

U.S. CUSTOM SERVICE
OPERATION HARDLINE

HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE IN PROBLEM SOLVING NOMINATION

THE PROBLEM

Customs serves as this Nations' primary border agency. Its mission involves processing the importation of over \$400 billion in commercial merchandise, processing annually 400 million land border passengers, enforcing 600 laws for over 60 agencies, collecting nearly 520 billion dollars annually, and prohibiting the illegal entry of contraband including narcotics into the country. The methods by which narcotics enter the country are varied and have traditionally included small aircraft, commercial cargo, land border vehicles, commercial aircraft, baggage, and on-body carries.

Beginning in 1994, Customs was suddenly faced with an extremely perplexing and dangerous problem. Those seeking illegal entry and/or smuggling narcotics into the country simply began to "run the ports." This occurred in virtually every major port of entry along the U.S./Mexican border and has involved a total of 827 port running instances. The violator, when anticipating some type of possible Customs interdiction action, would simply run through the port at very high speeds. This created unique challenges relative to apprehension of the vehicle, its driver, and its contraband. Safety was also a serious concern and problem. Below is a simple chart showing the monthly trends in port running along the Southwest Border.

	DEC 94	JAN 95	FEB 95	MAR 95	APR 95	MAY 95	JUNE 95
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Customs serves as this Nations* primary border agency. Its mission involves processing the importation of over \$400 billion in commercial merchandise, processing annually 400 million land border passengers, enforcing 600 laws for over 60 agencies, collecting nearly \$20 billion dollars annually, and prohibiting the illegal entry of contraband including narcotics into the country. The methods by which narcotics enter the country are varied and have traditionally included small aircraft, commercial cargo, land border vehicles, commercial aircraft, baggage, and on-body carries.

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FOR WHOM WAS IT A PROBLEM

Port running represented a significant problem for a broad spectrum of affected parties. The problem was a threat to the safety of the traveling public and residents on the U.S. side of the border, and occasionally on the Mexican side of the border, as port runners threatened the lives of anyone who might come in their way. It was also a problem for the nation inasmuch as it represented an effective, undeterred smuggling avenue for narcotics smuggling and the entry of illegal aliens. The Customs [and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)] inspectors' life was often immediately in danger inasmuch as the port runner had little respect or concern for human life or deterrence. It was a problem for state and local law enforcement officials because the port runner, having run the port, often continued at high speed with dangerous, evasive, driving action throughout the local community. It was a problem indirectly for the Border Patrol inasmuch as they had expended tremendous resources and investments to erect fences and barriers between the ports of entry, and the effectiveness of their system in deterring illegal entry of aliens and contraband between the ports was now being threatened by the violators simply avoiding the fences and running the ports of entry.

HANDLING OF THE PROBLEM

In the past, Customs developed multiple approaches and techniques for handling the problem of narcotics smuggling and the illegal entry of aliens. However, an integral part of that problem was to screen entering travelers at land border primary inspection booths. Those travelers, who by virtue of their behavior, meeting certain profiles, hits on the Treasury Enforcement Communications System (TECS), etc., appeared to be of higher risk were referred to "Secondary" for more intensive examinations. In general, this approach was effective in doing in depth examinations of potential violators. The problem was (and is) that port runners had no intentions of going to Secondary and,

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in fact, often ran the port in anticipation of being sent to Secondary. This created a unique, difficult to handle, and dangerous challenge that required new approaches.

INFORMATION COLLECTED

An information reporting system was established to identify the scope and nature of the problem. That information addressed the number, nature, and location of the port running incidents, enforcement efforts launched successes (and initially there were very few), and individual acts of violence including over one dozen shootings of which two were fatal. This required us to develop separate reporting methodologies and to work with all of the major ports along the Southwest Border to record the scope of the problem and to begin generating ideas for how to deal with it.

THE GOAL OF THE PROBLEM SOLVING EFFORT

Traditionally in the Customs Service, our goal has been to apprehend and arrest smugglers. The approach would have resulted in goals for arresting port runners. In line with the philosophy and approach of problem solving, however, we established the goals of preventing port running. To the degree that our strategies and approaches serve to deter and prevent the running of the port, we will then deem our efforts to be successful.

STRATEGIES TO REACH THE GOAL

We established at Customs Headquarters the National Problem Solving Team, and a multifunctional team involving representatives from inspectors, agents, and administrative support areas. That team was chartered with the responsibility for developing a port runner problem solving strategy along the Southwest Border. This project was labeled Operation Hard Line. The team generated a three phased approach that builds upon:

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- Establishing multifunctional teams of agents, inspectors, and administrative support in every major Southwest Border port.
- Developing information collection and dissemination methodologies for identifying port running, port running organizations, port running purpose, etc.
- Developing comprehensive information on port running scenarios and detection efforts.
- Fundamentally changing the traffic flow through the ports of entry by erecting concrete fences referred to as Jersey Barriers, to guide traffic; erecting retractable traffic detention systems, referred to as Bollards, that would prevent automobiles from running the port unless such devices were lowered; and relocating to the Southern border a significant number of agents to conduct follow-up investigations upon apprehension of the port runner and the generation of appropriate publicity.
- Developing of extensive coordination with local police departments and improving communication systems between Customs and those police departments to communicate information regarding port running.
- Changing our measurement systems to emphasize decreased port running incidents, not just apprehension of port runners.

WAS OUR GOAL ACCOMPLISHED?

Operation Hard line is still in an early phase. Much of the resources and systems deployment relative to traffic control and flow, improved communications, improved intelligence, etc., have yet to be deployed. Nonetheless, through extremely innovative local initiatives at the ports, we have reduced port running from 49 occurrences in December 1994, to 20 in June 1995. It is our

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intent and expectation to solve this problem. We are confident that when our problem solving methodologies and approaches are fully implemented, the incidences of port running will become inordinately rare.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Documentation supporting Hard Line's approach, progress, and success is enclosed.

NOMINEES

Although many employees have and are playing a key role in addressing the port running problem, three have been most critical to its success:

William S. Heffelfinger m

Jayson Paul Ahem

Arnold R. Gerardo

Mr. Heffelfinger, Mr. Ahem, and Mr. Gerardo constitute the Customs National Problem Solving Team. Their resumes are enclosed.

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