



Sen. John F. Kerry
 "Clear" drug dollars involved

Smuggler says he gave drug profits to Contras

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A convicted drug smuggler told Congress yesterday that he gave "several million dollars" to the Nicaraguan Contra guerrillas from profits he made by illegally importing cocaine into the United States.

George Morales also said he arranged on six occasions between 1984 and 1986 to ship weapons from the United States to the Contras because he said Contra officials who claimed to be CIA operatives

promised to try to get drug charges against him dropped.

Morales' testimony to a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee was part of the panel's continuing investigation into the illegal drug trade and Latin American politics.

Earlier yesterday, Gary Betzner, another convicted drug trafficker, said he flew weapons to Costa Rica for the Contras and picked up cocaine to be taken to the United

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Smuggler recalls drugs-for-weapons deal with natural allies — Contras

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States. Betzner worked for Morales. Sen. John F. Kerry, D-Mass., chairman of the subcommittee on narcotics and terrorism, said Betzner's testimony "makes it very clear that narcotics dollars were involved in the Contra support process."

Meanwhile, ABC News, citing unidentified U.S., Panamanian and Israeli sources, said that from 1983 to 1986 Israeli agents, with U.S. financial support, purchased arms in Poland and Czechoslovakia, shipped them from Yugoslavia to Bolivia and on to Panama. From there, the network said, the arms were flown to Contra supply drops in El Salvador and Costa Rica.

The network said the operation was launched with \$20 million in Israeli government money, which was reimbursed from U.S. covert funds.

ABC said Michael Harreri, an Israeli liaison who also served as an aide to Panamanian Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, was the middleman. It said former CIA agent Felix Rodriguez was the U.S. connection.

According to ABC, after supply planes dropped the weapons to the Contras, the same planes and pilots flew illegal drugs from Panama and Colombia to the United States.

ABC said the Israeli government denied yesterday that it supplied arms to the Contras and Rodriguez has denied he was involved in such a supply network.

In Washington, Kerry, himself a pilot, listened in fascination as Betzner spelled out details of how flying drugs made him twice a millionaire, making 50 flights at \$40,000 each over 18 months. It was a career that ended with his conviction two years ago on drug-conspiracy charges and his sentence to 27 years and two months in prison.

And it was a career that Betzner, 47, and the father of five children, said he tried to end when he feared drug agents were after him.

"It was too risky," Betzner said he decided after he lost a plane load of marijuana when Florida police arrested a driver carrying a load of drugs from the airport. When he heard that, Betzner said, "I packed my bags and locked the door and left" his Florida house.

He went to Hawaii, but returned to Miami three months later when a drug trafficker for whom he had worked was arrested. The colleague, Colombian native Morales, pleaded for help, saying if Betzner would help him fly arms to the Contra rebels fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua there was chance he could use contacts with CIA officials to work a plea bargain.

"I didn't want to do it, but I love and trusted George," Betzner said. "He took me in when I was, well, like an orphan."

The Contras were a natural ally of many of the drug merchants, Kerry said. Most of the traffickers were staunchly anti-communist and thought there was no higher priority than overturning the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

Morales, also serving time in a federal prison on drug charges, testified yesterday that he had given between \$4 million and \$5 million, virtually all of it from drug sales, and some of his drug-smuggling aircraft to organizations supporting the Contras.

At times the link between the Contras and the drug smuggling was open, both Betzner and Morales said. They recounted two flights that Betzner made into Costa Rica and landed near the ranch of John Hull, an American who has acknowledged supporting the Contras and who has been alleged to have been a CIA employee.

Betzner said Hull watched silently as a load of machine guns and explosives he flew to the ranch was unloaded and replaced by 17 duffel bags and five or six boxes filled with cocaine. Hull met a second flight on a strip near Voice of America radio transmitting towers near his ranch, a flight that exchanged small arms and land mines for between 15 to 17 duffel bags of cocaine, Betzner said.

Hull has been subpoenaed by Kerry's subcommittee for eight months, but the senator said he has no certainty that Hull will testify.

Morales said he met with three Contra officials in April 1984, and was told by two of them, Marcos Aguado and Octaviano Cesar, that they worked for the CIA. The pair promised to help get drug charges dropped if Morales would ship

weapons to the Contras, he said. The Contras have denied that they were involved in any drug smuggling.

Betzner said Morales told him he "had made a deal with the CIA to

supply them [the Contras]. He wanted me to fly guns and ammunition to the Contras and bring some contraband back."

Betzner said he did not know the source of the weapons. Each time,

he said, he went to a hangar at an Opa-Locka air field where the plane already had been loaded.

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