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San Francisco Bay Area man tangled in drug web

*Tales to DEA of gun running,
drug trafficking fall on deaf ears*

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DAVID MORRISON, A FORMER San Francisco Bay Area economist, got his introduction to cocaine politics in the spring of 1984. He hasn't been the same since.

"I had crossed over into the nether world that 99 percent of the population wouldn't even believe existed," he said. "I still have nightmares about it."

A conservative Republican Party activist and fundraiser, Morrison became a supporter of the CIA's anti-communist army -- the Fuerza Democratica Nicaraguense or FDN -- in the early 1980s, while teaching international finance at California State University at Hayward. Using his social and political connections, he began helping families fleeing the 1979 Sandinista revolution find jobs and friends in the Bay Area, which has had a large Nicaraguan population ever since the Gold Rush.

"I was just trying to support the President's position," Morrison explained. "I thought it was just insane that we'd allowed things to get out of hand in Central America."

But after 18 months inside the FDN, as an adviser to the group's political boss Adolfo Calero, a shaken Morrison went to the authorities and poured out a lurid tale of gun running and cocaine trafficking.

His lengthy statements to the FBI were immediately stamped "Confidential" and remained secret for nearly a decade. They were recently declassified for the Mercury News by the National Archives.

(Because he still fears for his safety, the newspaper agreed to substitute a pseudonym -- David Morrison -- for the economist's real name. His FBI interviews can be read in their entirety on the Mercury News' Web page.)

"(Morrison) said that the reason he was agreeing to be interviewed by the FBI is that he has certain information in which he believes the Nicaraguan 'contra' organization known as FDN ... has become [more involved in selling arms and cocaine](#) for personal gain than in a military effort to overthrow the current Nicaraguan Sandinista government," one of the reports states.

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Much of what Morrison told the agents about the [inner workings of the FDN](#) and its ties to the U.S. government was corroborated by the Congressional committees that investigated the Iran-Contra scandal. But his information about the FDN's drug operation seemed to fall on deaf ears, he said.

Morrison stumbled into it in April 1984, when a neatly dressed Nicaraguan exile named Norwin Meneses started showing up at meetings of a San Francisco anti-communist group Morrison was assisting.

Called USACA (United Support Against Communism in the Americas), it was a handful of mostly middle-class Nicaraguan couples who met in each other's living rooms and thought up ways to publicize the Contras' cause.

"All (they) were thinking of doing is writing a few letters to the editor," said Morrison, a veteran of several political campaigns. "They had no (political) connections whatsoever." After hearing some of Morrison's ideas -- like hosting a speaking tour for FDN leader Calero -- the group delightedly asked him to join their board of directors.

Meneses also decided to help. He became USACA's largest donor, records show, paying for dinners and parties for Calero, a Notre Dame-educated businessman and longtime CIA operative who became the public face of the Contras in the United States.

Meneses' generosity impressed USACA's members, who excitedly listed his gifts in their meeting minutes as one of their first significant achievements. In an interview before his death from cancer in June, USACA's founder, Don Sinicco, said he and his friends thought Meneses was merely a sympathetic fellow exile who ran a successful restaurant.

But Morrison, whom Sinicco described as a man who "knew Senators," began hearing rumors about the group's dapper benefactor and asked some friends in Washington to check them out. He got back a two-page report from a Drug Enforcement Administration file.

To his horror, he discovered what federal drug agents had known for years: Norwin Meneses was "a major, major trafficker ... He was selling cocaine all over the country," Morrison said. "The DEA had a file that was two feet thick on him."

The DEA refused to release any records regarding Meneses, on the grounds that it would be an unwarranted invasion of his personal privacy. The CIA refused on national security grounds.

Alarmed, Morrison dug deeper and, from a Nicaraguan friend in the FDN, made his most jarring discovery: Meneses wasn't just smuggling cocaine for himself. He was also doing it for the FDN, and he was selling them weapons as well, with the knowledge of the FDN's military commander and, it appeared, the tacit approval of the U.S. government.

An acquaintance in the U.S. Customs Service told Morrison that Customs agents had attempted to investigate "the Nicaraguan role in a large narcotics ring extending from Miami, Florida, to Texas and California" in mid-1985 but ran into interference from "national security interests," the FBI report said.

Morrison told FBI agents that "Norwin Meneses would have been arrested in a major drug case in 1983 or 1984 except that he had been warned by a corrupt (information deleted) officer."

Morrison said he never heard back from the FBI and didn't know why. He also complained to Iran-Contra Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh's office and was told that Walsh had no

jurisdiction to look into allegations of Contra cocaine trafficking.

"I thought this bastard (Meneses) should have been arrested. I assumed there would be an outstanding warrant on this guy. There was nothing," Morrison said. "They had no interest whatsoever."

Stunned and disheartened, he left California and went into virtual seclusion in New England, where he lives today, writing about economic trends.

"I had worked on national campaigns. I had grown up in a family that knew politicians. And I thought I was part of the Establishment," Morrison said with a sad laugh. "And all of a sudden I was a leper."

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