

Narco-Terrorism: American Style

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[Rusty Fleming](#)

On a hot summer evening, in a bar in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico just across the bridge from Laredo, Texas; a thirty year-old man, on his knees, surrounded by a dozen armed guards, can be heard begging for his life, he cries for one more chance to make it right with the boss, one more chance to see his family—one more chance at life.

His boss happens to be the man who dictates the life and death of every soul in the Laredo corridor, listens to the pleas but has already made up his mind. He stands as judge and jury in this court and it's clear, he's heard enough. So he pulls a diamond studded, pearl handled pistol from his belt and slowly hands it over to one of his newest recruits. He tells the recruit to put a bullet in the condemned mans head as he sobs uncontrollably—and so, without hesitation the young man pulls the trigger four times over.

This was the new recruit's first kill and his first real test for initiation to become an assassin of the Gulf Cartel's enforcement arm known as the Zetas. He had never killed anyone before that night and when his cartel boss handed him the pistol and he pulled that trigger— he knew he loved it. He told me later that it gave him a rush that he had never felt before, "to kill a man and know I was going to get a way with it gave me a feeling of power" —He spoke of that night as if he had found his true calling—"I knew right then I was born to be a sicario" (Spanish for "hit-man") He was thirteen years old.

I've met and talked with numerous players in the drug war being waged on our border and beyond, that have often left me feeling more than a little disturbed. The utter disregard for human life that's evidenced in the daily tortures and executions taking place down here, certainly wears on the most seasoned of us reporting on it. But when I looked into the eyes of this young man and saw how he lit up inside while speaking so nonchalantly yet eloquently about how he "lived to kill" ever since he pulled that trigger for the first time, it sent cold chills down my spine—and still does. "I've killed men while they were tied and bound but that there is no thrill, no excitement in that for me. I prefer to stalk my target, hunt them down and then, after I know his moves front to back, I sneak up on them, look'em in the eyes and pull the trigger—now that's a rush."

I interviewed him a year before the mainstream media ever heard his name, Rosalio Reta, was born and raised in Laredo, Texas and recruited by the Zetas when he was barely in the 7th grade.

The first time I met Reta he was barely 18 years old and awaiting his first murder trial in Webb County. We had to meet in private because to be seen talking with

someone like me, would have been a death sentence for someone like him. Sheriff Rick Flores, one of the courageous men I ever known, had him moved into his personal office so I could meet with the most infamous prisoner in his jail at the time. Even though Reta was in leg irons and shackles he had an arrogant look about him, wearing a smirk on his face that made you think he thought all of this was funny.

If you don't count the lightening bolts tattooed on his face, he looks like any ordinary kid until he opens his mouth to speak. Calculating and conniving, I'd call him street smart for sure. He ended up asking me as many questions that first day as I did him.

He took notes as we talked, he asked me all kinds of personal questions, in fact the more personal I got with my questions he did the same. At first I didn't know what to think about this quid pro quo interview, but after a while I realized he was trying to intimidate me or back me off more than anything else. Knowing what I already knew about this kid, it almost worked.



He told me that he frequently went to Nuevo Laredo looking to work as a drug runner or whatever he could to make the kind of money that type of work pays. This

part of his story is played out everyday all along the border, and recruitment of young teenagers into drug gangs is nothing new either, but giving them para-military training and state of the art weaponry is. Reta is part of a new wave of young recruits that are giving the drug cartels a bumper crop of highly trained and highly motivated soldiers and giving us our worst nightmare—domestic narco-terrorists.

Training for these kids starts as soon as they are deemed by their elder Zeta commander as being ready, usually after they have proven their ability to kill someone. Once that right of passage has been taken then the real training can begin.

The core group of men commanding los Zetas, were trained and outfitted here in the United States at the School of the Americas in the 1990's. Trained to handle all types sophisticated weaponry: automatic assault rifles, heavy-caliber machine guns, bombs, and grenade launchers. They are experts in explosives, GPS technology, wiretapping, and counterintelligence. And even though many of the founding members have been captured or killed in the last few years—they have managed to duplicate themselves many times over with this new generation of better Zetas.

My interview with Reta and numerous other sources revealed that the Zetas have training camps all over northern Mexico, central America and have even been known to use property on the U.S. side of the border to conduct training.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for six months; the same training that is given to the most elite special-forces anywhere is given to these teenagers, all in the concerted effort to build a generation of narco-terrorists better than their predecessors. They are indoctrinated to the ways of the Zetas. "Leave no man behind" is one of those creeds a Zetita is taught to live by, Reta told me "if you go out with ten other men and they get killed, you come home with ten corpses or not at all." At a time in his life when Reta should have been learning geometry, basic biology and how to muster up the courage to ask a girl out on a date—he was learning how to calculate wind and distance to take out a target and the best ways to torture a man to extract information.

And what exactly are they training these boys and girls to do? It starts out as any other military boot camp with physical training, running and obstacle course drills and then classes later in the day.

The ones signing up to be assassins aren't just taught to kill with weapons, but they are given martial arts training and taught first how to kill with their hands. They are taught how to run the most sophisticated surveillance and weaponry available today. They are taught how to dis-assemble and re-assemble every weapon they are issued, and then they learn how to use it with deadly precision; they handle all forms of handguns, AK-47's, AR-15's, .50 caliber machine guns, fragment grenades and rocket launchers. They are taught how to properly form a sniper team and take

out a target from distances of a thousand yards or more. To hone their urban assault training to a higher level, they encourage the teams here in the U.S., to enter into paintball tournaments and report their scores.

They have an extensive course in SERE, the acronym for Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape. They are taught how to dispense torture to obtain information and how to take being tortured, in case they are ever captured. They are taught how to drive their vehicles in high speed chases and how to box in their intended targets at intersection as to create the best possible kill zone and at the same time limit the potential for collateral damage and injury to innocent bystanders.

As you would probably guess many of these kids “washout” of the program and for those recruits that can’t cut the rigors of para-military training, the option is given to go into a complete smuggling training program or sign up for an advanced school in electronics and even college.

Operating in the States is a necessity for every drug trafficking organization including the Zetas. These American recruits serve as great benefit to the DTO’s because these kids don’t stand out, they blend right into our society. They speak perfect English, they dress like every other teenager, they know the roads and they know the customs. They can guard a million dollar load of narcotics from Laredo to Dallas and pass right through a border checkpoint and never look suspicious. When the narcotics reach their destination they act as the cartel bankers, collect the money, and drive that cash back safely to Mexico and never miss a day of school to do it.

I just recently spoke at a law enforcement conference of gang investigators and the question that’s being asked by the law enforcement community, “How does a police force seeking to act within the law and respect human rights successfully combat an enemy, made up of teenagers armed with heavy weapons, all of whom will kill a police officer without thought and who, if arrested, can only be held in custody for a few hours?”

~ About the Author ~

His entire life is about the war on drugs. He knows it because he’s lived it. For the first twenty years of his professional career, Rusty worked to the top of his industry as the largest exporter of transportation equipment in the U.S. to destinations worldwide. At the same time he was climbing the ladder of success, he was juggling a costly addiction to alcohol and drugs.

By 1996 his addiction had cost him every material possession, his family, his dignity, and nearly his life. Rusty was reduced to living in a dumpster and eating out of trashcans in Nashville TN. After a lifesaving chain of events through his father, a year later Rusty emerged radically changed and a man on a mission.

In 2002 Rusty started making commercials, PSA's and doing corporate work for hire.

The idea for his explosive documentary, "Drug Wars: Silver or Lead," was conceived in 2005 while Rusty was working on a story about methamphetamines. Rusty came upon information relating to the origin of vast amounts of the drug in North Texas and two weeks later he was in Mexico getting an inside look into the most powerful drug cartels in the world. Since that time he has been getting to the truth about the drug war through credible sources and undercover informants from both sides of the border, on both sides of the law. The narco-insurgents that are fighting over control of the ports of entry in the United States and Mexico are creating a new level of corruption and have claimed more lives in the last year than the total number of soldiers killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These drug trafficking organizations have well structured cell-based networks that stretch across the U.S. that include surveillance, intelligence gathering, money laundering, and the ability to enforce their operation with violence.

Adding to the Drug Wars franchise, Rusty has written a book entitled Drug Wars: Narco-Warfare in the Twenty-First Century available on Amazon.com. In addition he has started pre-production on a television series based on the documentary entitled "Embedded."

National media and law enforcement agencies recognize Rusty as an expert on border security and the Mexican drug cartels. He is currently producing news documentaries and news segments for FOX and CNN and has produced episodes of "Gangland" for The History Channel.

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