

# FRONTLINE

U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

VOL 9 • ISSUE 2



SEARCHING FOR THE  
**BEST**

CBP ramps up its hiring efforts



**We are CBP**  
A K-9 officer with CBP's Office of Field Operations conducts a training exercise at the Port of Baltimore, Maryland.  
Photo by Glenn Fawcett

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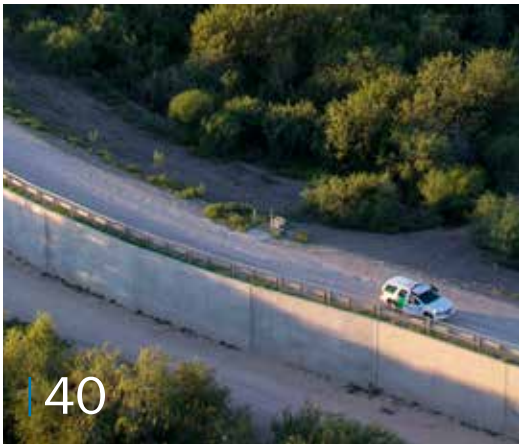
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COVER  
Photos and composite by Ozzy Trevino





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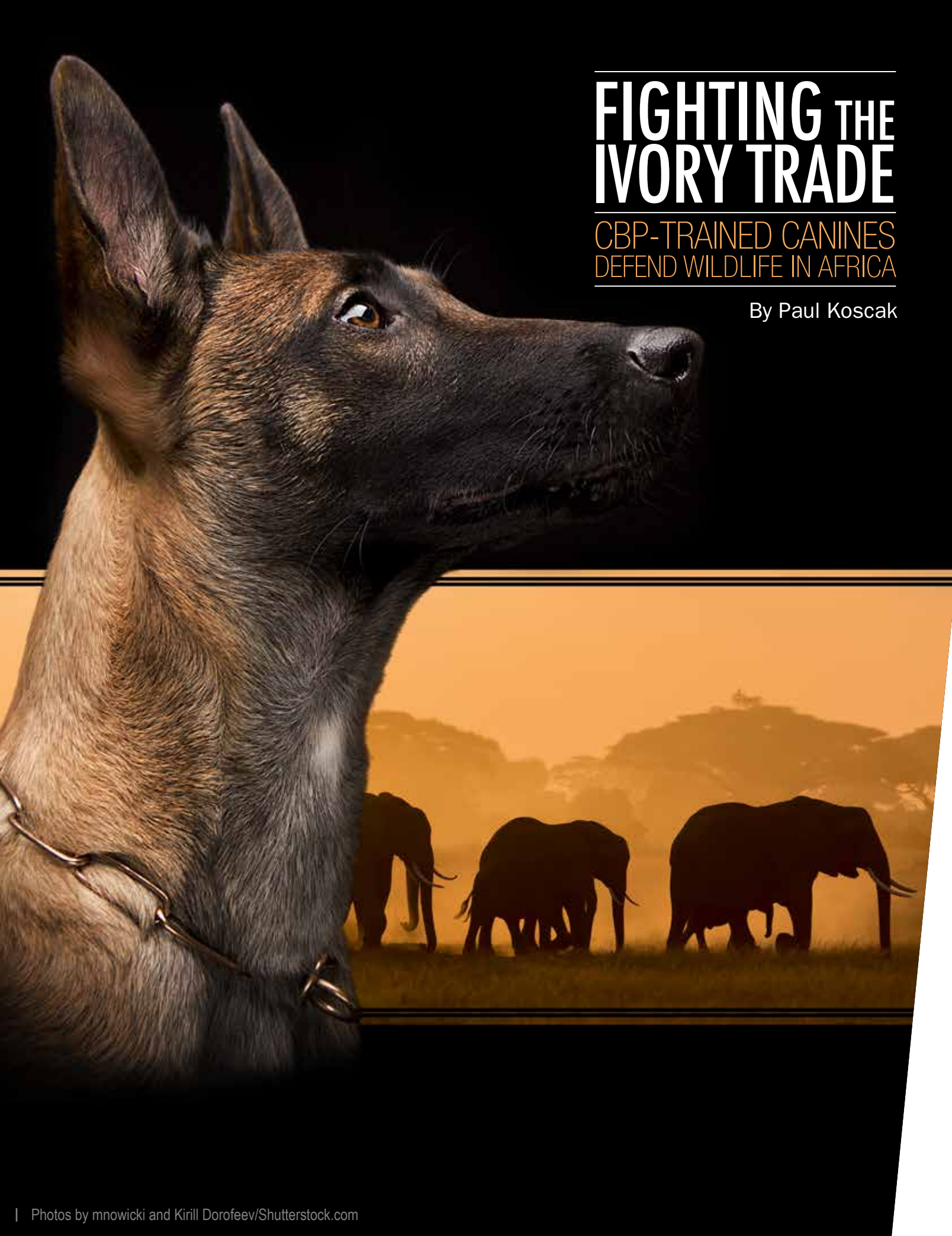
The Secretary of Homeland Security has determined that publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of public business by CBP.

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U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection





# FIGHTING THE IVORY TRADE

CBP-TRAINED CANINES  
DEFEND WILDLIFE IN AFRICA

By Paul Koscak

There's a wildlife crisis in Tanzania.

Poachers have killed 60 percent of Tanzania's prized elephants for their ivory tusks, reducing the animals from an estimated 109,000 in 2009 to 43,000 in 2014.

"Those numbers are just devastating," said Chargé d'Affaires Virginia Blaser at the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam. "You can easily see a scenario where they'll be no elephants in Tanzania."

China is the world's biggest peddler, fueling at least 70 percent of the illicit ivory trade, followed by the Philippines and Thailand where status and money drive demand, a British Broadcasting Corporation report found.

In those and other nations, ivory is a way to flaunt social rank and wealth by owning jewelry, ornaments and exquisite sculptures fashioned from ivory. Chinese medicine also touts ground ivory for curing everything from epilepsy to sore throats.

Staggering black market prices in Asia for the white gold entices poachers. Ivory can fetch up to \$1,500 per pound and two male elephant tusks can weigh 250 pounds, according to an account in British news magazine, *The Week*.

In their pursuit of wealth, poachers can be ruthless. In June 2016, they shot down a surveillance helicopter with AK-47 assault rifles in Northern Tanzania, killing the pilot. Poachers not only put elephants at risk, they harm Tanzania's economy with increased crime that discourages wildlife tourism, a major source of that nation's foreign exchange.

## CBP steps up

Working on behalf of the Tanzanian government, the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam reached out to former Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske for assistance in developing that country's canine program, particularly how to train their dogs to detect ivory. As a result, CBP's highly experienced canine handlers were tasked to work with Tanzanian



Belgian Malinois have tolerance for heat and rough terrain, ideal for Tanzania's canine program. Photo by Tim Ryan

law enforcement to combat wildlife trafficking. This wasn't the first time CBP instructors offered international assistance. They've provided training for at least 54 countries.

Assistance began when Damian Montes, director of CBP's canine program in El Paso, Texas, and Timothy Spittler, CBP's assistant canine director from Front Royal, Virginia, spent a week evaluating Tanzania's canine program that maintains about 45 working dogs to see where improvements were needed.

Montes and Spittler found shortcomings in the program. "There was no mentor opportunity," Montes said. "And the handlers needed to better understand how environmental factors such as weather and kennel conditions affect canine ability, as well as proper grooming techniques and how to train handlers in problem solving."

## International Effort

From their findings, Montes and Spittler crafted a plan tailored to strengthen the nation's canine program which offers Tanzanian police the most effective ways to train, maintain and use dogs to locate ivory, heroin and cocaine. Elevating Tanzania's program to where Tanzanian police accomplish these tasks without assistance is the ultimate goal.

Establishing the program wasn't easy. The U.S. Embassy coordinated a government-wide effort





Office of Field Operations handler James Hopper, right, guides a Tanzanian customs inspector through a canine exercise. Photo by Tim Ryan

that included the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Basics, such as potable water, kennels, retrofitting vehicles to transport canines, and fuel were needed along with support from the Tanzanian government and non-governmental organizations.

“We built an entire logistics, training, delivery and operational element that required resources guaranteed by multiple agencies and country support,” Montes explained. “We had phenomenal support from Tanzanian law enforcement.” Key Tanzanian government officials backed the program and divisions of Tanzanian law enforcement collaborated and shared resources.

CBP’s instructors encouraged Tanzanian law enforcement to network across offices and agencies to overcome some long-standing bureaucratic hurdles that hindered collaboration and sharing resources. “The value of using in-person visits and casual conversations to build cross-organizational relationships and trust is important,” said Ron Reichel, who served an 18-month detail in CBP International Affairs as acting director of the Africa Division.

## Training begins

When the program launched in May 2015, Tanzania selected four of its most promising police officers for training in El Paso.

Belgian malinois, which resemble German shepherds, were selected for the job because the breed withstands heat and adapts to rough terrain, “the optimal dog to be deployed in Africa,” said instructor and course developer Benjamin Gutierrez.

For 30 days Gutierrez and Hopper drilled the Tanzanian officers in how to train canines. It was also the first time CBP trained dogs to detect ivory. Not surprisingly, teaching animals to sniff ivory requires ivory, so the instructors obtained a 4-foot tusk and some crushed ivory seized by the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service.

Training emphasized skills needed in Tanzania because the officers would be on their own when they returned. Tanzania has few veterinarians so they learned first aid for dogs and other medical care. They also learned how to command the canines to search and recognize the scents of drugs and ivory. Teaching canines how to examine containers,

luggage and objects was stressed since the officers will work at both Tanzania’s seaport and airport, Hopper said.

Enforcing Tanzania’s poaching ban, gathering intelligence and building confidence were also part of the plan.

“It’s truly been an honor to be part of their instructor cadre,” Gutierrez said, noting how he became close to the Tanzanian officers during that time, learning about their families and personal concerns. “We started as strangers and have become family.”

## The celebration

When the officers returned home, the four trained canines were officially presented to the Tanzanian government in a stately ceremony officiated by Jumanne Maghembe, the minister of Natural Resources and Tourism.

Officials and guests sat under a blue tent on seats fitted with white satin covers as handlers guided the dogs, one at a time, along a green carpet runway in a show of prowess. Several boxes were spread out along the lane, one containing simulated contraband.

Tugging hard on their leashes, the malinois rushed forward one at a time. They probed. They pried. They panted. They darted between, around and on top of every box, sniffing ceaselessly with upturned noses. A narrator sounding more like a sports announcer, explained each move.


Suddenly, the canine’s gusto ceased and it quickly sat next to a box.

The officer reached into the container and held up the prize, about a foot-long white plastic pipe. The spectators applauded.

From his podium on the other side of the runway, Maghembe addressed the visitors and CBP’s trainers and officials. “We deeply appreciate efforts that the U.S. government is taking to cooperate with our government to ensure the survival of these big wildlife populations,” he said.

While noting poachers have taken a toll on Tanzania’s wildlife, the minister predicted the hunted animals will rebound with the international support.

The plan calls for two of the officers to return to El Paso for instructor training and Spittler and Montes to return to Africa to assess the program’s progress. Understanding proper canine care and training along with building a cadre of instructors who can teach these skills is the goal. Success is when Tanzanian law enforcement can independently manage these objectives, Spittler explained.

For the officers, their canines became more friends than working animals. “The four Tanzanian handlers were so excited to see the dogs again after the training in Texas,” recalled Chargé Blaser. “The security of the program rests with the relationship those police officers have with their canine partners. That’s what CBP helps them to realize.” 



Demonstrating a canine’s newly learned skill to detect ivory. Photo by Tim Ryan





## CBP'S CANINE HANDLERS BENEFIT FROM A RICH HISTORY

By Paul Koscak

| Photo by mnowicki/Shutterstock.com

Back in 1969, using dogs to combat drug smuggling was just a novel idea that led to the U.S. Customs Service detector dog program, launched by military handlers at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

In 1974, the operation moved to Front Royal, Virginia, on 300 acres of a former cattle research facility. When Congress approved funding in 1991, the facility grew to 100 kennels with an academic building and canines were prepared not only to detect narcotics, but also currency, firearms and explosives.

Alarmed at the increase in illegal alien apprehensions and narcotics seizures, the U.S. Border Patrol launched a canine program in 1986 and later opened a training center in El Paso, Texas. During the first five months of 1987, four canine teams accounted for numerous arrests of concealed people and over \$150,000,000 in seized drugs. By 1993, the Border Patrol had 152 canine teams and the training center began instructor and handler classes.

When the Department of Homeland Security formed in 2003, the canine programs of the combined agencies were made into one standard curriculum, directed by the newly formed U.S. Customs and Border Protection. In 2009, the El Paso

and Front Royal training centers were merged into CBP's canine program, with headquarters in El Paso.

Today's CBP canine program continues to put dogs to the test. Canine college starts immediately after the animals arrive at El Paso or Front Royal and not all of them pass.

"We first check for their drive, sociability, character traits and confidence—their general genetic makeup," to learn what dogs are fit for the field, said Instructor James Hopper. Tests include retrieving, tolerating gunfire or being able to walk on a slick floor. "If they can't, they may not be able to do a search."


Vendors supply training center dogs, delivering at times up to 10 animals at once, but only canines that make the grade are purchased. The other source is in-house. CBP mates robust dogs to breed puppies, which undergo the same screening. "CBP primarily uses sport and working breeds like malinois, shepherds and retrievers, but we are not breed specific and will take most dogs that pass the selection process," Hopper said. "Sometimes they all pass or just one passes." The successful canines must finally pass a medical check before pretraining begins, he said.

Pretraining lasts five weeks and focuses on detection. Dogs walk through buildings and warehouses, learn to recognize orders and are exposed to field conditions such as noise and distractions. There's extensive training in finding contraband hidden in vehicles for canines assigned to points of entry. Other dogs are exposed to underbrush and open land to work at Border Patrol checkpoints.

After pretraining, canines move to the field where training continues and they bond with their handlers. CBP's canine program is continuous and popular. Handlers are selected by their component, then spend seven weeks either in Front Royal or El Paso learning the trade. Classes can be large—up to 40—and extra seats are quickly snapped up by other

law enforcers and agencies—sheriffs or local and state police. Recently, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management participated. The centers also train handlers to become instructors who then return to their component to maintain the canine teams in the field, said Assistant Canine Director Timothy Spittler.

Working with dogs for almost 40 years, Spittler knows what it takes to run a winning program and how CBP stacks up with other canine training facilities.

"By far, none compare," he declared. "There's nothing operating to our standards. Our program and certification is the benchmark." 



August, 1970 - School days for Customs handlers and dogs in basic obedience training at the Customs Detection Dog Center in San Antonio, Texas. Photo courtesy of CBP History Program collections



# PHOTO FROM THE FIELD

Photo by:  
Sears Taylor  
Border Patrol agent  
U.S. Border Patrol  
Wellton, Arizona

Border Patrol Agent Jeffrey Hayden plays point as Yuma Station's newly created Recce Unit performs live fire, small unit tactics. The Recce Unit was designed to conduct reconnaissance operations in close proximity to the border where the terrain makes typical Line Operations extremely challenging.

Submit your photos to [frontline@cbp.dhs.gov](mailto:frontline@cbp.dhs.gov)





# MARINE LIFE

## A LOOK INSIDE THE NATIONAL MARINE TRAINING CENTER

By Paul Koscak, photos by Glenn Fawcett

Churned by a stiff evening breeze, the sea grew rough as the crew aboard a sleek interceptor searched in the dark for a reported smuggler. Then a blip with coordinates to the suspect flashed on the boat's radar. Wasting no time, the commander of Air and Marine Operations' 39-foot Midnight Express hollered for the crew to hold on and pushed the throttles full forward.

The boat's four 225 horse-power Mercury engines roared. As the accelerating hull hit the swells, it boomed like a kettle drum and sprayed water over the deck with a hiss. Bouncing from the waves at more than 50 knots, the vessel at times became airborne for an instant then slammed onto the water with a hollow thud, shaking the boat.

As the interceptor sped to its target, the crew checked their equipment and prepared for the unknown. That blip could be anything from a family setting sail to a ship overloaded with illegal aliens to a similar high-speed with well-armed runners

determined to deliver their contraband.

Using night-vision goggles, the navigator finally spotted the shrouded vessel and shouted headings over the din, guiding the commander through the dark for the intercept.

The gap rapidly narrowed. Now, just feet away, the commander gave the signal. Instantly, the interceptor's powerful flood lights and blue strobes illuminated the craft and the surrounding sea, stunning the unsuspecting subjects. The pursuers stood ready to board.

"Failure to heave-to [stop] is a felony," said Martin "Marty" Wade, the National Marine Training Center's director since 2012.

Wade's law enforcement career goes back to 1995, starting as a U.S. customs inspector and later a marine enforcement officer in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. "There were only a handful of us back then," he recalled. Wade advanced to a marine

supervisor and marine director in Miami and eventually served as director of marine operations in Washington, D.C., before arriving at the center.

While the simulated chase and all its drama happened as described, marine interdiction agents crewed the suspect craft. The episode is one of many realistic experiences those attending AMO's National Marine Training Center in St. Augustine, Florida, can expect and where U.S. Customs and Border Protection along with other federal, state, local and even foreign law enforcement organizations turn to keep their maritime skills sharp. International participants have included law enforcers from Paraguay, Malaysia, Ecuador, French West Indies and Colombia.

## Immense task

More than 500 marine interdiction and U.S. Border Patrol agents visit the center every year, taking courses covering basic and advanced maritime skills, recurrent certifications and specialized tactics used to protect the nation's coasts, lakes and rivers.

That job is accomplished in a remarkably nondescript building with two classrooms and adjoining dock that accommodates 30 vessels.

"Don't be fooled by our small size," Wade stressed.

Just six AMO and six U.S. Border Patrol instructors teach 50 classes per year. In 2016, they chalked



Supervisory Air and Marine Agent Mark White from the San Diego Marine Unit was among those benefiting from the National Marine Training Center's small classes.





Supervisory Marine Interdiction Agent and Instructor Ken Kilroy points out the tactics to expect when the class takes to the water.



Hitting moving targets at the right spot can be tricky as Supervisory Marine Interdiction Agent Chris Gallaspy from the Corpus Christi Marine Unit, Texas, takes careful aim.



Practicing tactics to safely board a vessel is an important part of the National Marine Training Center's curriculum.



Agents skillfully operate within a vessel's confined space and inspect for hidden dangers as they secure the vessel.

up an amazing 25,700 student training hours. Naturally, the high demand means a heavy workload, but it also means small classes so agents receive more one-on-one training.

Instruction is so valuable and comprehensive that members of the U.S. Navy special warfare units, special warfare combat craft operators and the Navy's sea, air and land or SEAL special operations force train at the center.

Vessel commander, marine instructor, tactical boarding officer, marine tactics instructor, small boat interdiction and use-of-force are among the classes in most demand where participants confront multiple law enforcement challenges and practice maneuvers not possible in the field.

At the same time, the center strives to keep courses up-to-date to tackle evolving threats. "If we're not moving ahead, we're moving backwards," Wade said. "I want our marine agents to come through the door and be excited to train. The last thing I want to hear is 'your training is not relevant.'"

Academics and application is balanced and everyone is trained to the same high standard regardless if they patrol the Rio Grande, the Great Lakes or the South Florida coast.

Improving marine units through standard training is central to the center's mission, which delivers a highly skilled and mobile force that can quickly

deploy to any of CBP's marine locations.

Standardization allows regions to do more with limited resources, said Jeff Eccles, a supervisory marine interdiction agent from the Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch taking the vessel commander recertification course. Eccles said his region regularly augments locations in other parts of the country. "You need to rely on those you don't normally work with during the year," he added.

Agents typically spend a half day in class studying the procedures they'll later practice on the water. Settings replicate real-world possibilities, just as the Midnight Express crew confronted during their evening intercept.

Procedures for successful intercepts, for instance, require teamwork and challenge vessel commanders to mentally picture the boat's path, calculate position by course and speed, monitor the radar and listen for headings all at once, said Andres "Andy" Blanco, a supervisory marine interdiction agent and instructor. "Most suspect vessels won't know you're there," he pointed out.

"This job is for people who can think quickly and react," offered Antonio "Tony G" Gammillaro, a supervisory marine interdiction agent from the Miami Marine Unit, taking the vessel commander recertification course. "When you're only feet from someone at night, no lights, it's one of the most challenging jobs in all CBP."

## As real as can be

Tactics to apprehend craft whether for a document check, inspection or for any reason is an important part of the program.

Agents in training chase a craft crewed by instructors playing the suspects who apply all the tricks evaders use to escape. The instructors deliver.

They zigzag. They dodge. They make sharp, abrupt turns, sometimes banking so forcefully the top side of their vessel nearly skims the water. But like a chess game, the pursuers anticipate and thwart each break-away.

Another boat intercepts. The commander maneuvers from one side of the fleeing craft to the other, studying its occupants. That assessment determines the tactics agents will use when boarding a vessel. Throughout the exercise, agents communicate and coordinate and there's a primary boarding officer in charge, Blanco said.

Then it begins again. Another crew becomes the bad guys and another vessel commander takes the interceptor's helm.

To ensure safety, two interceptors will parallel each side of a captured but overloaded vessel. Just as a bicycle rider will fall without enough forward speed, an overloaded boat can capsize for the same reason.

Runners can ultimately be stopped using shotguns that shoot projectiles designed to disable engines. Before resorting to disabling fire as it's called, agents will first use other methods such as projecting authority and verbal commands. If those tactics are unsuccessful, they will fire warning shots toward the vessel.

Since disabling fire training isn't authorized in the field, the center offers plenty of opportunity. Live fire is done several miles at sea, in "blue water." Blue water defines the open ocean, where the shore is just a line on the horizon.

"You never know who's out there—murderers trying to escape, weapons traffickers, those with warrants," said Scott Leach, supervisory marine interdiction agent and the center's deputy director. "That's why we invest so heavily in our vessel commanders."

Wade recalled a boat trafficking Haitians from the Bahamas to Florida. That night, winds were brisk and waves topped seven feet as their vessel raced for the beach, now just 50 yards away. When the smugglers realized the breaking surf prevented them from reaching the shore, they ordered the Haitians to swim the rest of the way. Many couldn't. The next morning, bodies were found along West Palm Beach. "Smugglers have no regard for life," Wade said.





Rapid shotgun blasts ring out as Marine Interdiction Agent Eli Palma from the San Diego Marine Unit practices disabling fire at a simulated run-away vessel. Supervisory Air and Marine Agent and Instructor Andres “Andy” Blanco evaluates.

## Disabling fire

Shooters practice disabling fire on plastic outboard engines and human torso dummies affixed to a bullet-riddled target craft at the end of a long line being towed by another vessel. They role play the pursuit vessel and the conditions are challenging. Their vessel bobs from side-to-side, spray fills the air and there’s a brisk wind. Agents hand out shotguns, ammunition and ear protection, yelling over the engines noise. Today, disabling fire won’t be easy.

The target approaches. At the vessel commander’s signal, the shooter goes into action and directs a rapid, ear-ringing fusillade at the dummies. Then the exercise repeats—another commander and shooter will show their skills.

Center staff instruct on six interceptor vessels. Four are long and sleek multi-engine boats with pointed and extended hulls ranging from 39 to 41 feet that can reach speeds of nearly 70 miles per hour. The newest interceptor—and the center’s largest—is 41 feet with four 350 horse-power engines. It weighs

22,000 pounds—nearly 6,000 pounds more than the other three—and can travel 74 miles per hour.

AMO’s other two interceptors are SAFE boats: 33-foot and 38-foot vessels. The smaller craft at 13,300 pounds has three 300 horse-power engines and can travel 51 miles per hour. The other weighs 18,000 pounds has four 300 horse-power engines and tops out at 57 miles per hour. SAFE stands for Secure All-around Flotation Equipped, denoting the vessel’s wrap-around foam collar, providing added stability and buoyancy.

Training also covers the riverine world—rivers and lakes, where the Border Patrol operates 207 vessels.

In the bay just off the center’s dock, U.S. Border Patrol agents prepare to tow a disabled boat. It’s a delicate task. As their 21-foot riverine shallow draft vessel, or RSDV, gently glides alongside the stranded boat, the agents tell the occupants how to prepare for the tow. When the two vessels finally touch, agents unravel coiled lines and carefully tie the two craft together. In this case, the RSDV performs a side tow.

Supervisory Border Patrol Agent and Instructor Mike Arietta evaluates the maneuver. “Make sure they understand what you want,” he tells them. “It’s one of the most dangerous times when two boats are next to each other. You can lose fingers.”

Agents practice two types of towing, Arietta said—side tows for short distances in calm water and stern towing for long distances in rough water.

RSDVs are perfect for shallow water, said Border Patrol Agent Alberto Casusus from the Del Rio Sector, taking the initial vessel commander course. Casusus patrols Lake Amistad, a lake that extends into Mexico.

By funneling water through its 260 horse-power water-jet engine, an RSDV can hydroplane, he said. “You can stop in 11 inches of water,” Casusus noted, or operate in “just four inches if you keep moving.” RSDVs can travel nearly 35 miles per hour.

SAFE and RSDV craft, 12-foot inflatable powered boats, air boats and 16-foot, low-draft connectors that resemble small recreational craft, are used at the center for riverine and special operations training. Agents can earn certifications in any of these vessels, said L. Keith Weeks, a supervisory border patrol agent and instructor.

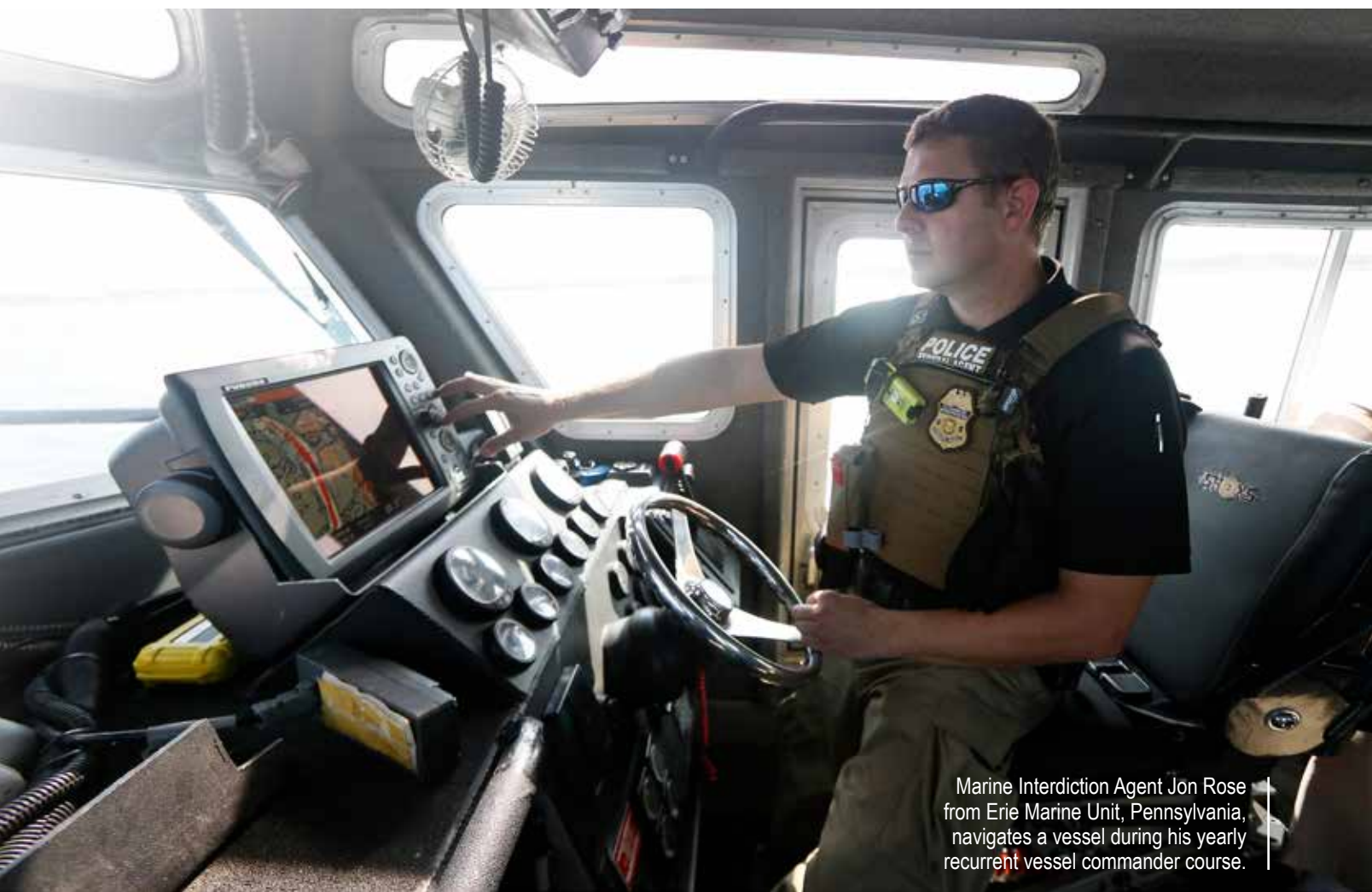
## Calling the shots

While speed, tactics and firepower give AMO agents the edge, the real advantage is the training and experience that allow AMO vessel commanders to authorize disabling fire without supervisory concurrence. This authority gives AMO the capability to disable non-compliant vessels, stop dangerous pursuits quickly and prevent these vessels from reaching our shores. CBP is the only federal agency that delegates this authority to its operators regardless of rank, Wade confirmed. “There’s a tremendous amount of trust and responsibility



U.S. Border Patrol agents safeguard the nation’s riverine border environment—rivers and lakes. Training includes operating low-draft and inflatable craft used for patrolling shallow water or special operations.





Marine Interdiction Agent Jon Rose from Erie Marine Unit, Pennsylvania, navigates a vessel during his yearly recurrent vessel commander course.

given to our agents when making critical use-of-force decisions,” he said. “That’s huge.” Since 2003, AMO has engaged in 126 events involving marine warning and disabling fire.

However, the center prepares commanders to use good judgement since they’re accountable to act within policy. For example, deciding when and where to pursue a vessel. Offshore pursuits give agents more control and little chance for violators to escape.

Thanks to a business mindset, the center gets the most from its \$1.08 million dollar budget, where efficiency and quality training go hand-in-hand.

The center has its own fueling station. Buying in bulk cuts costs and time since vessels no longer travel to offsite marinas to fill up at retail prices.

To eliminate airfare, attendees from Florida and Louisiana must drive to the center. Rental cars are shared and the center negotiated with three area hotels to provide rooms at \$33 below the government rate. Those measures alone save more than \$60,000 per year, Wade said, while the center pumps more than \$600,000 into the local economy.

More savings are captured through the center’s maintenance facility which keeps vessels in top shape at well below the going rate. Training vessels demand more attention because the constant maneuvering places greater stress and wear on the craft compared to regular operations.

“We never had to keep a class over because of maintenance issues,” Wade said. “Our dedicated technicians work day and night to support the mission.”



Photo by James Tourtellotte |

## AMO LAUNCHES NEXT GENERATION INTERCEPTOR

By Paul Koscak

To enhance operations, AMO is planning to add at least 52 next generation interceptors to its arsenal of vessels. Through a contract with SAFE Boats International, the new interceptors will feature an advanced hull design, safety equipment and electronics providing agents with a high level of protection, mobility reliability.

The vessels are designed to meet emerging Department of Homeland Security mission requirements and will be deployed to marine units nationwide, including Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, southeast Florida and San Diego. They will defend the nation’s coastal waterways combating smugglers and terrorists.

“We are excited to share this new vessel with our stakeholders, including those on Capitol Hill, within our department and the American public whom we serve and protect,” said Randolph D. Alles, AMO’s former executive assistant commissioner.

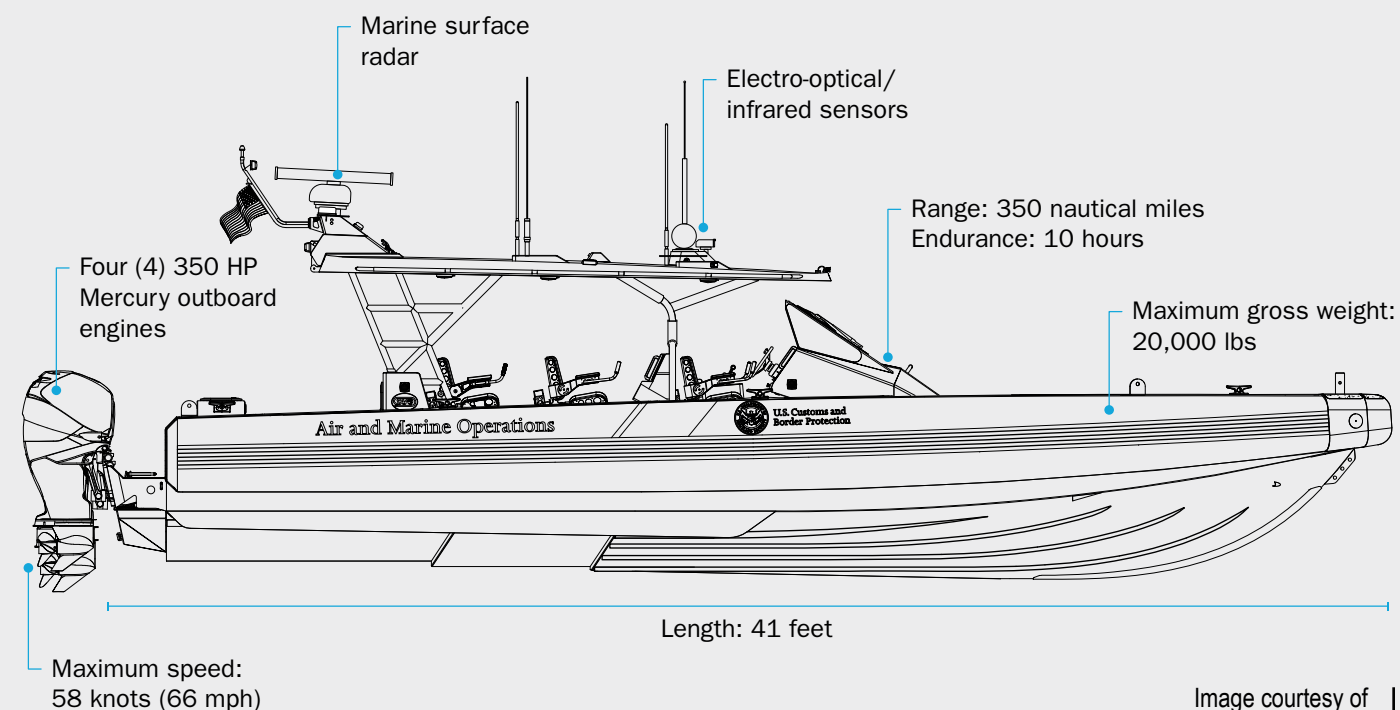


Image courtesy of  
SAFE Boats International



# MAINTAINING THE FLEET

Bold, can-do attitude gets things done

By Paul Koscak,  
photos by Glenn Fawcett



Installing a new engine on a 38-foot SAFE boat all-weather interceptor.

Maintenance is key to the National Marine Training Center's success, National Marine Training Center Director Martin "Marty" Wade notes. "You need world-class support when you have a world-class program."

World-class support takes place nearby at AMO's huge National Marine Center, a maintenance facility that resembles an industrial park. Buildings for every specialty line both sides of the facility's quarter-mile central roadway—a rigging shop, engine shop, fiberglass and vinyl shop, machine shop, paint shop, electronics shop, warehouse and parts department and administrative offices. Altogether, there's more than 178,000 square feet of workspace staffed by 68 Global Maritek Systems technicians and four CBP managers. "There's really not much that we can't do here," proclaimed Doug Wagner, the center's director, who began his career as an aircraft mechanic at just 17 when he entered the Air Force.

Walk into the cavernous rigging and electronics shop—the size of an airplane hangar—where a dozen interceptors on trailers are squeezed side by side, each undergoing some phase of refurbishment. The whines, grinds and rattles of power tools reverberate throughout the building as fiberglass cracks are sealed, electronic systems replaced, propulsion systems upgraded and engines are

replaced or overhauled. A few vessels are Coast Guard retirements destined to join the CBP fleet. Even vessels from the West Coast are serviced at the facility, Wagner said.

Completed craft are many times stored in the maintenance facility's depot for a quick swap with any marine location. Four semi-trailers are on hand ready to deliver.

By contrast, technicians in the electronics shop quietly sit by long workbenches testing, calibrating and fixing all manner of maritime navigation and communication gear. The machine shop also boasts vintage fabricating equipment—lathes, drill presses, milling machines—devices few marine maintenance shops have. The shop can manufacture difficult-to-replace parts or craft entirely new components.

In the fiberglass shop, Border Patrol SAFE boats are refitted with new collars, the component that gives the boat its name. "Our quality is superior," offered supervisor Lee Author. "Where a local marine shop would take three weeks, here we can do it in a week and at just a third of the cost."

As an example, Wagner produced a photograph of an electrical panel refitted by a marina. It showed a chaotic tangle of wires, some bunched with plastic zip ties. "This was a shock," he said, also pointing

out the wrong gauge of wire in the mix. The second photo was almost unrecognizable after the facility's electricians refitted the refit—orderly, clear tracks of properly secured wire taking up less than half the panel.

Under Wagner's leadership, Global's 165 technicians not only perform maintenance at St. Augustine but also at 28 other sites throughout the country, including Puerto Rico and St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. The company keeps up more than 300 craft along with vessels from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers, National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Marine Corps, saving those agencies and the taxpayer considerable money. Global offers CBP access to the country's largest parts inventory, on-site warranty work and up to 50 percent off retail part prices.

Another bargain is the customs automated maintenance inventory tracking system or CAMITS. The nation-wide system streamlines procedures, tracks purchases, records repairs, schedules required tasks and projects future maintenance, "and it's not expensive," added James Warfield, supervisory marine interdiction agent and maintenance deputy director.

## Can do

Still, the facility's most powerful tool isn't found on some shelf. It's an attitude. "We ask, and they say yes," is how Wagner describes the technicians. "They will find a way to make it happen."

A crucial creation that keeps vessels from an early trip to the junkyard is an example of their ingenuity.

Over time, an engine's vibration eventually weakens and breaks the transom, part of a vessel's stern where the engine is bolted. Like any invention, the breakthrough took numerous trial-and-error and commitment that paid off in a refabricated transom made with certain composite materials that deaden vibration and strengthens the stern. "We invent things," Wagner said, who estimates the beefed-up transom saved the government \$3 million and adds about five years to a vessel's life.

That entrepreneurial mindset is noticed. In 2011, the facility received the Industry Leader Safety Award; in 2012, the commissioner's Mission Integration Award and in 2013, the Small Business Achievement Award for innovation and cost savings.

Wagner credits the facility's success to the staff's sense of purpose. "They embrace our mission," he explained. Technicians take pride in their accomplishments, embrace innovations and are "eager to learn and work for the country and have a high work ethic. Many are former military."

Applicants seeking jobs at the maintenance facility learn from the first interview there's a higher calling expected as important as exceptional skills.

"Everybody brought on board is told they're not coming here just to maintain assets," Warfield added. "They're not just contractors. They're part of Homeland Security and the mission to protect the United States." ■



Saving the sheen, these technicians are applying paint.



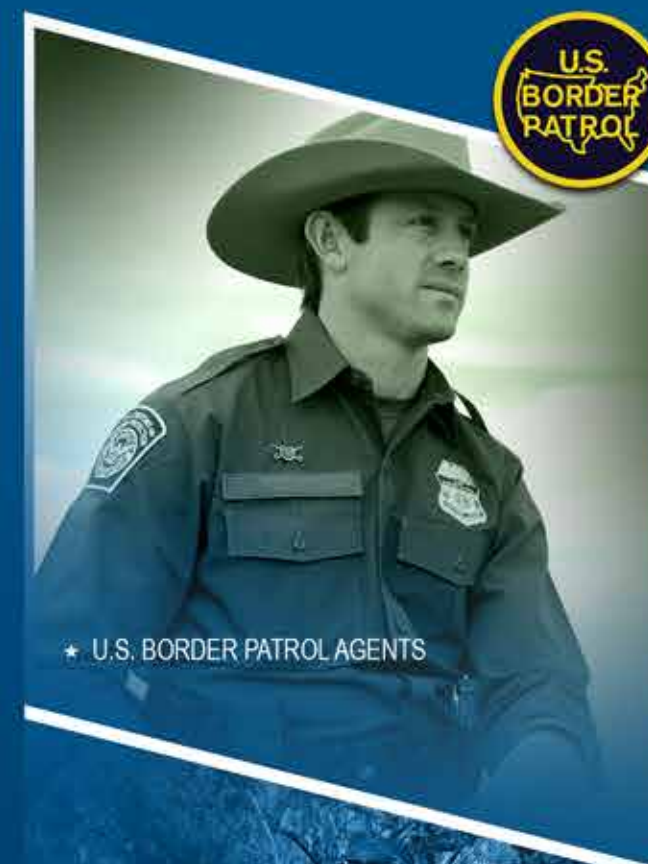
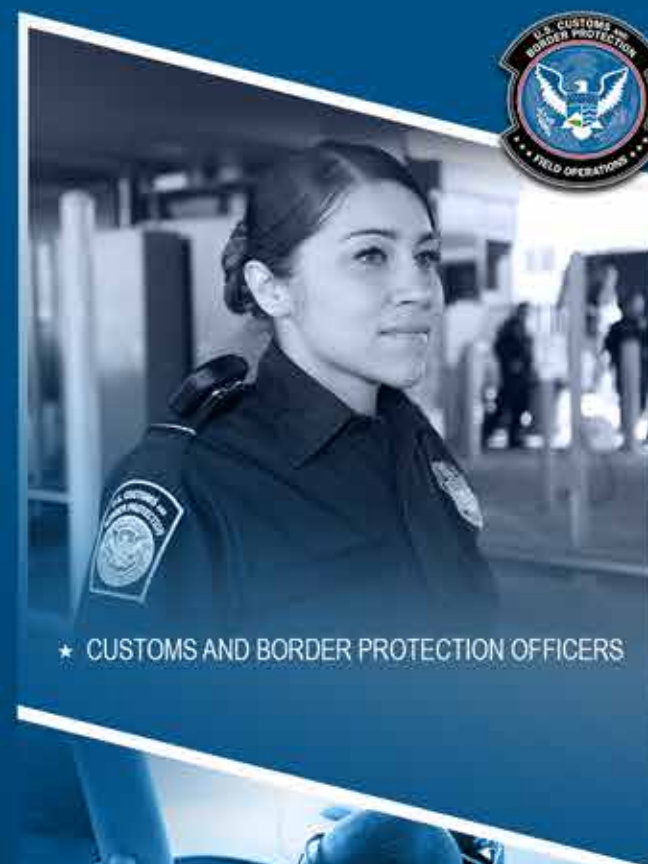
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U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection







# SEARCHING FOR THE **BEST**

CBP ramps up its hiring efforts

By Marcy Mason

| Image by Ozzy Trevino

At the age of 9, Shelly Lubin wanted to be a police officer. By the time she was 13, she thought about joining the military, how it could help pay for school. But at no time did she ever consider becoming a Border Patrol agent. “I had never heard about the Border Patrol,” said Lubin. “I had no idea what it was.”

Lubin, who ultimately served eight years in the Navy and graduated with a criminology degree from Florida State University in Tallahassee, decided to apply at the FBI. It was one of the law enforcement agencies Lubin’s college had listed to help students with their job search. Lubin applied, passed the first phase of testing, and then the FBI had a hiring freeze.

A few months later, 9/11 shook the nation. “I wanted to do something for my country,” said Lubin, who thought about rejoining the Navy. But then, Lubin saw something in the newspaper. “There was a huge advertisement for the Border Patrol. I didn’t ever remember hearing about the Border Patrol,” she said.

Lubin did some research and found what she learned appealing. “I decided while I’m waiting to finish the FBI’s hiring process, I’ll apply for the Border Patrol,” she said. Lubin applied and was hired. Soon after, she realized she wanted to stay. “I loved it,” she said. “I’ve always liked being outdoors. I love getting in my truck, going out to my area and patrolling. I couldn’t believe they were paying me to do this job.”



As a young Border Patrol agent in 2005, Shelly Lubin tracks foot prints of undocumented aliens in the Otay Mountain Wilderness in San Diego County. CBP photo

That was 14 years ago. For the first 10 years of her career at U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Lubin was stationed in San Diego, patrolling the border. Today, she is an assistant chief at the U.S. Border Patrol headquarters in Washington, D.C. “I wanted to show the federal agents out in the field that if you work hard enough, you can advance in your career,” said Lubin, who is one of the thousands of agents and officers at CBP who are protecting America.

At a time when federal hiring has slowed at many agencies, CBP is moving at full throttle to recruit new agents and officers to fill its ranks. Within the next few years, CBP will need to meet critical hiring needs for all its uniformed personnel. In January, President Trump issued an executive order calling for the hiring of an additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kelly also issued a directive to add 500 Air and Marine agents. Both are in addition to filling a deficit of more than 1,300 CBP officers and 1,700 Border Patrol agents.

## Filling the ranks

“It’s a huge undertaking with many challenges, but we’re making headway,” said Michael Tucker, commander of CBP’s National Frontline Recruitment Command, a division of CBP’s Office

of Human Resources Management, which is responsible for the agency’s recruitment strategy and hiring efforts. Aside from these numbers, Tucker said he also needs to take the agency’s attrition into account. “People retire and take other jobs based on many factors,” he said. “The attrition numbers average around five percent for us right now, which



Shelly Lubin discovered she loved working for the U.S. Border Patrol because she could work outdoors. Shown here, in 2005, as a young agent, Lubin patrols the Otay Mountain Wilderness in San Diego County. CBP photo





Commander Michael Tucker briefs the National Frontline Recruitment Command team at a weekly meeting in Washington, D.C. Counterclockwise from left: Richard Fortunato, Lillian Wang, Shirley Chen Barry, Kevin Wright, Rita Lott, Casey Adams, Michael Tucker, Sean Driscoll, and Charity Sperringer. Photo by Ozzy Trevino

is quite high. We need to hire almost 3,000 agents and officers annually for the next five years to attain our goals.”

Tucker, who is a Border Patrol agent himself, said that CBP is using two basic recruitment methods. Online advertising and recruiting in person at job fairs, college campuses, and military bases where CBP recruiters work with transitioning veterans’ programs. Last year, CBP conducted 4,407 recruiting events nationwide. “We’re trying to do a better job of attracting more people to recruiting events so that prospective candidates can meet officers and agents and ask questions,” said Tucker.

CBP also has taken steps to recruit on military bases. “We physically travel to military installations. We have one base, Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, where we are co-located with military hiring personnel, and we’re working toward similar arrangements with

five other military bases,” explained Tucker. “This expedites the hiring process because we’re right there. Applicants can see a CBP representative onsite who can answer questions, help them apply online, and talk to them about the benefits of CBP.”

Furthermore, the National Frontline Recruitment Command has a special unit that focuses on hiring military veterans. “Military personnel have a special vernacular,” said Tucker. “We wanted to train our forces to speak that language so we can attract the best candidates. Close to 30 percent of our workforce are veterans and we’re proud of that number.”

CBP’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 2016, employment websites, Monster and Military.com, ranked CBP as the No. 2 best employer for hiring and retaining veterans.

CBP also does a fair amount of recruiting on college campuses. “We have focused a lot on colleges and it hasn’t attracted as many successful candidates as we had hoped. We think part of it is timing,” said Tucker. “Our events were held first semester as opposed to second semester. We’ve realized that we need to reach students just prior to graduation.” Tucker also explained that his team plans to establish more relationships with community colleges. “We want to reach students who have not yet decided which career path to take,” he said.

From a geographical perspective, Tucker said that the majority of applicants and successful hires come from areas along the U.S. coastline and Southwest border. “We have not seen a great deal of applicants from the Northern border or the heartland of the U.S.,” said Tucker, adding that CBP is now focusing its efforts on the Midwest, where there is an untapped pool of quality applicants.

## Inspiring success story

Case in point is José Venegas, a supervisory CBP officer in Chicago who serves as the agency’s liaison to federal, state, and local law enforcement partners. Venegas first learned about the U.S. Customs Service, one of CBP’s legacy agencies, and its career opportunities when he was 17 years old and joined the Explorer Program, a law enforcement sponsored program for local area youth.

As a first generation American who was born in Guadalajara, Mexico, Venegas grew up in an immigrant neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side, where the schools were bilingual and his classes were taught in Spanish. Not until he was exposed to the Explorer Program did he realize that he needed to learn how to communicate in English to get ahead. “I understood that if I wanted to go into federal law enforcement, especially into customs, communication needed to be a strength. Otherwise,



Supervisory CBP Officer José Venegas, center, inspires teenagers in the inner city of Chicago who are members of the CBP Explorer program, which educates youth about trending law enforcement issues. Photo by Natalie Uchmanowicz



I was going to be in big trouble. So I ended up overcoming my language barrier. I had to,” he said.

At first, Venegas studied on his own. “I bought all of these books and taught myself how to read and write in English,” he said. Then Venegas decided to go to school. “My parents didn’t have the money to send me to college, so I worked summers at a car wash or I did landscaping,” said Venegas, who initially enrolled at a community college in the city. After a couple of years, he transferred to DePaul University in Chicago. “I took a lot of tutoring and used every resource available,” he said. In the end, Venegas earned straight A’s in all of his English classes and graduated from DePaul University with high honors. His degree is in elementary education, but Venegas decided not to teach at a grammar school. Instead, he joined the U.S. Customs Service.

“I thought I would enjoy teaching people, talking to kids, but I wanted to do it in the law enforcement field. I just found it so intriguing working with the community, explaining what we do,” said Venegas. Today, 23 years later, Venegas has risen through the ranks at CBP while continuing to be part of the Explorer Program, only now he’s mentoring inner city kids as a CBP advisor, inspiring them to achieve their goals.

## Rigorous hiring process

The hiring process for CBP officers and agents is rigorous. After submitting an application, candidates for CBP officers and Border Patrol agents take an entrance exam. “There isn’t an entrance exam for Air and Marine pilots and boat captains because they’ve already received certification,” said Tucker. “But they are required to do an aerial test flight or a test drive on a boat.”

Qualified applicants are then asked to take a medical exam and a basic physical fitness test. For these phases, CBP offers reciprocity to veterans who have recently completed a military medical or fitness test.

At this point, applicants fill out documents to initiate a background investigation. CBP officer and Border Patrol agent candidates then undergo a

scenario-based interview conducted by a certified panel of officers and agents of various ranks. Air and Marine applicants go through different interview procedures at CBP’s aviation and marine academies. If candidates successfully pass the interview, they are asked to take a polygraph. “If they pass the polygraph, candidates will undergo a background investigation,” said Tucker. “After they pass the background investigation, applicants may be required to pass a random drug test before a final offer is extended. If they accept, the new hires will enter on duty and begin their careers with CBP.”

One of the major challenges CBP faces is the length of time it takes to complete its hiring process. In 2015, it took an average of 469 days to bring potential candidates on board. The process in place today has shown the capacity to hire candidates in 160 days.

CBP sped up the process by establishing “hiring hubs,” where many steps of the hiring process take place at one location during the course of a weekend. “We set up hiring hubs at military bases three times a year to process applicants’ entrance

exams, conduct structured interviews, perform polygraph tests, provide adjudication, and grant provisional clearance,” said Tucker.

“Our goal is to hire 100 percent of our applicants through a hiring hub,” he said. “If we can do that, we can cut down the time it takes to process and hire applicants substantially, which is a great benefit to us. The talent pool isn’t just applying for a job with CBP. If we aren’t quick enough and reactive to their needs, then they’re going to find employment somewhere else.”

Recent legislation also has helped CBP expedite its hiring process. In December 2016, the National Defense Authorization Act was passed, waiving polygraph tests for veterans who already have an active Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information, or TS/SCI, security clearance when they are separating from their branch of service. Similarly, the Border Jobs for Veterans Act of 2015 gives reciprocity to certain veterans for physical fitness tests. “We are trying to make it easier for candidates to apply while maintaining our high standards,” said Tucker.

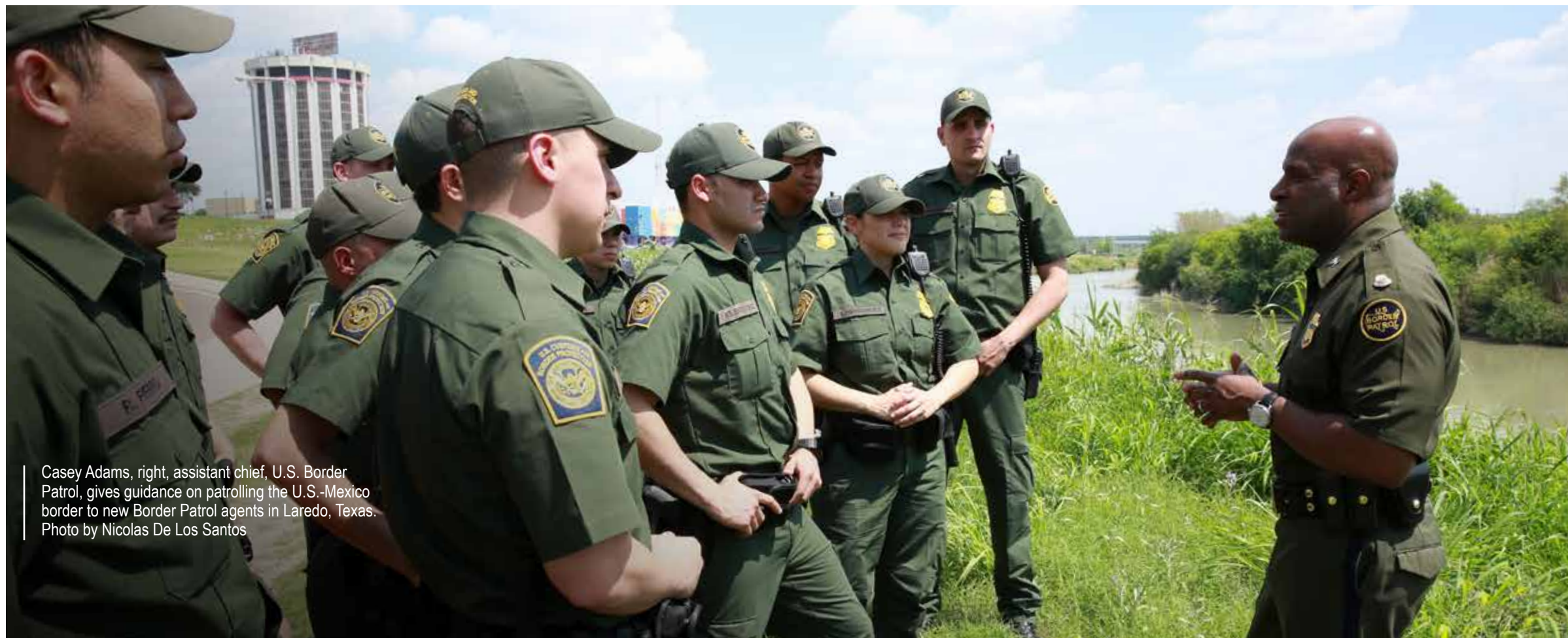
## Best recruiters

According to Tucker, CBP’s best recruiters are the uniformed agents and officers. “They know the mission better than anyone else. They do it every day,” he said.

“I was inspired to become a Border Patrol agent because I saw that agents care about what happens to people. They risk their lives to save people, not just apprehend them,” said Casey Adams, a 22-year veteran of the U.S. Border Patrol who leads one of the National Frontline Recruitment Command teams. “They go through life every day with one mission—to make the world better for everyone else, not necessarily themselves. That’s what I wanted to do. It was my calling.”

CBP Officer Rita Lott’s first encounter with customs was when she returned to the U.S. after taking a cruise. The ship had stopped at the ports along the Mexican coastline.

Instead, she was sent to secondary for further inspection.



Casey Adams, right, assistant chief, U.S. Border Patrol, gives guidance on patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border to new Border Patrol agents in Laredo, Texas. Photo by Nicolas De Los Santos



“It was my first trip overseas and when I came back, I was pulled out of line and sent to secondary. The CBP officers wanted to check my bags,” said Lott. “I was wondering what I did wrong. Was I in trouble? Am I going to jail? I guess it was just a random check, but I was terrified,” she said.

That’s when Lott discovered the CBP officer who was searching her bags was kind. “She was really nice,” Lott said. “I started asking her questions about her job and she told me how much she liked it.”

After Lott returned home, she spoke to her brother about what happened and did a little research. “I didn’t know anything about traveling overseas, so it piqued my interest,” she said. Lott’s brother noticed that there was a job posting online for CBP officers and told his sister to apply. But Lott, who has a degree in microbiology and was a consumer safety officer for the Department of Commerce at the time, decided to wait. Time passed and Lott’s brother asked her if she had ever applied for the job at CBP. That got her thinking and eventually she did and was hired.

“Once I started working at CBP, I looked at all of the job opportunities that were available. There are so many things to do,” said Lott, who now has

been with CBP for 14 years and is a recruitment program manager. “Most people don’t realize all the different duties that CBP officers have. When people travel overseas and return to the U.S., they know we ask them questions, but they don’t realize that we check all the goods and services that come in from clothing to food to cars. Everything that crosses the border including the mail goes through CBP. The average person doesn’t really understand the depth of our jobs, how many different things we actually are involved in.”

## Dreams taking flight

CBP is also a place where people fulfill their dreams. Such was the case for Todd Gayle, who knew he wanted to be a pilot since he was a sophomore in high school. “I wanted to fly, but I came from very humble means. I didn’t have any money for college,” said Gayle, who grew up in Wisconsin. “At the time, there was only one school in the entire state that offered a degree in aviation and it wasn’t cheap. So I was kind of in a pickle.”

Some of Gayle’s college-bound friends suggested he enlist in the Army. They knew that the military offered money for college under the G.I. Bill. Gayle didn’t want to make a career out of it though. He had set his sights on going to flight school and becoming a pilot. The Army recruiter told him that if he wanted to shorten his enlistment, he could take a combat position. So Gayle did. “I drove tanks in the Army during the Iraq War,” he said.

When Gayle was stateside, he was stationed in El Paso, Texas. There, he was introduced to a Border Patrol agent who offered

CBP Supervisory Air Interdiction Agent Todd Gayle locates smuggled marijuana hidden in the New Mexico desert. Photo by Ruben Reyes



Supervisory Air Interdiction Agent Todd Gayle, left, conducts a preflight briefing with Aviation Enforcement Agent Fabian Cardiel at CBP’s El Paso Air Branch in El Paso, Texas. Photo by Ruben Reyes

to let him ride along so that Gayle could see what the Border Patrol did. That’s when Gayle discovered that the Border Patrol had an aviation unit with a pilot training program. “When I heard that, I specifically set my goal to get into the program,” said Gayle.

After he finished his tour with the Army, Gayle went back to Wisconsin to go to flight school. He graduated and, in 1996, was hired by the Border Patrol. “I spent 6-1/2 years as an agent on the ground before I was able to pick up a pilot slot,” said Gayle. “There were a lot of people including family members that kept questioning if I was ever going to be a pilot. It would have been easy to be dissuaded from continuing that pursuit, but once I received my first pilot job, where I was getting paid to fly, I was like a kid on Christmas morning. When I first got my flight suit and gloves, I literally wore them around the house the whole day,” he said.

Things have changed for current applicants. “There is a shortage of pilots now throughout the aviation industry,” said Gayle, who is now a supervisory air interdiction agent in CBP’s Air and Marine Operations. “Today, we do what we call ‘street hires.’ As long as a pilot can meet the hourly flight requirements, he or she can potentially come on board.”



At CBP, Todd Gayle was able to fulfill his dream of becoming a pilot and flying multiple aircraft. Photo by Ruben Reyes

Since 9/11, CBP’s primary mission is counterterrorism, along with facilitating safe, legitimate trade and travel across the U.S. borders. “Air and Marine Operations provides the maritime and aviation aspects of looking for human smugglers, drug smugglers, and people who are smuggling anything else that’s illegal,” said Gayle.

Furthermore, CBP’s Air and Marine Operations work with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies that request support. “If the president comes to town, we’re going to be flying overhead to do countersurveillance,” said Gayle. “We also provide security for events such as the Super Bowl or when the Olympics are in the U.S. So it’s a very diverse mission set, which is one of the appeals of the job. Every day is different.”

As a pilot, Gayle has achieved his highest ambitions too. “Through CBP, I’ve been able to realize my dreams of flying multiple aircraft,” he said. “A lot of people in the military will fly one airframe or at the commercial airlines, maybe they’ll fly two airframes, but I get to fly them all—little planes, big planes, jets, little helicopters, big helicopters—and I can have my pick of aircraft, depending on where I’m stationed.”







# HEAVY HIT

**Automaker learns import fraud comes at a steep price**

By Paul Koscak

Volkswagen recently made history thanks in large part to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

It's the sort of history the company likely never expected—earning the largest customs penalty ever, which cost the automaker \$4.3 billion in fines for fraudulently importing vehicles rigged to thwart U.S. emissions standards.

Volkswagen added a software package to thousands of its vehicles that modified the engine's exhaust when it detected the vehicle was undergoing an emission test. The scheme and the cover-up made international news in 2016. Meanwhile, six top Volkswagen executives await a court ruling on criminal charges for continuing the ploy that allowed the import of at least 590,000 vehicles over almost a decade.

Levied by CBP, the record penalty was part of a settlement with the agency, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Justice after Volkswagen pleaded guilty to criminal customs fraud.

CBP not only enforces customs laws and regulations, it enforces health, safety and border security violations for other government agencies.

The cover-up became the crux of the crime and why CBP played a major role in the outcome.

Trust is central in the way CBP regulates trade and expects importers to operate with integrity because of the massive volume of goods imported into the country every day.

"We can't look at everything," said Jerry Malmo, the Office of Trade's director of the Civil Enforcement Division. "We trust companies are good corporate

citizens and have good internal controls. This was quite a breach of that trust."

Volkswagen's blatant disregard for that principle was the driving force in CBP's strong stance for the huge penalty.

That bond was broken when "Volkswagen entities lied by submitting false information and omitting important information on importation," said Leslyanne Koch Kessler, deputy associate chief counsel, enforcement and operations, for CBP's Office of Chief Counsel. "This was a border security issue. We need to know what's coming into our ports."

CBP first learned about the deception in September 2015, when the EPA cited the automaker for violating the Clean Air Act by not disclosing that numerous models—including Audi and Porsche—were equipped with "auxiliary emission control devices," software designed to defeat emissions tests. That would have required the company to report its own cover-up, an unlikely event.

On the road, the devices allowed engines labeled as EPA compliant, including the advanced technology vehicles the automaker touted as "green," to pollute way over the authorized limit. "Volkswagen claimed they had valid EPA certification on importation," Kessler said.

CBP immediately took custody of more than 16,000 fraudulently imported models, impounding them at ports of entry and other sanctioned areas throughout the country and launched an investigation to determine the scope of the violation.

It was an immense effort. Led by CBP's Automotive

and Aerospace Center of Excellence, experts from the Offices of Field Operations, Trade, and Chief Counsel formed a trade enforcement team that invested more than a year searching for evidence. Summonses were issued to Volkswagen importers to turn over customs entry documents. "We wanted to know what they knew," Kessler said.

The team spent countless hours reviewing thousands of records to determine how many vehicles were involved, the models and their combined value, factors that also contributed to the record fine.

Collaboration was central to the team's success, explained Lisa Wallace who directs the Automotive and Aerospace Center of Excellence and Expertise. All offices and divisions connected to the investigation pooled their resources, worked as a unit and communicated frequently through conference calls.

"We were efficient," she said. "This helped us to stay on track. We shared updates and talked together about steps to take next." The team approach was so effective it's now among the center's best practices and is being used on new cases under review, Wallace added.

Kessler called the group "an excellent example of interoffice coordination for enforcement."

Within the \$4.3 billion settlement, Volkswagen paid \$1.45 billion in civil penalties for customs and Clean Air Act violations and \$2.8 billion in criminal penalties.

Malmo said CBP stood prepared to litigate if the automaker refused to settle.

Volkswagen's membership in CBP trusted trader programs, which streamline the importing process, was revoked. The Office of Trade offers these benefits to importers who can show their supply chains are secure. Volkswagen would need to reapply for those privileges.

"The Volkswagen settlement sends a powerful message to importers around the world," said Scott Falk, CBP's chief counsel. "If you violate our customs laws and breach our trust, you'd better be prepared to pay a heavy price." ■

Photo by J2R/Shutterstock.com |



# NEW BORDER PATROL CHIEF TAKES CHARGE



By Jayna Desai

Ronald D. Vitiello never rode a horse until he joined the U.S. Border Patrol.

Growing up in a suburb of Chicago, and also in San Diego, he knew more about hot rods and baseball than saddles and spurs; more about walking beautiful beaches than the streets of Laredo. The only peripheral connection? His childhood game of “Cowboys and Indians.”

It’s been more than 30 years since newly sworn-in Vitiello first put on a green uniform and entered on duty as a U.S. Border Patrol agent in 1985, as a member of Class 174.

He now leads one of the most important law enforcement organizations in the world. The Border Patrol, under its parent agency of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, secures the nation’s borders across 6,000 miles of Mexican and Canadian international land borders and 2,000 of coastal waters surrounding the Florida Peninsula and the island of Puerto Rico.

“This type of work always interested me,” said Vitiello. “My dad’s older brother was in World War II as part of the Army’s celebrated 10th Mountain Division. He was a Chicago police officer when I was a kid. I was fascinated by all of the gear, the stories and the symbolism. His life’s work definitely made an impact on my decision and fueled my passion.”

Vitiello was born on July 30, 1963, in Addison, Illinois, to Robert and Regina Vitiello. He is a middle child with one older brother and one younger sister. Vitiello is the son of a first generation father whose parents came from Italy. His mother and her family moved to the U.S. from Lithuania. In 1977, he and his family moved from Addison to San Diego following his freshman year of high school because his father worked with United Airlines, which was expanding to Southern California.

After high school, Vitiello enrolled at Grossmont Community College in San Diego and studied law enforcement. He met a former assistant chief from the San Jose, California, Police Department who

worked at the college and encouraged him to apply for a role with the Border Patrol. He helped the 21-year-old navigate through the recruiting process leading to the position that changed his life.

It was in the Laredo Sector of Texas that Vitiello began his Border Patrol career. Since then, he and his family weaved their way across the country, through Texas, Arizona and Vermont; and, through the cities of Laredo, Dallas, Nogales, Swanton, McAllen, Mexico City and Washington, D.C.

“I saw the work that the Border Patrol did in the media while living in San Diego, but when I got to Laredo, it was a completely different culture,” Vitiello said. “It’s a change in lifestyle rather than just some job that you have. And it was important for me to learn the Spanish language as well. Because everybody in town knows who you are and what you do, being able to speak Spanish influences every interaction in Laredo that you have.”

Before starting his career, Vitiello told his friends and loved ones he had no plans to leave San Diego. That the only way he would take a job with the Border Patrol is if he were stationed close to home. Much to his mother’s astonishment, his feelings quickly changed once the official acceptance letter came. The move proved to be momentous, both professionally and personally. Vitiello met his wife, Nuri, in Laredo in 1986. He considers her to be an incredible

support system in his life. They have been married for 29 years and have two children. Their daughter, Alexis, 24, graduated from James Madison University with an English major and creative writing minor. She is currently an au pair in Paris, France. Their son, Ron Jr., 20, is currently attending the International Culinary Center in New York.

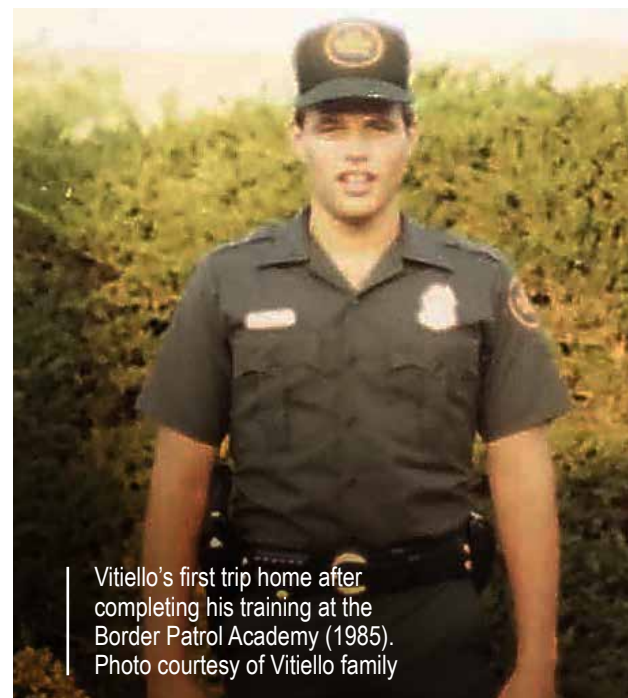
“We met through a mutual friend when I was attending Laredo Junior College and he was a Border Patrol agent,” Nuri said. “Even though I grew up in the border town of McAllen, Texas, I had no idea what the Border Patrol did or was until I met Ron.”

Despite the complexities of the role, and knowing that she might have to follow her husband to other parts of the country as part of his duties, Nuri knew she wanted to marry Vitiello. She said she was comfortable making the required sacrifices, knowing the importance that he placed upon serving his country.

Ron is my best friend,” Nuri, 52, said. “We love spending time together and enjoy just sitting out on our deck, having a drink, and talking. I am in awe of the father and husband he is. To this day, my kids nor my husband can remember a birthday, holiday, or special event he was not able to attend. I never complained to my kids about their dad’s work. I made it very clear we were lucky to have a father that worked hard so we could enjoy a comfortable life.”



Vitiello speaks at CBP Headquarters after taking the Oath of Office as the 17th Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol. Photo by Donna Burton



Vitiello's first trip home after completing his training at the Border Patrol Academy (1985). Photo courtesy of Vitiello family



Vitiello receives the Oath of Office by DHS Secretary John Kelly, becoming the 17th Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol. Photo by Donna Burton



After Ron Jr. turned 2 years old, they made a joint commitment to maintain a steady family life and discussed the possibility of Nuri becoming a stay-at-home mother and wife.

“Ron and I talked about how important it was for our kids to have some stability and as a stay-at-home mom, this would be the one thing that was consistent in their lives,” Nuri said. “Since my parents were business owners, this was not a life I was used to, but I understood why my husband wanted this for our family. And so did I.”

From the first day she met him, Nuri could see how much Vitiello invested in the Border Patrol and because he always gave the organization his best, he did not mind moving from state to state and working long hours. She believes this is the right time for him to become chief and the right thing for the entire Border Patrol family.

Erica Aguilar has known Vitiello and Nuri for six years and considers them close friends. Her husband, Border Patrol Agent Luis Aguilar, was killed in the line of duty on Jan. 19, 2008. Though Vitiello did not know her husband personally, she said he remembers the day her whole family, as well as the Border Patrol family, was notified of her husband’s death.

“I’ve had many special moments with the Vitiellos,” Aguilar said. “The last thing that my daughter, Arianna, did with her dad was learn how to ride a bike. She always hesitated to get back on a bike

again after his death, but Ron helped her overcome her fear. He was so patient with Arianna and was right there by her side, constantly reassuring her. I have complete faith in him as chief because he is genuine and inspirational. He knows the way of a Border Patrol agent so he can show the way to 21,000-plus agents.”

CBP Acting Commissioner Kevin K. McAleenan shares the same sentiment. He has known Vitiello for 14 years and describes him as “a tremendous law enforcement leader” who brings a wealth of experience to the position.

“He has done it all,” McAleenan said. “From starting as a frontline agent in Laredo and progressing through the ranks, representing CBP at the Department of Homeland Security, serving as a chief patrol agent in Rio Grande Valley, and serving as deputy and acting chief of the Border Patrol at headquarters. No one could be more prepared for this critical role at this key moment. Under Ron’s stewardship, we will have significant opportunities to continue to enhance our mission effectiveness and support our agents in the field.”

Vitiello said one of his top priorities as chief is to address the concerns that Border Patrol employees expressed through the recent Human Capital Study.

“We have our share of difficulties, but people should have absolute clarity when it comes to our mission,” he said. “Employee contributions and ideas are important and I intend to provide our workforce

with the information, tools, and support they need to succeed at their jobs. I want to empower our employees through the voice I have at headquarters.”

Border Patrol Chief of Law Enforcement Operations Directorate Scott Luck, who has worked in the organization for almost 31 years, believes Vitiello is an ideal choice to move Border Patrol’s agenda forward. He and Vitiello first met in the early 1990s when they were detailed as instructors for driver training at the Border Patrol Academy in Artesia, New Mexico.

“Chief Vitiello is the best selection in the country for this position,” Luck said. “His breadth of knowledge with particular subject matters is extensive, having been a Border Patrol agent trainee and going through the ranks and serving his time with each one of those positions. He brings a lot of credibility to his leadership style. And he’s just genuinely a good person. I believe in him. I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.”

Vitiello realizes there are challenges ahead. But, with the support of his family and friends, he is ready for them. He lists capacity building and working with foreign partners as some of Border Patrol’s greatest achievements.

Some of the biggest challenges? Attrition, hiring, and how President Trump’s proposed border wall will change communities. The nation’s immigration laws will also remain in the spotlight.

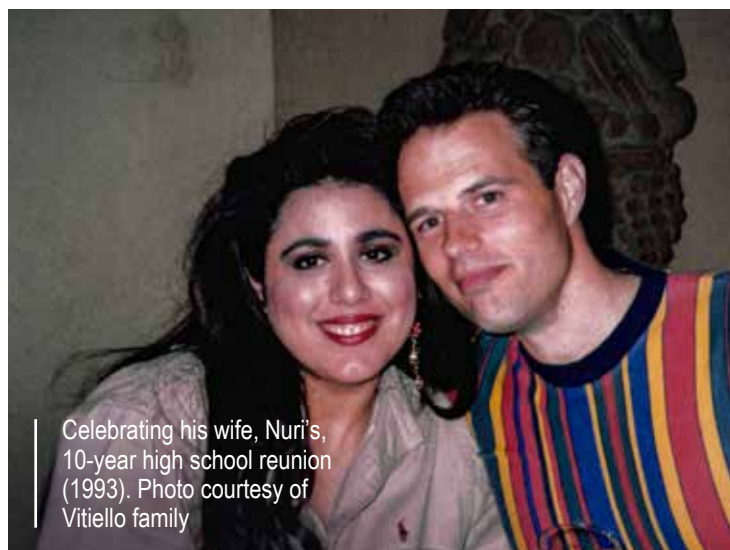
“We execute our mission within the framework and the policies that are given to us, either through the law, our own developments, or through priorities of the executive branch,” Vitiello said. “But in order to fulfill this mission, people must trust us. Most agents approach undocumented border crossers with a high degree of compassion. We’re the first ones that these individuals see on their journey and we’re the ones responsible for their well-being and safety. I don’t think the public understands how agents are often put in a place where they do heartfelt things.”

Vitiello said he is proud to be a part of Border Patrol and accepts the responsibility that comes with its leadership.

“I’ve been blessed in this career and have no regrets,” he said. “Sure, I would like to make us better and have tried to do the best I could everywhere. But overall, the focus should remain on providing substantial protection and security at and between the ports, as well as having the capability to know what is happening, and to respond appropriately. The Border Patrol has had a long and storied history. Today, we are adding a new chapter and I am excited to be a part of its future.”

#### Editor’s Note:

Following the President’s appointment of Randolph D. (“Tex”) Alles as Director of the U.S. Secret Service April 25, Acting Commissioner McAleenan announced that Ronald D. Vitiello will serve as Acting Deputy Commissioner until a permanent selection is made. Carla Provost will serve as Acting Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol.





# BORDER WALL

## MOVING AHEAD WITH CBP'S EXPERTISE

By Paul Koscak

U.S. Customs and Border Protection is driving the effort to design and construct a wall along much of the Southwest border with Mexico. The wall will be part of a comprehensive security barrier that includes lighting, cameras, sensors, other related technologies and all-weather roads.

The project fulfills President Donald Trump's executive order to achieve operational control of the southern border by improving border security and immigration enforcement. CBP's Office of Facilities and Asset Management has moved forward with a request for contractors to submit designs and prototypes for consideration, which generated a robust response.

Once contractors are selected, CBP will have them construct multiple prototypes--some made from reinforced concrete, others from unspecified materials designed to deter illegal U.S. entry. The prototypes, some potentially as high as 30-feet, will be constructed this summer in the San Diego Sector.

The structures will guide CBP in identifying the best materials, building methods and final designs before investing substantial money into the project, according to Karl Calvo, assistant commissioner for CBP's Office of Facilities and Asset Management. "Plans call for no more than eight and no less than four" prototypes, he said, noting the arrangement gives CBP a try-before-you-buy advantage and an opportunity to evaluate the wall prototypes in actual field conditions.

Prototypes must meet U.S. Border Patrol requirements and withstand "destructive testing," Calvo said. That means Border Patrol agents will test the wall's resistance. They will use power tools and other methods they expect border crossers to employ to break through the barrier.



Metal fencing can be seen atop a concrete barrier as it lines the banks of the Rio Grande near McAllen, Texas.  
Photo by Glenn Fawcett



CBP's preconstruction analysis, planning and evaluation provides a roadmap to build a wall and barrier system that's feasible, durable and cost effective, but also aesthetically pleasing when viewed from the north side.

"Border security is critically important to the national security of the United States. Aliens who illegally enter the United States without inspection or admission present a significant threat to national security and public safety," President Trump stated in his order, addressing one of the administration's top priorities.


The president further stated the border barrier, "supported by adequate personnel along with added technology aims to prevent illegal immigration, drug and human trafficking and acts of terrorism." In meeting that goal, CBP is committed to hiring an additional 5,000 Border Patrol and more than 500 Air and Marine agents without reducing hiring and training standards.

"I've seen its impact and its effect on border security," said CBP Acting Deputy Commissioner Ronald Vitiello, on the improved barrier system during a recent visit to the Laredo Sector in Texas. "It will help agents be better prepared and safer, and it will reduce a lot of traffic that comes from the south."

While the barrier may impact some communities, Acting Deputy Commissioner Vitiello noted the end result is a safer border. "That's a good thing for Mexico and that's a good thing for us."

Loren Flossman, the director of the Border Patrol & Air and Marine Program Management Office (PMO) within the Office of Facilities and Asset Management, leads a team that will oversee construction, in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and make final decisions, Calvo explained.

"The PMO will leverage lessons learned from the Pedestrian Fence 225 and Vehicle Fence 300 projects," said Flossman, tasks that installed steel fencing and crossed steel planks as road barriers. "We've retained the appropriate subject matter expertise and institutional knowledge to move forward swiftly in meeting USBP's operational requirements and administration priorities."

CBP has long been involved in building border infrastructure. CBP maintains 705 miles of barrier. The border infrastructure is a mix of walls, pedestrian fencing, vehicle barriers, operational roads and lighting, depending on topography, operational requirements and other factors. 

A U.S. Border Patrol vehicle along the border in the Rio Grande Valley.  
Photo by Donna Burton

# TAKE THE MEMORIES, LEAVE THE REST



We understand why you would want to bring a bit of Mexico home with you, but be aware of the regulations. Some meats, fruits and vegetable products are not allowed in the U.S.

**So take memories - not restricted items!**

## PROHIBITED:



Meats



Fruits



Vegetables



Plants



Soil



Animal or plant material products



U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection

For more information visit the CBP website at [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov) or the APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine website at [www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq)



# We safeguard the American homeland at and beyond our borders.

## Air and Marine Operations

Air and Marine Operations (AMO) is a federal law enforcement organization dedicated to serving and protecting the American people. We apply advanced aeronautical and maritime capabilities and employ our unique skill sets to preserve America's security interests.

With approximately 1,800 federal agents and mission support personnel throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands, AMO conducts its mission in the air and maritime environments at and beyond the border, and within the nation's interior. AMO interdicts unlawful people and cargo approaching U.S. borders, investigates criminal networks and provides domain awareness in the air and maritime environments, and responds to contingencies and national taskings.



U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection

CBP Ethos Series (2 of 6)