



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 17, 2011

## ATF Supervisors of Botched Gun Sting Get Promoted

Two were recovered at the site where U.S. Border Patrol agent Brian Terry was killed in Arizona last year.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) reported Tuesday that the three supervisors of the operation — William McMahan, William Newell, and David Roth — have been promoted to management positions at ATF headquarters in Washington. McMahan was the agency's Deputy Director of Operations in the West when the sting operation was carried out. Newell and Roth were field supervisors out of the ATF's Phoenix office. The news brought a quick response from [Sen. John Cornyn](#) (R-Texas), who last week sent a letter to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder demanding to know about other alleged ATF operations similar to Fast and Furious.



"Until Attorney General Holder and Justice Department officials come clean on all alleged gun-walking operations, including a detailed response to allegations of a Texas-based scheme, it is inconceivable to reward those who spearheaded this disastrous operation with cushy desks in Washington," said Cornyn, a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The operation, which ran from November 2009 to January 2011, was part of Project Gunrunner, an ATF surveillance program to track firearms purchased in the United States for resale to Mexican drug dealers. At a congressional hearing in June, three ATF agents said they were repeatedly ordered to stand down while gun buyers in Arizona walked away with AK-47s and other high-powered weapons agents believed were headed to Mexico. "We were fully aware the guns would probably be moved across the border to drug cartels where they could be used to kill," an unidentified agent told [CBS News](#) in February.

The serial numbers on the two rifles found at the site where Border Patrol Agent Terry was killed matched two of the guns ATF agents watched suspect Jaime Avila purchase at a Phoenix gun store over the course of a year, CBS reported. Within hours of the killing, ATF agents arrested Avila and later indicted 34 other suspected gunrunners.

Testifying before the House Judiciary Committee on May 3, Holder said he "probably" learned about Operation Fast and Furious only within the previous few weeks. But he had surely been aware of Project Gunrunner. In [remarks](#) prepared for delivery at the Mexico/United States Arms Trafficking Conference in Cuernavaca, Mexico on April 2, 2009, Holder described "the development of an arms trafficking prosecution and enforcement strategy on both sides of the border."

"Last week, our administration launched a major new effort to break the backs of the cartels," the Attorney General said. "My department is committing 100 new ATF personnel to the Southwest border in the next 100 days to supplement our ongoing Project Gunrunner, DEA is adding 16 new positions on



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the border, as well as mobile enforcement teams, and the FBI is creating a new intelligence group focusing on kidnapping and extortion."

Economic "stimulus" funds were also directed to Project Gunrunner in early 2009, with \$10 million of the \$40 million in law enforcement money going to the gun trafficking program.

In March of this year, President Obama told the Spanish-language broadcaster Univision that his administration never approved a strategy that allowed the weapons to reach the drug cartels. "I did not authorize it; Eric Holder, the attorney general, did not authorize it. He's been very clear that our policy is to catch gun-runners and put them into jail," Obama said. "There may be a situation here in which a serious mistake was made," he continued. "If that's the case, then we'll find out and we'll hold someone accountable."

As reported recently in [The New American](#), members of Congress have learned that other agencies — most likely the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration — may have been involved in the purchase of the weapons. "The evidence we have gathered raises the disturbing possibility that the Justice Department not only allowed criminals to smuggle weapons but that taxpayer dollars from other agencies may have financed those engaging in such activities," wrote Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) in a letter to Holder. "It is one thing to argue that the ends justify the means in an attempt to defend a policy that puts building a big case ahead of stopping known criminals from getting guns," they added. "Yet it is a much more serious matter to conceal from Congress the possible involvement of other agencies in identifying and maybe even working with the same criminals that Operation Fast and Furious was trying to identify."

"I share responsibility for mistakes that were made," the ATF's McMahon testified to a House committee in July. "The advantage of hindsight, the benefit of a thorough review of the case, clearly points me to things that I would have done differently." As the new Deputy Assistant Director of ATF's Office of Professional Responsibility and Security Operations, McMahon's duties will now include investigating misconduct by agency employees. Acting Director Kenneth Melson announced the promotion in an agency-wide confidential e-mail Sunday, saying McMahon is among ATF employees rewarded for "the skills and abilities they have demonstrated throughout their careers."

Newell, the special agent in charge of the field office for Arizona and New Mexico, has been promoted to Special Assistant to the Assistant Director of the agency's Office of Management. Voth, who was an on-the-ground team supervisor for the sting operation, is now in Washington as Branch Chief for the ATF's tobacco division. The *Times* reported that three ATF spokesmen did not return calls Monday for comments on the promotions.



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