after, Perry and Air Interdiction Agent Chris Dobozy took off in an Airbus AS-350 A-Star helicopter and began an air search for Matt and Sweat.

Back at Plattsburgh, Supervisory Air Interdiction Agent Robert Makowski received a state police request for airborne surveillance imagery. “State troopers were hoping that our forward-looking infrared camera would help them see easier into the heavily wooded areas,” Makowski said.



Border Patrol all-terrain vehicle teams from Swanton and Burke, Vermont, joined the search one day after the search began.



Believing Matt and Sweat were still in the area, law enforcement teams moved carefully.

Fixed wing aircraft, including a Cessna Citation C-550 and a Cessna C-206, launched from Plattsburgh to support law enforcement communications. Carrying radio repeaters, the AMO airplanes circled over the search area. The repeaters received and automatically rebroadcasted ground communications over the search area, extending signal range between searchers from yards to miles.

“Two airplanes flew 12 hours a day,” Makowski said.

“Without our aircraft retransmitting ground radio signals from the air, searchers in the woods would have been cut off from each other.”

A Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter along with two flight crews from AMO’s Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch also deployed to assist in search operations.

MANHUNT

Two days of searching by law enforcement had not yielded a solid clue on the escapees’ whereabouts. New York state agencies in the manhunt included corrections officers, state police, forest rangers and environmental conservation police. In addition to CBP officers and agents, other federal law enforcement officers joined the hunt from the U.S. Marshals Service, the FBI’s Hostage Response Team and agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Canine teams from the state police, Border Patrol and FBI fanned out over the area, trying to pick up scent of the escapees.

Local police departments and sheriffs’ deputies were on the lookout, along with tribal authorities along the border. A tip line set up by the New York State Police was receiving hundreds of calls each day from the public – every call was followed up by law enforcement. In Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were following up on leads from citizens living near the border.

Border Patrol Tactical Unit joined the manhunt June 9, combing search grids assigned by the state police. “Matt and Sweat had time on their side,” said Special Operations Supervisor Tom Woods, leader of the BORTAC elements assigned to Swanton sector. “They had the terrain to their advantage, and the more time they were at large, the more distance they were creating.”

The density of the terrain was daunting. “There were no trails at all – it was bushwhacking all the way,” Woods said. “There were times you couldn’t see a foot either way.”

As law enforcement searched, torrential rains moved through the region, washing away any sign of the fugitives. “The weather was terrible during the manhunt,” said Woods. “We knew the rain was hampering us, but it had to be bothering the bad guys too. They had to be wet and hungry, and we were hoping the storms would help flush them out.”



Search team rides in a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter to investigate another site.

New York State Police requested deployment of a second BORTAC team, the National BORTAC Team stationed in El Paso, Texas, which joined the manhunt on June 12. Acting Special Operations Supervisor Chris Voss recalled the first few days on the ground. “Time was the big thing. The fugitives escaped on June 6, and in five days could be anywhere,” said Voss.

At the ports of entry, CBP officers were temporarily reassigned from Champlain and the Buffalo Field Office to the smaller ports to bolster outbound inspections. National media had camped outside many remote CBP border crossings in satellite vans, looking for stories and trying to interview law enforcement officers and travelers.

Travelers at the Port of Champlain on I-87 were experiencing longer wait times due to outbound inspections on each side of the border. With two killers still at large, travelers remained patient and often expressed thanks for the increased level of vigilance. “People were concerned for the safety of their families,” said Port Director Farnsworth. “Many people told us they were sleeping with their shotguns.”

FRUSTRATION MOUNTS

By June 17 the number of law enforcement officers in the search had swelled to more than 1,200 and tight coordination of resources was proving essential. Patrol Agent in Charge Norm Lague was detailed from Border Patrol’s Swanton Sector to join the team at the tactical operations center, or TOC. The center was directed by New York State Police and staffed by representatives of every agency in the manhunt. “It was the driver for the operation,” said Lague. Following up on tips from citizens, law enforcement deployed as many as 800 officers to clear different search grids several times a day.

“A lot of what we did was driven by tips from the public,” said Lague. “Richard Matt and David Sweat were doing a good job staying out of sight, avoiding mistakes that revealed their location until much later in the operation.”

In the sky, AMO fixed wing aircraft were flying 10 to 12 hours a day, extending the range of searchers on the ground. “One plane would launch, and another would launch several hours later. After coordinating, one plane would go back to refuel. The planes were constantly relieving each other,” said Air Interdiction Agent Gerhardt Perry.

Uncertain if the fugitives were still in the area, some agencies reduced their participation in the search on June 18. The BORTAC team from El Paso returned to Texas on June 19. Swanton Sector BORTAC operators remained, searching and clearing more than 100 hunting cabins. “We thought it was only a matter of time before Matt and Sweat made a mistake. There was no information suggesting the escapees were survivalists or hunters, or had the skills to move in the heavy woods. We stuck with the state troopers and kept searching,” said Tom Woods.

Though the number of searchers dwindled, the manhunt had become methodically disciplined. “The New York State Police mustered as many assets and resources as they could, identified search grids, and one by one, cleared those areas. They ran a huge operation and did an outstanding job,” said Swanton Sector Chief Patrol Agent John Pfeifer.

Acting on leads generated by the tactical operations center, Border Patrol ATVs continued to patrol the dense forests. “The state police gave us a search point, and told us how many miles a person could travel from it on foot. We would draw a circle around that area, and hit the trail. We knew we would eventually find a sign if the fugitives were near,” said Border Patrol Agent Jerry Boucher. “That’s how the state police plan worked, and ultimately, it’s why Matt and Sweat didn’t get far.”

Leads continued to pour into the tactical operations center. Some people doubted the fugitives were still in the area. After considering such theories, state police focused on a single fact—nothing indicated the fugitives had left the area. “That was the mantra – we had to continue to pound the area. They had to be out there somewhere,” said Lague.



Air and Marine agents used helicopters to search.



BORTAC agents search a home in upstate New York.

AT LONG LAST, A BREAKTHROUGH

The search area was dotted by hundreds of hunting cabins, most unoccupied in the summer. Visiting his cabin near Titus Mountain on June 20, the owner reported seeing a person running away into the woods. The sighting was the break state police were expecting. The cabin was only 10 miles from the prison. The cabin owner also reported a 20-gauge shotgun missing from the property.

State police converged on the cabin site, scouring the vicinity for sign of the escapees. They would not be disappointed.

“In their hurry to get away, Matt and Sweat left behind soiled socks and underwear,” said Special Operations Supervisor Woods. After analyzing DNA from the abandoned clothing, state police confirmed the articles belonged to the escapees.

“Law enforcement surged right back up after that discovery,” said Lague. “At that point, we knew where they were, and that was the breakthrough we needed.” More than 1,300 law enforcement agents and officers rejoined the manhunt. The El Paso BORTAC team flew back to New York on June 22.

Voss, the acting BORTAC supervisor from El Paso, and his team returned to the field, searching the wilderness for Matt and Sweat for four more days. On the morning of June 26, a citizen reported that someone had fired shots at his recreational vehicle. Supervisory Air Interdiction Agent Brian Hebert and Air Interdiction Agent Jim Pontzer loaded BORTAC operators into two helicopters, landing them on a highway to join state troopers near the area of the gunfire.

The air crews, with air crew rifle operators onboard, remained overhead, providing top cover to BORTAC operators. AMO fixed wing crews established and maintained airborne command and control, providing communications between the operators and the tactical operations center.

Moving through the dense terrain for two hours, the BORTAC team found a man deep in the woods, hiding behind a log. “My point man was the first person to see the subject,” Voss said. “The individual had his head down, and was flat on his stomach.” Voss maneuvered closer, keeping his eyes on the subject.



A BORTAC agent searches the woods of upstate New York for the prison escapees.

Voss knew this situation was different. “There was no response, no movement from the subject when my point man told him to put his hands up. I yelled at the subject to get his hands up – still no response. I thought, this could be the guy,” said Voss.

“From my position I could see the subject’s head coming up, and then I saw his face. He was moving something in my direction, but I couldn’t see what it was. As I moved in toward the subject, I saw he had a shotgun pointed right at me,” Voss said. “Once my brain made the equation of no response and the pointed shotgun, I began to shoot.”

Concern immediately shifted to where David Sweat could be hiding. State troopers expanded the perimeter around the log. Voss recalled, “The first thing that went through my mind was, ‘Where is the other fugitive?’ He could have us in his sights, ready to pull the trigger.” Following CBP policy, Voss left the scene for administrative duties while CBP’s Use of Force Incident Team arrived to investigate the shooting of Matt.

BORTAC operators and state police continued to hunt for Sweat. “They continued to search and clear other areas, trying to find Sweat, until they realized



BORTAC team flies to the escapees' new suspected location.

“My point man maneuvered into a contact-cover position. I removed the shotgun from under the subject while my point man covered me. I did not want to disturb the weapon at a crime scene, but I definitely didn’t want to leave the gun too close to the subject,” Voss said. The rest of the team moved into the area and formed a perimeter around the log. BORTAC operators confirmed the subject was dead, and positively identified the body as Richard Matt by a tattoo that read, “Mexico Forever.”

there wasn’t much to go on,” Voss said. The BORTAC team and state troopers withdrew to plan further on how to catch Sweat.

Two days later and 16 miles from where Richard Matt was killed, Sweat was shot and wounded while trying to run from a state trooper. After 22 days of searching, the manhunt concluded when Sweat was finally taken into custody by New York State Police on June 28.

RELIEF

Supervisory Air Interdiction Agent Robert Makowski and other AMO pilots had been flying continuously since June 6. Learning that Sweat was in custody, “felt like 100 pounds had been lifted from our shoulders,” Makowski said. AMO crew members from the Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch, National Air Security Operations Center-Jacksonville, and Manassas Air Branch, including the Plattsburgh and New York Air Units, returned to their duty stations.

“We flew more than 300 incident-free hours during the manhunt. We knew exactly what to do, where to go, and how to proceed in the air search,” said Air Interdiction Agent Perry. Throughout the manhunt, AMO also coordinated flight operations with aircraft flown by the New York State Police and the FBI.

With the manhunt concluded, outbound inspections were ended at the ports of entry along the Canadian border. “Throughout the manhunt, law enforcement worked smoothly – it was the experience of a lifetime,” said Port Director Farnsworth.

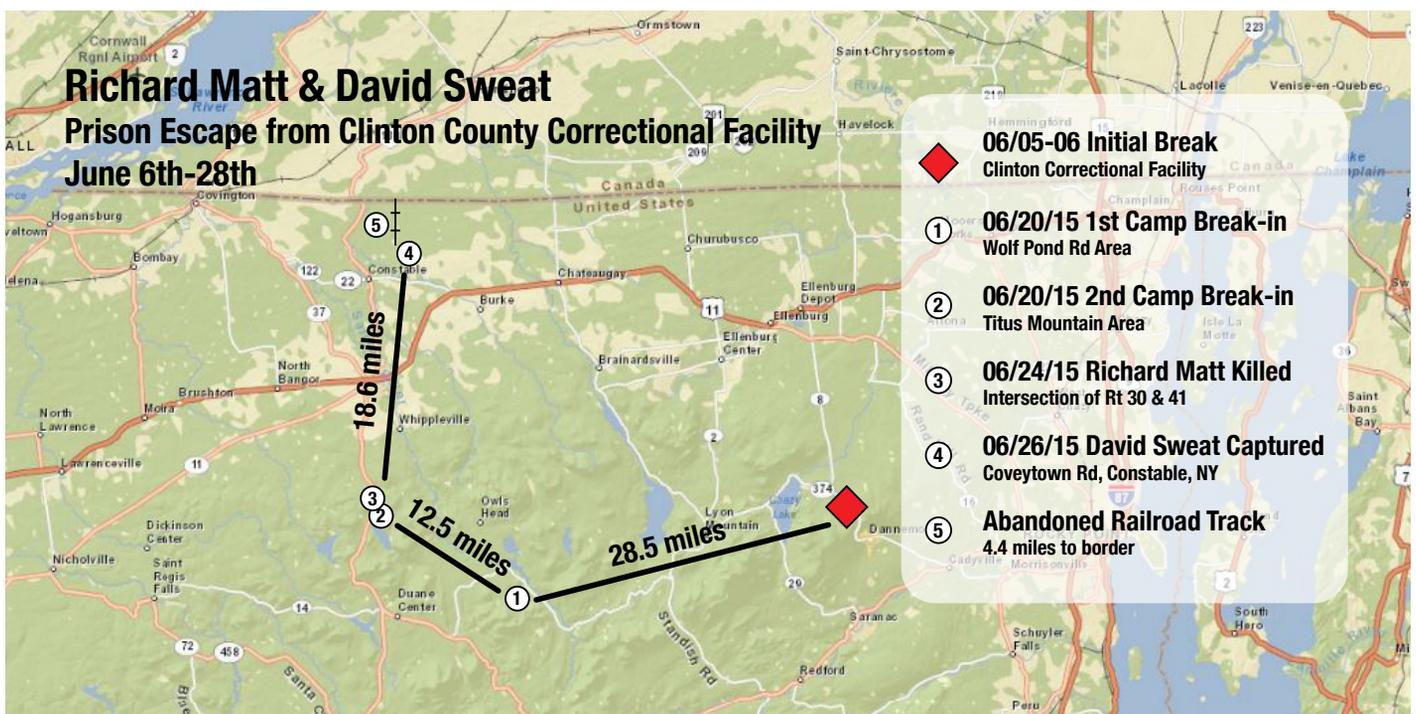
“I was concerned about catching these individuals first and foremost, knowing CBP employees and the public were targets,” said Acting Director of Field Operation Rose Hilmey. “Our ports of entry

immediately reacted to the threat of the fugitives and sealed the border north of the prison. They knew what they needed to do.”

Swanton Sector Chief Pfeifer said, “I was relieved when I heard about Matt. I was concerned that someone in law enforcement would be hurt, because the pair had nothing to lose.” Pfeifer was in the sector radio room when the report came in of Sweat’s capture. “I was on the edge of my seat until we confirmed David Sweat was down and getting medical attention – and our agents were safe,” Pfeifer said.

Two days after Sweat was arrested, the town of Malone, New York, held a parade to honor law enforcement. Townspeople lined the streets and waved signs thanking officers for keeping their community safe.

Several weeks later, a letter arrived at Border Patrol Swanton Sector headquarters from William Rickerson, Jr., the son of the 76-year old Buffalo man murdered by Richard Matt. “The letter thanked us for our relentless pursuit of Richard Matt,” said Pfeifer. “I’ve been in law enforcement for 29 years, and I never received anything like this. It was powerful.” **E**







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Steadfast Partnership

CBP international adviser program builds trust, law-enforcement capacity

Article and photos by Warren Byrd



Bryan Picado, CBP ports/customs adviser in Peru, discusses future plans for customs operations with Edith Sanchez Delgado, Peruvian national customs chief of staff, during a visit to the Pachacamac ruins near Lurin, Peru.

The scene is repeated at each stop, each day, of a two-week whirlwind tour of Peru law enforcement and customs operations: officials enthusiastically – and respectfully – greet their trusted friend and mentor, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection adviser.

“Buenos días mi amigo,” the Peruvian official bellows.

“Buenos días, cómo estás hoy? Muchas gracias por permitirnos visitar hoy,” the adviser replies. The informal greeting is a standard, “Hello, how are you today?” followed by a, “Very well, thank you for letting us visit today” response.

Observers – mostly CBP representatives who are part of the traveling entourage – then listen to a rapid-fire exchange of dialogue between the two in Spanish, noting the genuine smiles on each face. It’s evident there’s a bond, not only between the two government officials, but between their two countries.

And that defines the key ingredient to a successful adviser program: trust.

“My successes lie with the trust that we have, that I’ve been able to generate with the government of Peru,” said Bryan Picado, the CBP ports/customs adviser working with the State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Lima. Picado started working with the U.S. Customs Service at age 16 and has remained with CBP since.

He’s drawn by the agency’s unique career environment. While many professions feature a more exact focus, with duties commonly stretched across a 40-hour work week, CBP adviser workdays routinely bleed into nights. The “adviser” tag is misleading – they wear multiple hats simultaneously: financier, diplomat, adviser, legal eagle, translator, teacher, negotiator, coordinator, problem solver. That’s how they successfully orchestrate their environment. The 30-odd CBP advisers and attachés scattered across the globe log their sleep sessions in winks,

not hours. Their duties are endless, the job daunting. They must be sage and steadfast operators, and carry credentials steeped in CBP job diversity.

Perhaps most importantly, they play pivotal roles in helping host nations thwart criminal operations involving illegal drugs, illicit trade, smuggling, human trafficking and money laundering. They partner with local law enforcement and immigration and customs officials to improve their operations. Advisers spearhead CBP’s efforts to help countries help themselves improve and build confidence in their abilities through training and mentoring. In some cases, like Peru’s, customs and law enforcement officials are overwhelmed and outpaced by criminal operations. Another hurdle is negotiating Peru’s laws governing seizure and disposition of illegal drugs or goods. Peru’s system assigns different legal procedures to each category of seized product.



Bryan Picado, center, CBP ports/customs adviser in Peru, enjoys a friendly discussion with Javier Evaristo Cosco, right, Peruvian National Police commander, and PNP K-9 instructor Marco Alameda Féli.

Some advisers, though, face challenges unique to their posts. Peru is one such example. Led by Picado, the adviser program has flourished – combatting cocaine trafficking and other illegal activities – because of his full-throttle approach and knack for building a close-knit, effective network of Peruvian associates.

While Picado works with the Andes Mountains as a backdrop, he’s mostly on the road. One day he’s crisscrossing the country offering training and advice on seizing drugs being smuggled into and out of ports of entry by sea or land. Another day, Picado’s observing, assessing and then recommending better ways to conduct search-and-seizure operations.

Peru’s estimated \$1.2 billion a year illicit cocaine trade, with profit margins of roughly 80 percent, is a huge problem.

When office-bound, Picado works the telephone. He mediates with local and host country governments, customs officers and national police. These relations can be sensitive. It sometimes takes all his diplomatic skills to finesse a dialogue between them.

Training bolsters effectiveness

Picado said that the adviser program offers training, technical advice and the latest equipment to improve the way Peru screens cargo and passengers.

And, thanks to State Department funding, he’s able to buy narcotic-identifying equipment and new computers. He’s also able to maintain and repair U.S.-donated body and cargo scanners to improve search-and-seizure operations at Peru’s seaports and airports.

Picado also trains officers of the Peruvian National Police, or PNP, and Peru’s National Customs and Tax Administration, called SUNAT, to interdict drug shipments and other illegal contraband destined for the U.S. Safer ports boost the economy and stem the country’s crime, drug trafficking and violence, particularly in Lima and Cusco, located in the Andes east of Lima.

“Violence goes hand-in-hand with drug trafficking,” Picado said, explaining that killings and drug-related assassinations in the Callao port area are common. Even grenades are being tossed at vehicles.

But the U.S. investment is getting results. Peru customs and the national police now seize roughly 2 tons of cocaine per year. From January to August 2015, State Department ports and customs program activities resulted in a 200 percent increase



An officer with the Peruvian National Police K-9 unit on patrol at the Cusco international airport watches as her canine sniffs a passenger’s luggage. Photo by Charles Csavossy



Representatives from CBP watch Peruvian customs officers examine cargo contained in a truck as it passes through a cargo scanner at the Callao, Peru, seaport.

in seizures. In Cusco, the Peruvians nabbed 30-plus kilos of illegally mined gold worth an estimated \$1.3 million, \$200,000 in currency and a Cessna airplane.

During that same timeframe, the program trained 522 officers from several agencies to combat criminal organizations. It sponsored a new Customs Operational Practices for Enforcement and Seizures workshop in July, drawing more than 100 attendees, many from Peruvian law enforcement agencies. The workshop taught World Customs Organization standards in the storage, chain of custody and legal disposition of seized property and drugs.

Peru's law enforcement and customs officials also learned targeting and risk management, as well as seaport and international air cargo interdiction. CBP brought Peruvian officials to El Paso and Laredo, Texas, for training in nabbing border crossers and using machines to detect contraband.

Progress, Picado said, is reflected by the fact that Peruvian customs and national police are making seizures now at some locations where before, they weren't. He credits the U.S. presence.

"You can see successes with some of our training," Picado noted. "We teach something, and then, boom, two or three weeks later, we see a seizure. It helps that we're there with them."

The International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs program, or INL, led to several significant seizures in 2015.

- In Cusco, Peruvian law enforcement logged two separate seizures in the cities of Iquitos and Paita of more than 60 kilograms of cocaine.
- In March, based on Picado's recommendations, Cusco's international airport installed officers trained in CBP targeting methodology and soon seized four bars of illegally mined gold valued at nearly \$1 million, and made two arrests.
- In May, the Peruvian Task Force targeted a shipment of canned pineapples in Callao that contained 122 kilos of cocaine worth about \$7 million. Also in May, inspection of a targeted shipment of avocados destined for the U.S. revealed 166 kilos of cocaine embedded in the packing material.
- In early July, the task force seized 190 kilos of cocaine from duffle bags in a sea cargo container bound for Spain.

Picado said that the majority of cocaine from Peru – now the world’s top cocaine-producing country – is smuggled to South American countries for domestic consumption or for shipment to East Asia, Mexico, the Caribbean, and the U.S., with roughly 80 percent going to Europe. Consumption of illicit drugs in Peru is growing, especially in Lima’s Callao seaport area, which has experienced a 300 percent rise in crime and increased murder rates since January 2014, Picado said. From January until June 2015, for example, Callao has had 60 murders directly related to narcotics trafficking.

Lima is also becoming a base for human trafficking. It’s where Picado has invested in a modern computer system to help the country fight that growing issue. The technology modernized Peru’s human trafficking division and allows officers to more quickly and easily access information about ongoing investigations from the field, plus track and house trafficking data, which Picado said has led to more arrests.

INL’s port security program with the CBP adviser in Peru has ebbed and flowed over the past 10 years, starting with one adviser, going to three full-time and a few part-timers and then to just Picado. But, two more full-timer advisers were recently added to the fold. The operation also includes targeting and risk assessment.

The bigger picture

CBP advisers exist to oversee capacity-building programs that help other nations to fight the flow of illicit materials and people, as well as to quicken and secure trade and travel.

“The advisers promote continuity and sustainability for the training that CBP provides to assist the countries with implementing and institutionalizing new skills and concepts,” said Loretta Gamble, international operations executive director in the CBP Office of International Affairs. “This gives CBP an on-the-ground perspective that allows for the identification, investigation, and interdiction of threats as early as possible, often in their countries of origin and before they reach the United States.”

“You have to have the ability to see the big picture,” she said.

Gamble said that Peru’s adviser program was very successful early, partly due to one of the first advisers, Art Bruno, who is now program manager for the CBP Office of Intelligence. Bruno, who arrived in 2007, was recruited by the State Department’s Narcotics Affairs Section, which later became International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, to run the Peruvian Task Force.



Peruvian National Customs inspectors process illegal pharmaceuticals at the storage warehouse in Lurin, Peru.

Bruno resurrected a flailing task force comprised of Peru's DIRANDRO (anti-narcotics police), the PNP and SUNAT. Bruno still supports the adviser program by conducting training, targeting and assessments, including a recent trip to infuse new ideas into the task force to support Picado's negotiated detente between SUNAT and PNP, who now work together harmoniously after a previously rocky relationship.

Gamble said another aspect of being a good adviser is practicing the World Customs Organization's three critical components of any capacity building program – political will, people, and partnership – all of which the WCO considers key to helping countries operate globally and sustain their development and modernization. Advisers, she said, help countries engage those attributes by providing training and mentorship.

Peruvian customs and national police agree with U.S. officials that both countries learn from each other through training and sharing common customs and police operations experiences.

“The U.S. Embassy and Peru are strategic partners in the fight against people trafficking contraband and [committing] serious crimes. We have a common goal: to fight international crime,” said Ivan Luyo, deputy superintendent for SUNAT. “Their collaboration is invaluable. Trust is a key to achieve objectives. The work between our customs and the U.S. is a pretty clear example of collaboration and trust. We share a common goal, which is to protect the world's society, and I believe the only way to do this is to work together.”



Bryan Picado, right, CBP Adviser in Peru, talks with Jose Carlos Barcorondan, general manager of the storage warehouse in Lurin, Peru, during a tour of the seized property facility.



Roly Sedano Huaman, second sub officer with the Peruvian National Police K-9 unit, follows his dog's lead in searching for narcotics hidden in the trunk of a car during training.

K-9 program grows with U.S. help

Suitcases are spread on the ground in the neatly pruned grassy quadrangle at the PNP K-9 headquarters in Lima. Sherman, the most productive dog in the pack of 49 canines, sits patiently by his handler, Saul Villanueva. Villanueva, an anti-narcotics division officer, has been a PNP canine handler for six years. This year, Sherman has spotted 320-plus kilos of cocaine. Villanueva has been with Sherman since January.

Sherman showed his prowess. On Villanueva's command, Sherman calmly but intensely moved toward the suitcases, sniffing them one by one. Handlers had first tried to fool him by filling the suitcases with different items – not including cocaine – and shuffling them around like a street-corner shell game. Sherman didn't bite on that ruse, but then a bag of cocaine was slipped into one of the suitcases. The suitcases were reshuffled before Sherman's next run, and he quickly identified the bag and waited for Villanueva to acknowledge his find.

"The U.S. Embassy and agencies have provided a lot of capacity building for us," said Javier Evaristo,

commander of the PNP K-9 unit/anti-drug police section. "It's been a very significant change since the U.S. became involved. We have the capacity to confront [in] the war on drugs. We would like to see the same support for us to be able to combat the emerging threats."



Members of the Peruvian National Police K-9 unit examine drugs found in a car trunk by a handler's canine during a training exercise.

Picado helped establish a system whereby the handlers, once selected, train and live with the canine for several months.

“It’s a great system, a concept that we like,” Evaristo said. “The handler gets to know the behavior of the dog, as well as the dog gets to know the handler, so they both work together well. There’s been a lot of successes, lots of seizures because of the dogs.”

The five dogs donated by the U.S. in 2015 found more than 500 kilos of cocaine in seven months, inspiring the PNP to launch its own K-9 academy.

Picado said the K-9 program he’s nurtured in Peru is “one of my top priorities. The canine has been one of the most successful tools used here, more than even non-intrusive technology.”

Villanueva doesn’t dispute that. “When CBP came here, they gave us tips on what we were doing wrong, and how we needed to correct those techniques to make us better handlers,” he said. “We’ve seen a lot of successes and a lot of positive changes since CBP has been working with us, especially with the infrastructure [kennel facilities] and the types of dogs we have.”

Peruvian Task Force

Besides the K-9 program, one of Picado’s biggest accomplishments has been improving the Peruvian Task Force, a program that brings together select personnel from the Peruvian National Police and national customs. The task force was formed in June 2005 through a multilateral agreement between the U.S. Embassy-Lima, Peruvian customs, the PNP and the Peruvian national drug police. The task force led to the development of an advanced ports program.

Picado called those developments a big improvement after five years of low morale. “I was tasked with either invigorating or disbanding the task force,” he said. “I decided to move forward with the PTF and invested in capacity building rather than high-tech equipment, which has resulted in several significant seizures.”

A customs mutual assistance agreement signed in 2006 allows information between Peru and the U.S. to be cross-referenced for more accurate targeting. “A lot of the success we’ve had here is because of this information sharing,” Picado said.



Bryan Picado, right, CBP adviser in Peru, discusses some X-rays with Richard Ramos, chief veterinary officer for the Peruvian National Police K-9 unit.



A member of Peruvian national customs, called SUNAT, probes a bag of organic quinoa before it is X-rayed at a seaport in Callao, Peru.

Equipment donations buoy efforts

Through CBP's adviser program and the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the U.S. has donated or purchased computers, screens, software and smart boards for the Callao office. The technology allows Peruvian officials to map and monitor drug trafficking organizations to determine problem areas at the Callao ports.

The U.S. has also donated X-ray machines, underwater photo equipment and scuba gear, which allows a diving team to look for drugs attached underneath vessels.

Picado said all the money the U.S. spends assisting other countries is worth it. "There's a return on the investment for the American taxpayer," he said. "We have that international footprint, we're branding CBP, and countries are turning to CBP for assistance. We're setting the tone, setting the standards as an agency globally."

"When you look at stopping a human smuggling ring, or stopping even 1 kilo of cocaine reaching our borders, that in itself is the payoff," he added. "Expanding our borders, it's all part of a layered strategy and has given us a lot of strength. We have made the U.S. better. We are protecting the frontline from far away. That's why we're here." **F**

A member of Peruvian national customs, called SUNAT, examines bags of organic quinoa being run through an X-ray machine at a seaport in Callao.



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SOLAR ECLIPSE

How CBP partnered with industry to save America's solar manufacturers

By Marcy Mason

It all started with an anonymous tip from industry. A concerned member of the trade community suspected an importer of fraud and alerted U.S. Customs and Border Protection. An online report, known as an e-Allegation, was filed and funneled to CBP's national targeting unit in Miami. From there, the suspected trade violation crisscrossed the country and was shared with the agency's Los Angeles-based Center of Excellence and Expertise for Electronics, the trade processing and enforcement hub for electronic goods imported into the U.S.

The industry source believed that the importer wasn't fully disclosing the contents of its solar panel shipments from China to avoid paying hefty antidumping duties, which had been added to the price of a specific type of solar cell to protect American manufacturing.

Alan Aprea, one of the trade enforcement branch chiefs at CBP's Electronics Center of Excellence and Expertise, was familiar with the importer and its California-based operation. "It's a company that we had our eye on. The allegation just reinforced our decision to move forward," said Aprea. "When we

receive allegations, we take them very seriously, and we look into them to make sure we vet those companies."

Aprea reached out to the port of San Francisco to target the importer's incoming shipments. Five shipments were identified. Four were headed to the port of New York and one was routed to San Francisco. In March, when the San Francisco shipment arrived, a team of CBP officers, import specialists, and auditors collectively conducted a physical examination of the 36 crates containing the solar panels.

"When we open crates, we never know what we're going to find. It's not uncommon for goods to be misdescribed on the invoice," said John Gerber, a CBP supervisory import specialist in San Francisco who is part of the electronics center's enforcement team. The importer had listed the solar cells as "thin-film," a variety of solar cells that are duty-free. But the shipments were suspected to contain the protected type of solar cells made of crystalline silicon, which requires payment of duty.

A view of one of five solar rooftop installations at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii. Photo courtesy of SolarWorld





CBP Supervisory Import Specialist John Gerber, center, works with a team of CBP officers, import specialists, and auditors to conduct an examination of a targeted shipment of solar panels at the port of San Francisco. From left, Supervisory CBP Officer Alvin Eder, Auditor Thomas Soohoo, Supervisory Import Specialist John Gerber, Import Specialist Jennifer Wu, and CBP Officer Alfonso Portillo. Photo by Frank Falcon

Samples of the solar panels were sent to CBP's San Francisco lab. There, scientists determined that the panels contained a mixture of both types of solar cells, matching the information that was received in the allegation. "We then expanded our investigation and looked at past importations from this importer to see if we could uncover additional violations," said Aprea, noting that the electronics center found many.

"Our preliminary estimate shows that more than \$50 million in duties, fees, and penalties will be owed to the U.S. government, and it all ties to this one importer and a tip from industry," said Aprea. "CBP's goal is to level the playing field – to make sure that everyone is operating in a fair manner when they're conducting their trade business in the U.S."

To bolster its efforts, CBP adopted a new enforcement strategy. Four years ago, when American solar panel makers were being driven out of business because of falling prices and stiff competition from China, the agency decided to

take a proactive approach. CBP reached out to U.S. solar manufacturers to strengthen its enforcement techniques even before the U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. International Trade Commission concluded that American businesses were suffering because of unfair foreign competition. It also was the first time that CBP took a holistic approach throughout the agency to prevent evasion of dumping orders, which require violating foreign companies to pay steep import duties to level the playing field for U.S. industry.

Unfair Chinese trade practices

During the late 2000s, the climate for manufacturing solar panels in the U.S. was crumbling. "There was a concerted effort by Chinese manufacturers and the Chinese government to expand and take over solar manufacturing," said Timothy Brightbill, an international trade attorney and partner at law firm Wiley Rein, who represents domestic companies and industries in trade remedy cases. "The government of China's five-year plan specifically called out renewable energy and solar as targeted areas for growth. We saw billions of dollars of subsidies given to Chinese companies. If you add up all of the grants, loans, and loan guarantees, it was more than \$40 billion of subsidies," he said. "At that time, 95 percent of China's solar panels were being exported because China wasn't using solar energy."

As a result, there was a surge of solar panel imports coming into the U.S. from China. "Chinese imports peaked in 2011 at just under \$3 billion worth of imports," said Brightbill, who added that "from 2009 to 2012, there was a 1,000 percent increase in imports of solar cells and panels from China into the U.S. That's one of the largest surges of any product I've ever seen."

The market flooded, causing a price collapse, which had a major impact on U.S. industry. "The price reduction was so enormous. It was clearly a case where someone wanted to take the market share by dumping under cost. We were affected badly," said Mukesh Dulani, the president of SolarWorld

Americas Inc., in Hillsboro, Oregon. The company is the oldest and largest crystalline silicon solar manufacturing firm in the U.S., and was founded in 1975 by an American entrepreneur, but now has German ownership.

“The company has gone through ups and downs because of the trade aggression from China,” said Dulani. “At the height of things, we had 1,335 people employed. Last year, we went down to 700. We had to shut down our California plant and lay off close to 200 people. We consolidated in Hillsboro, but then had to close two sections of our manufacturing here,” he said.

Before long, the entire U.S. solar manufacturing industry was experiencing shutdowns, layoffs, and huge operating losses. “Company after company started closing and we made the decision to stand and fight,” said Dulani. In the fall of 2011, SolarWorld filed petitions with the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. International Trade Commission, alleging that Chinese manufacturers were selling solar cells and panels at below market or “dumped” prices and were receiving unfair subsidies from the Chinese government.

From there, the Department of Commerce opened an investigation to determine whether the Chinese solar cells and panels were being dumped in the U.S. market or subsidized by the Chinese government. The U.S. International Trade Commission simultaneously began conducting its own investigation to determine whether or not U.S. industry was injured by the imported goods. In the event that unfair trade practices are found, the Department of Commerce decides the appropriate amount of antidumping and countervailing duties to remedy the market distortion caused by the dumping and subsidizing respectively. In other words, the additional taxes placed on the imported merchandise will level the playing field so that U.S. manufacturers can compete.

Proactive enforcement

Traditionally, CBP’s enforcement role begins when the investigations on a trade case are completed and the Department of Commerce issues a dumping order with instructions for CBP to follow. “From the time an initial claim is made until the Department of Commerce makes a final decision usually takes eight months to a year, so it can be quite a long time,”



A solar farm developed by U.S. solar manufacturer SolarWorld in the desert near Twentynine Palms, California. Photo courtesy of SolarWorld

said Michael Walsh, CBP's director of antidumping and countervailing duty policy and programs division in Washington, D.C. "We thought rather than wait all of that time for Commerce to make a decision, why aren't we talking to industry now?"

So in the fall of 2011, when the petition was filed, CBP reached out to representatives of the solar industry. "We said, 'Tell us about your product. How can CBP be smarter about enforcing the evasion of this order? What can we be doing even before the order goes into place?'" said Walsh. "This was the first time we ever did that with any industry. It was our first effort to be proactive in terms of the dumping process."

According to Walsh, CBP changed its tactics because the agency wanted to be able to leverage the trade's knowledge about its industry sector earlier. "Rather than having to start from ground zero when the order went into effect, we already wanted to be up and running and thinking about how do we best enforce this at the border," he said. "In the solar panel case, we didn't know if we needed special lab equipment or if there was some kind of country of origin test that we could do. Using this strategy, there were all kinds of questions that we were able to ask before the order went into place – not just from a laboratory standpoint, but from an officer, an import specialist, and an auditor's perspective too."

Walsh explained that the agency's new antidumping strategy, which is now being used for all industries, has embraced a holistic approach. "In the past, we were looking at antidumping in terms of stovepiping rather than at CBP as a whole," said Walsh. "We realized that we were not being effective in our overall enforcement and that we needed to do a better job of coordinating our efforts. Now, we are thinking in terms of how

we can best use all of the various parts and pieces of CBP. If we are trying to solve a problem, we figure out who the best players are and what is the best method that we can use," he said. "Our overall goal is to protect the domestic economy and to make sure that folks who have been given the protection that dumping and countervailing orders are supposed to provide, get that relief. And that we are doing everything we can to protect jobs and enable U.S. industry to compete fairly on a level playing field."

When the dumping orders were issued in December 2012, they specified that all merchandise containing crystalline silicon solar cells made in China were subject to duties. Most companies were required to pay about 30 percent extra on their shipments after the antidumping and countervailing subsidy duties were added on. But the rates could go much higher, to approximately 250 percent, for manufacturers that fall into a category where China's country-wide rate is applied.

Learning from industry

By that point, CBP's staff at the ports had been rigorously learning from industry for more than a year. "SolarWorld came out and conducted training. They talked to us about the technology involved in manufacturing solar cells and they brought examples that they shared with us," said Aprea at CBP's Electronics Center of Excellence and Expertise. "They were able to dive into the complexities of the scope of the order – what is considered in and out of the scope, what is acceptable and what isn't."

SolarWorld also held webinars and video teleconferences where CBP employees from across the country could call in and ask questions. "It was the first time that we brought someone in from



Mukesh Dulani, far left, president of SolarWorld, takes CBP employees on a tour of the SolarWorld factory in Hillsboro, Oregon, to educate them about solar cell production. CBP employees, from left, Ed Colford, supervisory CBP officer; Steve Lewis, supervisory import specialist; Kristy Huckins, import specialist; and Katie Schultz, senior import specialist. Photo by William Wells

the trade community to do that,” said Alexander Amdur, the branch chief of CBP’s antidumping and countervailing duty policy division.

Then the company hosted a tour of its Hillsboro factory for a group of CBP commodity experts, so they could see SolarWorld’s manufacturing process firsthand. “We saw how solar cells are made and which kind of solar cell falls under the dumping case. We also learned which countries have the capability to make crystalline silicon solar cells and which countries don’t, so that we could focus our attention better on which products would be suspect,” said Katie Schultz, a senior import specialist at the port of Portland in Oregon.

Schultz also learned that each solar cell has an ID number. “When the solar cell is placed into a panel, those solar cell numbers are identified as going into that panel, which is very important, because that is the industry norm,” said Schultz. “So when I get information from an importer who says, ‘There are 10,000 solar cells that went into the panels in that shipment,’ I can say, ‘Show me which cells went into those panels.’ This is the kind of information that I am using when I conduct my examinations.”

Scientific challenge

But the complexity of the commodity was only a part of CBP’s enforcement challenge. It also is difficult to determine where solar cells are made. “To date, there is no scientific technique to differentiate between different manufacturers or different countries that produce crystalline silicon solar cells,” said Steve Cassata, a CBP senior science officer based in Washington, D.C. “Crystalline silicon solar cells, which are almost pure silicon, are all manufactured with the same chemical composition, using the same methodology and the same manufacturing process, so this creates a challenge for our officers and the labs.”

However, the CBP labs do have some methods to test solar cells. “We can determine different types of solar cells, crystalline silicon versus thin-film varieties, based on thickness and the chemical composition of the cells,” said Cassata. The solar cells subject to the dumping order need to be made of crystalline silicon and be 20 micrometers or thicker. “Twenty micrometers is slightly thicker than a fine strand of human hair,” said Cassata.

Additionally, the surface area of the solar cell needs to be larger than 10,000 square millimeters, roughly the surface area of one side of a DVD disk.

In contrast, the thin-film solar cells, which do not fall under the scope of the order, “are basically a chemical that’s sprayed onto a panel of glass and dried,” said Cassata. “On a microscopic level, it is much thinner than the crystalline silicon solar cells, so we are able to tell the difference.”

Money trail

Rather than rely solely on lab results, CBP tackled the problem holistically and used other methods to determine where imported solar cells are made and to catch companies trying to evade paying the dumping duties. One technique that is used is tracing the paper trail to get to the source. “At the ports, the CBP officers are doing real-time examinations, but we’re able to review records, financial documents, and import documents going back three to five years,” said Alexander Ebarle, the assistant field director of CBP’s Regulatory Audit Office in San Jose, California. “As auditors, we’re looking at the money and the money trail.”

For example, when Ebarle’s auditing team couldn’t obtain sufficient information from an importer about the country of origin for shipments containing solar cells, they analyzed the manufacturer’s purchasing records in China. The manufacturer, a large solar cell producer based in Eastern China, claimed that the solar cells used in the panels were from Taiwan, so they didn’t need to pay any duties. Only solar cells made in China were dutiable. But when Ebarle’s team pieced together a timeline of when the solar cells were exported from Taiwan to China and when the panels were shipped to the U.S., it didn’t make sense.

“The purchasing records showed that the manufacturer’s earliest purchases of solar cells from Taiwan were made in April 2012,” said Ebarle.

“But the shipments in question arrived in the U.S. a month earlier, in March 2012. Based on the records, we determined that they didn’t even have the solar cells at the time of importation,” he said. “When we showed the manufacturer the discrepancy, the company admitted right away that some of their shipments were made with Chinese solar cells.”

Ultimately, because of the manufacturer’s poor record keeping, Ebarle’s team determined that the shipments were partially dutiable and the company owed more than \$10 million to the U.S. government.

In some instances, CBP’s auditors have been able to collect the revenue. This was the case when Ebarle’s team looked into the records of another solar panel importer and its Chinese parent company. The importer had been claiming that its shipments of solar panels were made exclusively with duty-free Taiwanese solar cells, but they couldn’t prove it. So in February 2013, Ebarle’s auditing team requested detailed purchasing, inventory, production, and sales records from the manufacturer in Changzhou, China. “When they pulled their records, they couldn’t identify which types of solar cells were in the panels,” said Ebarle.

Two months later, the importer filed a disclosure for unpaid countervailing duties due to subsidies the manufacturer received from the Chinese government. “The disclosure was prompted by our request for detailed records from the Chinese manufacturer,” said Ebarle. As a result, in May 2014, CBP collected \$829,000.

To help speed up the auditing process, CBP regulatory auditors have recently started using a survey technique where more than one company is targeted at a time. “We use surveys to quickly assess risk related to certain importers,” said Ebarle. “In that way, we are able to focus our resources on companies that represent the greatest risk and could be most damaging to the U.S. economy.”



Alan Aprea, lower right, Electronics Center of Excellence and Expertise branch chief, discusses the steps the port of L.A. team should take to examine a solar panel. Pictured left to right, CBP Officers Wayne Hooper, Travis Townsend, and Senior Import Specialist Dirk Lolkus. Photo by Jaime Ruiz

At the port level, antidumping enforcement activities are coordinated through the Electronics Center of Excellence and Expertise. “We have a nationwide view of all of the importations that come into the U.S. and we’re conducting nationwide enforcement for electronics. Solar cells are one of the commodities,” said Aprea.

For uniformity at the ports, the electronics center sent out guidance to assist with solar panel cargo examinations. “We knew this was going to impact a lot of ports, so we put out guidance that is clear and concise for the field,” said Aprea. “It’s basically a well-defined list of questions so that we didn’t have one port asking different questions than another. It gives them a clear path of what the agency wants to look at and what kind of information we need for this particular product, so that we can do the best job of enforcement and protect American industry.”

Operation Solar Flare

Sting operations are one of the tactics CBP uses at the ports to enforce solar cell and panel dumping orders. Although many operations are conducted nationwide, one of the first and most successful is Operation Solar Flare at the port of Charlotte in North Carolina. The original operation ran from

August to October 2012, and it’s still ongoing. “Back in 2012, we were looking for a new enforcement operation. Our team focuses a lot on electronic products and we saw that a new dumping order was coming out on this burgeoning, new technology,” said Laurie Pazzo, a CBP senior import specialist at the port of Charlotte. “We thought, what better time than now? Let’s get in on the ground floor and see what enforcement issues we can uncover.”

Pazzo and her teammates realized they didn’t know much about solar cells and panels, so they decided to educate themselves. They read articles, worked with CBP’s national import specialist who interprets the scope of dumping orders, and communicated with the Electronics Center of Excellence and Expertise. They also participated in the SolarWorld webinars and talked to others in the industry. “We reached out to the local industry in this region to learn about solar panels in terms of classification, manufacturing, and differentiating the types of solar cells,” said CBP Import Specialist Jeff Sorrells. “We learned that the industry had made attempts to circumvent the system in multiple ways and that helped us learn how to catch importers who were using illicit means to bring their shipments into the U.S.”

The port of Charlotte team shared their knowledge with the area ports. “As we developed the operation, we reached out to other ports that would be affected – Wilmington, Morehead City, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Greensboro – and we let them know what we were going to be doing,” said Sorrells. “Through our learning process, we developed team training and we were able to instruct the officers on what we were looking for, how we were going to work on this, and what we planned to do moving forward.”

It didn’t take long before the team received a suspicious shipment. “One of our officers targeted it randomly,” said Pazzo. “The shipment was described as a suitcase and it was coming from a company that had the word ‘technologies’ in its name, so it just didn’t fit.”

There were other red flags. “A suitcase has a very high duty rate. Twenty percent plus,” said Pazzo, “and the goods were in retail boxes that said, ‘Designed and assembled in the USA,’ when they came from China.”

When the team examined the merchandise, they saw that it wasn’t really a suitcase. “It may have looked like a suitcase, but it was actually a metal frame in the shape of a suitcase with a plastic handle on the top and it had an opening on the side where a solar cell could be inserted for mobile power once it was fully assembled,” explained Pazzo. “It was a misdescribed solar power unit that would be used in the event of a power outage.”

The port of Charlotte team sent a sample to the CBP Savannah lab to determine if the solar cells were the crystalline silicon type that were covered by the dumping order. “It was determined to be affirmative and approximately \$6,600 in antidumping duties were due for that one entry,” said Pazzo.

Operation Solar Flare has been highly successful. During the original three month operation in 2012,

the potential loss in revenue owed to the U.S. government was \$1.6 million. From August 2012 to April 2015, CBP recovered slightly more than \$1 million in lost revenue because of classification errors and \$6.5 million in antidumping and countervailing duties.

“Solar cell manufacturing is an evolving and struggling industry in the U.S. That is why it is so critical that we continue to do the work that we’re doing to protect U.S. industry,” said Pazzo.

Still there are other aspects that contribute to CBP’s holistic approach to preventing evasion of dumping orders. One is a specialized targeting unit that works with industry and partner agencies to gather and analyze trade intelligence. The intelligence is shared with the ports and the Centers of Excellence and Expertise to implement better trade enforcement actions nationwide. CBP’s Automated Commercial Environment, ACE, cargo processing system also helps the agency validate shipment activities and recover revenue. “We do shipment document reviews through our cargo processing system electronically to see if the information supplied by brokers and importers is accurate and to check for any discrepancies,” said Amdur, who heads CBP’s antidumping and countervailing duty policy branch. “The reviews resulted in the recovery of approximately \$22.7 million in revenue for solar cell and panel shipments from March 2012 through February 2015.”

Closing the loophole

But CBP faced another major enforcement hurdle that proved to be a bigger challenge. The dumping orders had a loophole. As long as Chinese manufacturers used non-Chinese solar cells, their products were duty-free. As a consequence, Chinese solar panel imports in the U.S. skyrocketed, increasing by more than 1600 percent between 2011 and 2013.

“China just changed its unfair trade practices to using Taiwanese solar cells, but their products were still dumped and subsidized,” said Brightbill. “It was very

difficult to enforce, because the product comes in a panel that is labeled with the country of origin, but the cells do not have any indication of what country they're coming from," he said. "While the first trade cases did result in some reduction in the amount of Chinese product coming into the country, solar panel prices continued to go down very significantly and there was more harm to U.S. industry. More producers were shutting down, there were no new producers opening up and those that were still around were losing money."

"By 2013, the Chinese came pretty close to making the solar industry extinct in the United States," said SolarWorld's Dulani.

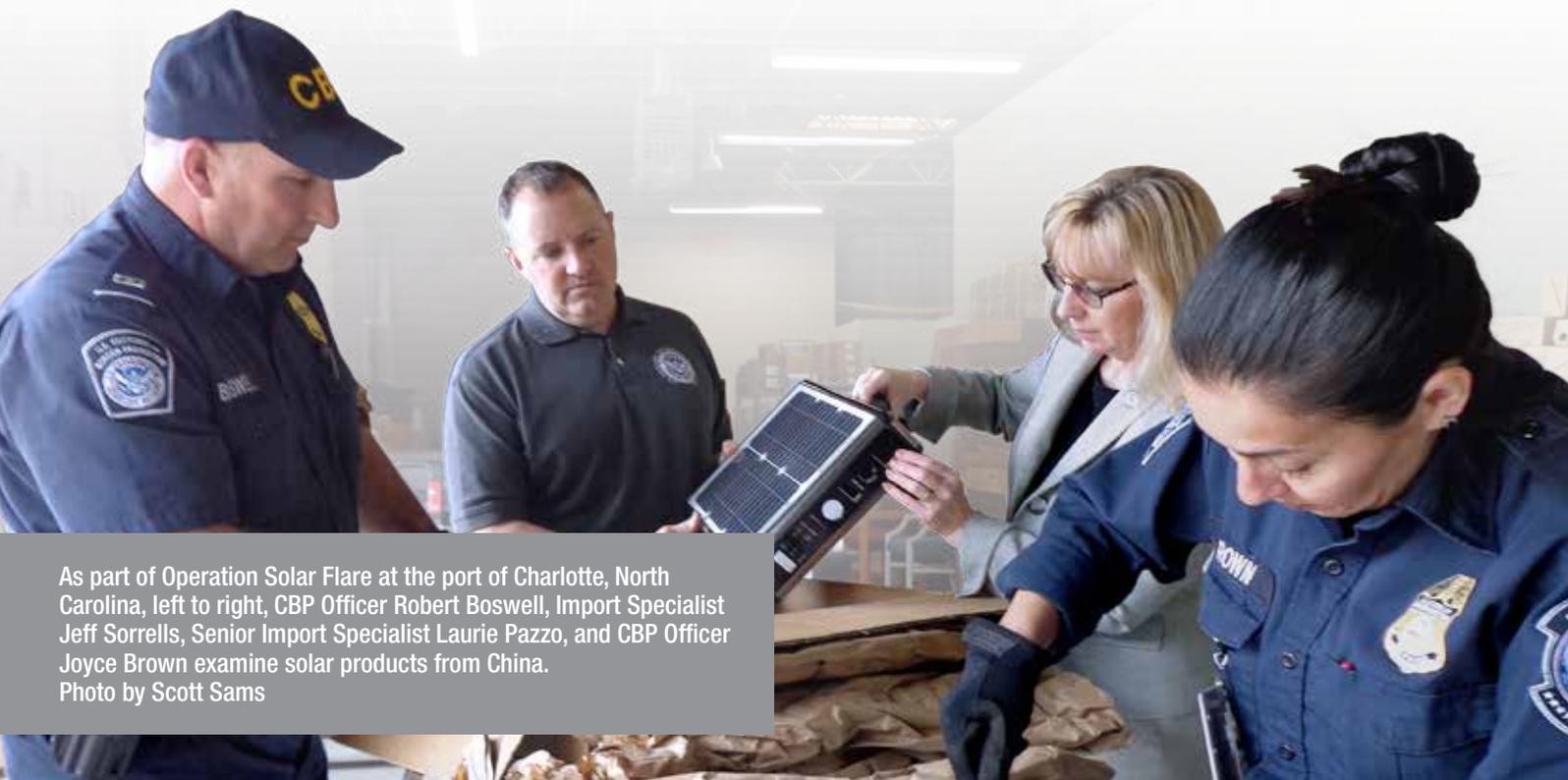
As a result, on December 31, 2013, SolarWorld filed a second set of petitions. This time the trade case was against China and Taiwan. A year later in December 2014, after a rigorous investigation, the Department of Commerce issued its final determination. "Our analysis showed that companies from China and Taiwan were dumping solar cells and solar panels in the United States and that the government of China was providing countervailable subsidies," said Christian Marsh, deputy assistant secretary for antidumping and countervailing duty operations for the U.S. Department of Commerce. A few

months later, in February 2015, following its own investigation, the International Trade Commission also found China and Taiwan guilty of violating trade laws. New dumping orders were issued, new duties were put in place on additional products, and the loophole was closed.

Moving swiftly

Even before the second dumping order was finalized, CBP was moving swiftly to step up its trade enforcement. Katie Schultz at the port of Portland had reopened a sting operation she had worked on in 2012. She also decided to take another look at the solar importers she had focused on earlier. "I went back to the companies I had looked at previously to check their new shipments, to see if they were doing things the same way or if they were sourcing their solar cells from somewhere new," said Schultz. That's when Schultz noticed a company she hadn't seen before. "They were all pretty much the same importers except one new company based in Los Angeles," she said.

Schultz immediately started to review the company's shipments to see where they were getting their product from and what claims they were making.



As part of Operation Solar Flare at the port of Charlotte, North Carolina, left to right, CBP Officer Robert Boswell, Import Specialist Jeff Sorrells, Senior Import Specialist Laurie Pazzo, and CBP Officer Joyce Brown examine solar products from China. Photo by Scott Sams

“The first documents they submitted were inconclusive, so I contacted them and they didn’t respond. That really rang all of my bells. Something was not right here,” said Schultz.

Eventually Schultz made contact with the importer, but there were long breaks in the communication, the company requested several extensions, their documents were incomplete, and they kept switching brokers. “However, the real kicker,” said Schultz, “was the shipments should have been sent to L.A. for an L.A. project. I couldn’t understand why they would be bringing the shipments to Portland and then transporting them down to L.A., and they were using a different broker to do it.”

All of those things combined made Schultz suspicious. “It made me think they could be transshipping goods through another country or bringing shipments in to different ports thinking CBP can’t track them. However, we can,” she said.

Through her research, Schultz discovered that the importer had sent 13 shipments through the port of Portland since May 2014. She also determined that several of the shipments were in violation and the potential lost revenue owed to the U.S. government was approximately \$32.6 million.

Bright future

During the last year, signs of a brighter future have been unfolding for U.S. solar manufacturers. According to a January 15, 2015, article published by Greentech Media, an industry news/research source, the third quarter of 2014 saw domestic solar panel production spike 275 percent since the market collapse in 2012. “We’re seeing a real resurgence in solar manufacturing in the U.S.,” said Brightbill. “Now that the unfair trade practices are being addressed, we expect to see tremendous growth in manufacturing. And it makes sense because the demand for solar energy in the United States by the residential, commercial, and utility sectors is extremely strong. It’s not just growing by double digits, but in some cases by triple digits every year. It’s a very strong market. We should be adding five to 10 new manufacturers a year and thousands of jobs.”

SolarWorld, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2015, is one of the companies making a comeback. “We are rehiring 200 people. By the first half of 2016,



Solar panels are installed at a residence in Hillsboro, Oregon. Photo courtesy of SolarWorld

we will have hired everyone,” said Dulani. When complete, SolarWorld’s employment in Hillsboro will return to 900 workers.

The company is also expanding its production volume. A new solar-panel production line is being added, increasing the factory’s annual capacity from 380 megawatts, MW, to 550 MW. SolarWorld also has expanded its advanced, high-power cell production capacity by 100 MW.

Other solar manufacturers such as Silicon Energy, a small niche company with facilities in Marysville, Washington and Mt. Iron, Minnesota, also have plans for growth. “We are in the process of getting ready to hire more people in Minnesota,” said Gary Shaver, Silicon Energy’s president. “We’re looking at 2016 as a year of significant growth for us. Our hope is to increase by at least 50 percent.”

Not long ago, the company was fighting for its survival. “In Minnesota, we went up against a company that was importing from China. It really damaged our company to the level that we’re lucky we’re even here,” said Shaver.

Then, there are others such as Suniva, a Norcross, Georgia-based crystalline silicon solar cell manufacturer that opened its second U.S. manufacturing plant in Saginaw Township, Michigan, two years ago. As reported in the Atlanta Business Chronicle in July 2014, “Suniva is following a growing trend of manufacturing returning to the U.S.” from overseas. Suniva plans to add 350 new jobs to the Saginaw community.

SolarCity, the largest residential solar installer in the U.S., is also joining the domestic solar panel manufacturing ranks. The San Mateo, California-based company, chaired by entrepreneur Elon Musk, broke ground in September 2014 in Buffalo, New York, for a manufacturing facility that is being billed as one of the world’s largest with more than

one gigawatt of capacity. One gigawatt can power up to 750,000 homes.

According to company spokesman Will Craven, “several thousand people” will be hired to work at the new facility, which will open in 2016. “The factory is scheduled to be at full production by the end of the first quarter of 2017,” said Craven. “Most, if not all, of the volume will initially be used in the U.S. by SolarCity’s more than 190,000 customers.”

“The growth that we’re seeing in U.S. solar manufacturing today would not have been possible two, three, or four years ago when Chinese imports were crushing what was left of U.S. industry,” said Brightbill. “It is a remarkable turnaround in a very short amount of time for an extremely important industry since renewable energy is such a growth market both here in the United States and around the world.”

SolarWorld president Dulani credits the U.S. government for his company’s turnaround. “Because of the support from CBP, the Department of Commerce, and the legal process, which works in the United States, we won our second trade case,” he said. “Without the help of the government and CBP, it would be hard to keep these 700 jobs here—forget about expanding. But,” he said, “if the enforcement isn’t there, then these orders don’t mean anything.”

“The CBP staff invested time to understand our product line and how it works. They participated in webinars and came to tour our factory while the trade cases were going on. They were eager to learn and asked so many questions about our products. That showed us that they truly care and want to enforce our trade laws,” said Dulani. “And this is important, because if CBP employees understand the product line, it’s easier for them to enforce the trade laws and our company’s employment will be in safe hands at the border.” **F**



BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

By Carl Siegmund, photos by Donna Burton

CBP employees who go above and beyond their normal duties deserve recognition. Some of these employees put their lives at risk and put other people's safety ahead of their own. Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske honored employees in 17 different categories at his annual awards ceremony. Two of the awards – the CBP Medal of Honor for Heroism and the CBP Meritorious Service Award for Valor – highlighted the extraordinary acts of four CBP employees.

The Medal of Honor for Heroism is awarded to employees who display extraordinary bravery or valor during a life-threatening situation. The employees must voluntarily assume the risks of their actions, which should be above and beyond their call of duty. This is CBP's highest valor award. Another similar honor is the Meritorious Service Award for Valor, which also recognizes employees who display courage in a life-threatening situation. The action must involve saving another person's life or protecting property.



Several CBP Commissioner's award recipients, along with their senior leaders, participate in the Aug. 27 awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. Left to right: Laboratory and Scientific Services Directorate Executive Director Ira Reese; Senior Fingerprint Analyst Stephen Greene; Senior Attorney Karen Hiyama; Border Patrol Agent Jerome F. Schmitt Jr.; then-U.S. Border Patrol Chief Michael J. Fisher; Ontario Preclearance Port Director Donald M. Anderson; Chief Counsel Scott K. Falk; Deputy Commissioner Kevin K. McAleenan; Deputy Assistant Chief Counsel Jeffrey Sajdak; CBP Officer Michael D. Hedlund; CBP Officer Christopher L. Ramos; Air and Marine Operations Assistant Commissioner Randolph D. Alles; Deputy Director Kimberly Garcia, Air and Marine Operations in Riverside, California; Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske; Supervisory Border Patrol Agent Vincent J. Dulesky; Office of Field Operations Assistant Commissioner Todd Owen.



CBP Officer Christopher Ramos, center, receives the CBP Medal of Honor for Heroism at the Aug. 27 awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. Also pictured: Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske, left, and Deputy Commissioner Kevin McAleenan.

Christopher Ramos

As a former volunteer firefighter, CBP Officer Christopher Ramos is no stranger to emergencies. The training from his previous job kicked in immediately on the morning of Oct. 9, 2013, when he spotted thick, black smoke on the horizon during his drive to work at the Roma, Texas, port of entry.

“I felt like I was prepared for that minute. I couldn’t just drive by the fire. If people need help, I am there. It’s how I was raised,” said Ramos, whose stepfather and brother were also firefighters.

Ramos raced to the origin of the smoke and found a trailer home in flames. Concerned that a family was trapped inside, he pushed open a window in the front of the house and yelled inside in English and Spanish, but no one responded. He ran to the back of the house and found a butane tank. To prevent an explosion, he disconnected the tank.

Five minutes later, a local fire department arrived and Ramos volunteered to use their hose while the firefighters pumped water. Additional emergency responders arrived at the scene and after 45 minutes,

the fire was under control. When responders cracked open a door, several pets raced to safety. No family members were injured.

Ramos departed for the Roma port reeking of smoke. Assistant Port Director David Alvarez said Ramos reported the incident to his supervisor, and didn’t brag about it to co-workers. Ramos’s supervisor nominated him for the award, but Alvarez noted the write-up didn’t fully capture the intensity and seriousness of the fire. “If people had been in [the house], there could have been loss of life. We definitely saw the human aspect of what Officer Ramos did,” Alvarez said.

Ramos forgot about the fire until months later, when he received an email stating he was being awarded the CBP Medal of Honor for Heroism.

Ramos couldn’t believe he was being recognized. “I said ‘Are you sure you have the right Ramos?’ I did a quick search of the CBP global directory just to make sure there wasn’t another Christopher Ramos from Texas.”



Supervisory Border Patrol Agent Vincent Dulesky, center, receives the CBP Medal of Honor for Heroism in Washington, D.C., at the Aug. 27 Commissioner's awards ceremony. Also pictured: Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske, left, and Deputy Commissioner Kevin McAleenan.

Vincent Dulesky

In his pre-dawn drive to work on Aug. 13, 2014, Supervisory Border Patrol Agent Vincent Dulesky kept his eyes peeled on a minivan speeding in front of him. As the minivan crossed the Milpitas Wash in Palo Verde, California, it hydroplaned, rolled over and careened down a 20-foot embankment on the side of the road and into the wash. A truck driver who also witnessed the accident slowed down, shook his head in disbelief, and pulled over on the side of the road.

"I was thinking somebody has to get these people. They aren't going to make it," said Dulesky,

Dulesky ran up to two men standing by the embankment and asked one to use his cell phone to call 911. Dulesky and the other man went down the embankment and tried to pry open a door of the van. Inside, three generations of a family were trapped: a grandmother, mother and baby. Under the pressure of knee-deep water, the van door wouldn't budge, so the duo dragged the mother and baby out the window.

The grandmother remained stuck as the strong current pushed the van.

After emergency responders arrived, the current rolled the van over on its side. The grandmother managed to escape and was rescued by firefighters while standing precariously on the passenger door. Dulesky directed his Border Patrol staff to close its checkpoints on Highway 78 and direct traffic at the scene of the accident.

"I was so surprised to get a call from [Commissioner Kerlikowske]," Dulesky said about winning the award. "[The award] won't change how I approach my work. It will make me more aware for my troops and I'll let them know that good work is getting recognized."



Border Patrol Agent Jerome Schmitt, center, holds his CBP Meritorious Service Award for Valor at the Aug. 27 awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. Also pictured: Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske, left, and Deputy Commissioner Kevin McAleenan.

Jerome Schmitt

The Sasabe, Arizona, port of entry closes at 8 p.m. So when Border Patrol Agent Jerome Schmitt got a call at 3 a.m. on March 22, 2014, he immediately knew there was a problem. Schmitt, a certified emergency medical technician, learned a man with gunshot wounds to the abdomen and arm had been rushed to the border. Schmitt relayed to his supervisors that he needed to open the port in the middle of the night.

When Schmitt arrived, he found the man, partially bandaged and in agony, in the bed of a truck. Schmitt ran through his emergency checklist: examining the man's vital signs, treating him for shock and keeping him warm.

"I was trying to be cool and collected," Schmitt said. "My biggest concern was keeping him alive and I kept going through the [checklist] in my head and talking to him."

Schmitt cared for the man in the truck for two hours before a helicopter arrived to whisk the man to a hospital. The man survived.

"I am honored to get the recognition for what I did, but I don't think I did anything extraordinary," Schmitt said. "I was doing what I signed up to do."



CBP Canine Officer Michael Hedlund, center, receives the CBP Meritorious Service Award for Valor on Aug. 27 in Washington, D.C. Also pictured: Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske, left, and Deputy Commissioner Kevin McAleenan.

Michael Hedlund

CBP Canine Officer Michael Hedlund usually pays little attention to the dozens of military jets taking off and landing each day at the Marine Corps Air Station near his home in Imperial, California. When driving home from work at the Calexico port of entry on June 4, 2014, Hedlund watched intently as a military jet flying low to the ground suddenly began to nose dive into a neighborhood.

Moments later, the pilot ejected and the jet crashed, tearing a crater in the middle of the street. Hedlund turned on his lights and siren and sped to the scene. He immediately began knocking on doors to make sure residents evacuated the area. He heard what sounded like gunfire, but emergency responders later confirmed it was ammunition in the house closest to the crash.

"I just had an initial gut feeling on what to do. I had to get people out of the area," said Hedlund, who established a perimeter around the crash site after he became concerned that more ammunition might explode.

Several minutes later, emergency personnel arrived from Imperial County, the City of El Centro and the local military base. The pilot, who landed away from the crash site, was cut from his ejection seat and rushed to a local hospital. Emergency personnel continued to secure the area and move local residents farther away from the crash. Thankfully, no one on the ground was injured.

When Hedlund learned he won the CBP Meritorious Service Award for Valor, he said, "It blew my mind because I never expected anything that big." He and his wife, Janneth, who is also a CBP officer in Calexico, were excited to attend the awards ceremony last August.

"It motivates you to take pride in your work," Hedlund said of the award. "Sometimes the type of work I do is monotonous, but when you do get recognized, it rekindles that fire and makes you want to work even harder." **F**

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U.S. Border Patrol conducts cold weather operation in the Wellesley Island, Alexandria Bay and Clayton regions of New York along the U.S. Canada border. Border Patrol agents patrol frozen waterways along the border of the U.S. and Canada. Photo by James Tourtellotte





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