

The Invisible Drug Lord: Hunting 'The Ghost'

Drug traffickers today realize that their best protection is not a private army but anonymity.

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1

The Invisibles of the Drug World



Drug traffickers today have realized that their best protection is not a private army, but rather total anonymity. We call these drug lords “the Invisibles.” This is the story of one such trafficker, alias “Memo Fantasma,” or “Will the Ghost.”

InSight Crime has long believed that behind every famous drug trafficker, there have been many “invisibles.” Rather than dressing in alligator boots, sporting gold chains and gold plated pistols, these drug traffickers have shunned ostentation and the limelight, acting like legitimate businessmen. Because the drug trade needs protectors, with high profits and untrustworthy participants, every invisible needs a “visible,” to ensure that agreements are respected and debts are paid.

Pablo Escobar was the ultimate visible trafficker, becoming a member of Colombia’s congress, opening his vast estate Hacienda Nápoles to the public and populating it with exotic wildlife. Yet when Escobar fell dozens of invisibles remained and many, like Memo Fantasma, survive to this day.

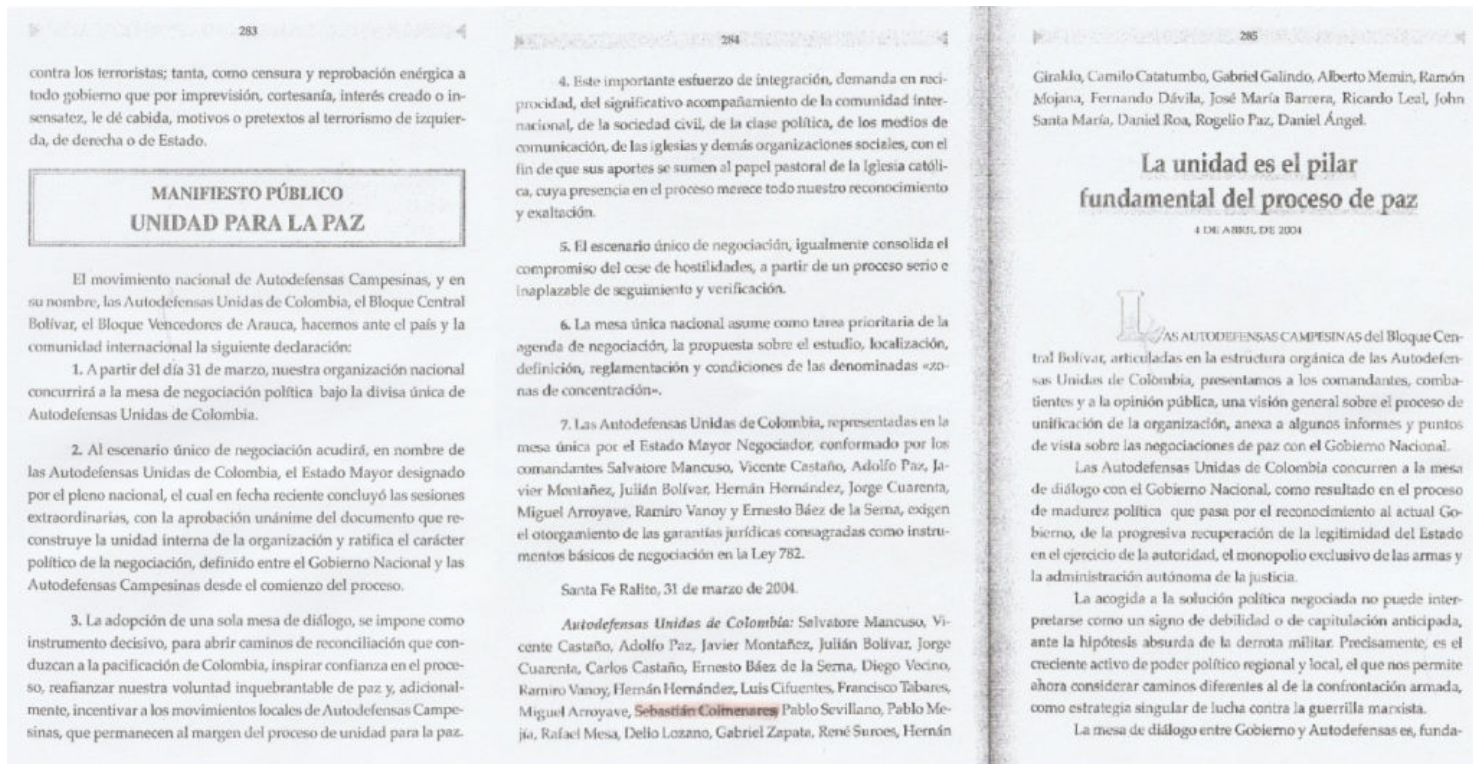
Escobar’s successor, [Diego Murillo](#), alias “Don Berna,” learned from Escobar’s mistakes, living in the shadows in Medellín, his alias known to all but his face and real name known to few. Still, he too stepped into the limelight in 2003 when he entered the paramilitary peace process with the government and sought, unsuccessfully, to evade imprisonment and extradition. But hidden behind him and his criminal structure, the Oficina de Envigado, were dozens more invisibles, doing business and making money under his protection. Memo Fantasma was one of them.

Then there were the Castaño brothers, once members of the Medellín Cartel, who founded the right-wing paramilitary force of the [United Self Defense Forces of Colombia](#) (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC) in 1997. Their army provided hundreds of invisibles with protection as well as the infrastructure necessary to do business. Memo Fantasma was one of them.

At any one time, InSight Crime has dozens of open files on suspected invisibles. A file is opened when an individual, or an alias, repeatedly appears on our radar, linked with serious transnational organized crime, usually cocaine. Many of these files remain dormant for years, or indeed forever, only being activated when new information becomes available. For many years, two aliases remained on our files, for which we were unable to find enough information to initiate an investigation. These were “Sebastián Colmenares” and “Memo Fantasma.”

Sebastián Colmenares

The Sebastián Colmenares file was opened in 2004. Colmenares was the alias of a commander of the paramilitary AUC. From its formation in 1997 until its demobilization in 2006, the AUC was the most powerful drug trafficking organization in the world. The group demobilized some 30,000 fighters and in its heyday controlled up to 30 percent of Colombia, including some of the country’s most strategic drug trafficking real estate. It exported hundreds of tons of cocaine a year.



Colmenares became visible only briefly in 2004 when he signed a crucial AUC document, “Unity for Peace,” in Santa Fe de Ralito, in Colombia’s northwestern department of Córdoba, where different elements of the paramilitary army announced their intention to work together and negotiate a peace agreement with the government.

The signatories to this, the top paramilitary command, read like the Who’s Who of Colombian drug trafficking. Membership at this level meant you were part of the world’s criminal elite.

We pored over the names at the time and were able to identify almost every person behind the aliases, except Sebastián Colmenares. As the paramilitaries demobilized, Colmenares did not appear, let alone surrender. He was never heard of again. Our thinking was always that this was a top-level paramilitary drug trafficker who decided not to turn himself in, but remained outside the peace process, slinking back into the criminal shadows, until nobody was sure that he had really existed.

Signees of Unity for Peace



Carlos and Vicente Castaño

Founders of the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC).



Adolfo Paz, alias “Don Berna”

Real name Diego Murillo, successor of Pablo Escobar and head of the Oficina de Envigado, a criminal group in Medellín.



Javier Montañez, alias “Macaco”

Real name Carlos Mario Jiménez, head of the most powerful AUC faction, the Central Bolívar Bloc (Bloque Central Bolívar - BCB).



Julián Bolívar

Real name Rodrigo Pérez, military chief of the BCB and Macaco’s right-hand man.



Pablo Sevillano

Real name Guillermo Pérez, brother of Julián Bolívar, ran BCB drug trafficking operations in Colombia’s department of Nariño on the Pacific Coast.



Rogelio Paz

Real name Carlos Mario Aguilar Echeverri, one of Oficina de Envigado’s top capos, who answered to Don Berna, and was known in Medellín as “Rogelio.”



Sebastián Colmenares

Never identified. To this day, the Colombian state does not know who he is.

Memo Fantasma

The alias Memo Fantasma has been kicking around the Medellín underworld since the days of Pablo Escobar. He was linked to the Medellín cartel, then its successor organization, the Oficina de Envigado, headed by Don Berna. Many had heard of the alias but nobody appeared to have met him, knew what he looked like, or had an idea of his real name. He was presented by the Colombian police as a low-level player, not worthy of serious law enforcement attention. Yet the few mentions that came from our underworld sources suggested this was a sophisticated trafficker playing at the very highest levels. Despite the assertions of the police, we kept our Memo Fantasma file, but for years it remained dormant, the odd mention never enough to justify any serious attention.



The screenshot shows the top of a news article on the website 'EL ESPECTADOR'. The date is 'Lunes 10 De Febrero'. The navigation bar includes categories like 'Noticias', 'Opinión', 'Economía', 'Deportes', 'Entretenimiento', 'Cultura', and 'Cromos'. Below this, there's a red bar with regional links: 'NACIONAL', 'Antioquia', 'Atlántico', 'Bolívar', 'Boyacá', 'Cundinamarca', 'Cauca', 'Magdalena', 'Meta', 'Santand'. The article title is 'El narco fantasma' by Ana María Cristancho, published on July 18, 2015. The article text begins with '¡Pacifista! presenta la primera parte de la historia de un personaje que atravesó las estructuras del narcotráfico desde los años 80 hasta las bandas criminales de hoy, sin que aún haya sido detectado por las autoridades.' and includes a quote: '“Para entender a las bacrim (bandas criminales) y el narcotráfico hoy, tiene que saber qué pasó en la desmovilización del bloque central Bolívar, BCB (...) Hay un personaje que se escapó de la justicia. (...) Me quiere matar porque soy de los pocos que lo conocen de cara. Ya acabó

That all changed on July 18, 2015, when an article was [published](#) by Ana María Cristancho in one of Colombia's top newspapers, El Espectador, entitled "The Narco Ghost" (El narco fantasma).

The article not only named both Sebastián Colmenares and Memo Fantasma, but alleged that they were one and the same. It stated that Colmenares was the partner of paramilitary warlord Carlos Mario Jiménez, alias "Macaco," and that he had managed to wipe all records of himself and his links to the most powerful of the AUC's fighting divisions, the Central Bolívar Bloc (Bloque Central Bolívar - BCB). He did this "to continue the illegal business of the bloc he commanded ... and to look after the money and properties of the BCB."

A follow-up article, [published](#) two days later, gave even more details.

The articles stated that Memo Fantasma began his criminal career in the Medellín Cartel, working for the Galeano criminal clan, based in New York City, receiving cocaine shipments. When Pablo Escobar [killed](#) the head of the Galeano clan in 1992, claiming he was not being paid his dues, Memo Fantasma had just received a big shipment. Now he had no boss to answer to and could keep the money from the sale for himself. This was the seed money that allowed him to start moving his own drug shipments and enter the big leagues of drug traffickers.

The article stated that he returned to Colombia in 1996 and set himself up in the municipality of Caucaasia (not far from Santa Fe de Ralito where the aforementioned AUC document was signed). This was at the same time that the paramilitaries were expanding from their home base in the Urabá region of northern Colombia, ready to [launch themselves](#) as a nationwide movement in 1997. Paramilitary fighters arrived in Caucaasia and drug traffickers flocked to join them, among them Macaco and Memo Fantasma, who were tasked by Vicente Castaño, one of the paramilitary founders, to create a paramilitary unit and “conquer” the south of Bolívar department, for the right-wing army. They paid up to five million dollars to the Castaños to become part of the AUC.

Revealing Testimony

The story of Memo’s time in the AUC is based on the testimony of paramilitaries who testified as part of special legislation that formed the heart of the peace agreement with the government: the Justice and Peace Law. Those that told the truth to the Justice and Peace Tribunals, created to oversee the legal side of the paramilitary demobilization, would receive a maximum of eight years in prison, no matter how horrific their crimes, and be protected against extradition.

There were two key testimonies to the Justice and Peace courts quoted in the articles: that of José Germán Sena Pico, alias “Nico,” and Juan Carlos Sierra, alias “El Tuso.” Nico was a member of the BCB, while El Tuso was a senior drug trafficker who moved large consignments of cocaine under paramilitary protection.

Nico detailed much of the drug trafficking operation, stating that one drug laboratory produced 65 tons of cocaine between 1997 and 1999, of which 50 tons, which had a scorpion marking on the packaging, belonged to Memo Fantasma and Macaco. It left Colombia via the Caribbean coast in boats and speedboats. Between 2000 and 2001, 78 tons of cocaine were processed in a similar laboratory, of which 50 tons belonged to Memo and Macaco, this time leaving via the Pacific coast.

El Tuso, the drug trafficker who worked with the AUC and was [extradited](#) in 2008 with much of the paramilitary high command, stated that Memo Fantasma was a major drug trafficker that worked with several paramilitary leaders, not just Macaco, because he had a top-level connect with Mexican drug traffickers.

Best of all, the articles gave a real name for Memo Fantasma: Guillermo Camacho.

InSight Crime [wrote its own article](#) laying out the work that El Espectador and ~~Pacifista~~ had done and started looking for Camacho.

We found a recording of Germán Sena Pico being questioned by a Justice and Peace prosecutor in 2015.

Prosecutor: *Who is Memo Fantasma?*

Germán Sena Pico, alias "Nico": *Memo Fantasma was the second person in Bloque Central Bolívar after Macaco.*

Prosecutor: *And who is he? Where is he? Where is he from?*

Nico: *Memo Fantasma is from Envigado, Antioquia.*

Prosecutor: *What is his real name?*

Nico: *The name, because I was with him, I acted as a courier for him and was physically with him was Guillermo Camacho.*

Prosecutor: *That name does not exist, it is not registered. We have looked, looked again, in all the registries. I have sent orders to the judicial police, I have done a legal inspection. That name does not exist.*

Nico: *I saw that name. Once we went to his farm in Buenavista (in Cordoba department, near Santa Fe de Ralito), we came via the airport in Caucasia, because he had a plane.*

Prosecutor: *What was he called? He was not called Guillermo Camacho.*

Nico: *Well, he was always known as Sebastián Colmenares or Memo Fantasma.*

We had no more luck than the prosecutor. We could find no Guillermo Camacho either. The Ghost had shimmered briefly into view, but once again faded away.

2

Hunting the Ghost: a Face and a Name

The hunt for “Memo Fantasma” had stalled once again. The name Guillermo Camacho did not register with anyone. Had The Ghost managed to wipe all traces of his real identity? Was he now living under a false name? Was he gone forever?

In 2017, without realizing it, InSight Crime hired the author of the [El Espectador article](#) which named Memo Fantasma and Sebastián Colmenares as Guillermo Camacho. Ana María Cristancho brought with her the information she had on Memo Fantasma and a keen desire to keep working on the story. In the aftermath of the publication of her article, another source had come forward anonymously, presenting herself as a woman who had had an intimate relationship with Memo Fantasma that had ended badly. While Ana had been unable to verify the identity of the source, whom we shall call “Zara” (after the William Congreve play “The Mourning Bride”), she provided valuable information, all of which checked out over more than two years of investigation.

Zara’s first and perhaps most important nugget of information was that Guillermo Camacho was a false identity that Memo Fantasma had created to protect himself while he worked with the paramilitaries of the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia ([Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC](#)). He even had a false ID card with the name printed. She provided another name: Guillermo León Acevedo Giraldo. We were back in business.



For just a couple of seconds, the camera focused on the face of a man enjoying his coffee and trying to ignore what was going on in the background. It just so happened that the show was very popular with a group of former paramilitaries, including some from the Central Bolívar Bloc (Bloque Central Bolívar – BCB) of the AUC. They would gather while in prison to watch the program. During this episode, one of them apparently pointed at the screen and cried “that’s Memo Fantasma.”

Ana María Cristancho came through once again. She not only managed to find the episode of Séptimo Día and the relevant segment, but a source got her a passport photo from a source from what may now be a disappeared police file on a trafficker known as Memo Fantasma.



Suddenly, we had two pictures of Memo Fantasma. They were the same man. At the same time, a search of the Medellín and Bogotá Chambers of Commerce turned up a Guillermo León Acevedo Giraldo as a stakeholder in a company, Inversiones ACEM S.A. There was an office address in Bogotá: Carrera 14 N° 85-68, office 408. All shareholders have to attach a copy of their identity card to the registration of any company with the Chamber of Commerce.



We had an official ID card and two photos. The Ghost began to take on a solid form and his story took shape.

Memo Cut His Teeth in the Medellín Cartel

Memo Fantasma was born in Medellín in 1971 and registered himself for his national identity card in the municipality of Envigado, part of Medellín's urban sprawl. Envigado was where Pablo Escobar grew up and started his criminal career. Escobar set up a criminal structure in the municipal building of Envigado known as the "Oficina de Envigado," a debt collection agency. Escobar would use the Oficina de Envigado to keep track of the debts that drug traffickers owed him for protection or logistics services. If anyone was foolish enough not to pay, the Oficina would contract the feared "sicarios," or cartel hitmen. Much of the Medellín Cartel's infrastructure was based out of Envigado.

Getting the story of Memo's early days has been arduous. Most of the major traffickers of those days are dead or in prison in the United States. But Zara, the scorned lover, was able to get us started.



Fabio Ochoa Vasco.

Memo was a scrawny kid with long hair when he started his criminal career as a teenager. He went to the United States to help receive drug shipments where, according to Zara, he worked with Fabio Ochoa Vasco.

Ochoa Vasco was one of the key members of the Medellín Cartel and responsible for much of the US end of its operations. Such was his importance that the United States put a **\$5 million bounty** on his head. This was when he was handling an estimated six to eight tons of cocaine to the United States **every month**. Ochoa Vasco worked for Escobar and then his successor, Diego Murillo, alias “Don Berna,” until he **turned himself in** to US authorities in 2009. He was crucial to the development of routes into the United States **via Mexico**, and it seems likely that the young Memo learned the ropes from this top-level Medellín Cartel operative while making some important Mexican connections that were essential to his future criminal career.

Memo’s break allegedly came in 1992, when he was just 21 years old. Pablo Escobar was sat in a prison of his own making, dubbed “The Cathedral” in Envigado, having made a deal with the Colombian government and turned himself in once extradition had been taken off the statute books. Perched on a hillside overlooking Medellín, Escobar was getting angry, pacing around his golden cage. While he sat in prison, the rest of the Medellín Cartel was making money hand-over-fist, and he felt he was not getting his fair share of the proceeds.

Before turning himself in, Escobar had placed much of his smuggling interests in the hands of senior traffickers, among them Fernando Galeano and the Castaño brothers. Galeano was one of the more prolific traffickers in the organization, and he was growing rich, protected by his head of security, Diego Murillo, alias “Don Berna.” The Castaños, whose father had been killed by Marxist rebels, were building their own paramilitary army to fight the guerrillas and becoming ever more powerful thanks to their cocaine earnings. Led by Fidel Castaño, alias “Rambo,” and his two brothers Vicente and Carlos, the Castaños were slipping out of his control, thought Escobar.

They were all summoned to the Cathedral to explain themselves. The Castaños refused to go, but Galeano went up the mountain, against the advice of Don Berna, hidden in a secret compartment in one of the trucks that supplied the prison. He was killed by Escobar in the prison, his body incinerated. Escobar then sent his sicarios to wipe out the Galeano clan and seize all its assets and drug business. Don Berna escaped. The killings sparked a civil war in the Medellín Cartel. The Castaño brothers allied with Don Berna and sought funding from the rival Cali Cartel, setting up a vigilante group called the PEPES (People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar). They set about intimidating, turning or killing Escobar supporters.

All this kicked off just as Memo Fantasma, sat in the United States, received a hefty drug consignment. Suddenly he had no boss looking over this shoulder, expecting payment.

“He was an associate of Pablo Escobar and the infamous Medellín Cartel, and ended up making off with a large load of high quality cocaine that he stole from Escobar and set up his own operation,” said Peter Vincent, formerly a senior US Justice Department official who worked in Bogotá from 2006 to 2009 and has deep knowledge of the Colombian drug world.

Memo suddenly went from a small-time player to the big leagues. He had the contacts in both the United States and Mexico, and now had the seed money to set himself up. He started dealing cocaine for himself.

Memo Builds Reputation After Fall of Escobar

As the Medellín Cartel war grew ever more brutal, Memo sat it out on the sidelines making money. In December 1993, Escobar was killed on a Medellín rooftop. The Medellín Cartel died with him, only to be replaced by the next generation: Don Berna in Medellín and the Castaños in the countryside of Antioquia and Córdoba departments, building up their paramilitary army and gobbling up drug trafficking real estate.



Carlos Mario Aguilar, alias "Rogelio".

Towards the tail end of 1995 or early 1996, Memo was back in Colombia.

He was spotted in Medellín by Cruz Elena Aguilar, a former Colombian prosecutor and sister to one of the most feared enforcers in the Oficina de Envigado, Carlos Mario Aguilar, alias “Rogelio.”

“I heard my brother talking of a Memo Fantasma in 1995 or early 1996. I saw him once or twice around the same time, speaking to my brother,” she told us.

When shown the photos, she immediately said, “That’s Memo Fantasma.”

She added: “The only thing I know about him is that my brother had to collect a debt from him related to drug trafficking. Memo was kidnapped by him over this debt and was later released. He ended up becoming a friend of my brother.”

Three other sources who knew people in the paramilitaries and the Oficina de Envigado also told us of the relationship between Memo and Rogelio. Rogelio, it appears, had become Memo’s criminal godfather.

By this time Don Berna was running much of the Medellín underworld via the Oficina de Envigado. Rogelio was one of Don Berna’s most trusted lieutenants and at the heart of drug trafficking and the Medellín underworld. It may have been that Memo was acting as an independent drug trafficker without “protection.” The Oficina would routinely identify these traffickers and squeeze them. Nobody was allowed to operate in Medellín without paying their dues to Don Berna.

Memo Fantasma was now part of Medellín's drug trafficking elite, and sources place him not only with Rogelio, but even alongside Don Berna at several meetings. At just 24 years old, Memo was moving in the highest circles of the Colombian drug world.

It seemed that he needed to get his hands on product. He had the network and the smuggling route to the United States via Mexico. But he was having problems getting enough cocaine to feed his buyers. So he decided to set up his own laboratory in the rural area of Yarumal, a town several hours north of Medellín.

We returned to Héctor, the former paramilitary commander, who became a little less reticent once confronted with the identity and photo of Memo.

“The Yarumal story I heard from a guy who later joined the paramilitaries, who had been there and knew Memo,” he told us. “This must have been around about 1997. Memo had set up a laboratory in Yarumal and was churning out cocaine. At this time the paramilitaries under the Castaño brothers were expanding out of their stronghold of Urabá and arrived in Yarumal. It seems Memo was acting without the permission of the ACCU [the first paramilitary unit the Castaños set up was called the Peasant Self Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá - Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá - ACCU] in a territory that they claimed. Or Memo might have actually claimed he was protected by the Castaños when he was not. Either way, he was summoned.”



Carlos Castaño. Photo: Reuters.

Memo arrived to meet Carlos Castaño accompanied by Don Berna. He was given the option to pay for his “mistake” or to become part of the paramilitary franchise, thus officially gaining the protection of what was becoming one of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations in the country. Vicente Castaño, who handled the financial side of the business, introduced Memo to a powerful trafficker who had established himself in the municipality of

Caucasia, a certain Carlos Mario Jiménez, better known by his underworld alias “Macaco.” They were told by the Castaños to “conquer” the south of Bolívar province for the paramilitaries, long a stronghold of the Marxist rebels and home to hundreds of hectares of coca crops. Memo was to provide the money, Macaco the muscle. The Central Bolívar Bloc of the newly formed AUC was born soon after.

All of this was confirmed by José Germán Sena Pico, alias “Nico,” when he testified years later before the Justice and Peace tribunals set up as part of the paramilitary peace agreement.

“When it all started, the partner of Carlos Mario Jiménez [Macaco] was Sebastián Colmenares, alias Memo Fantasma. And when they were given the zone of southern Bolívar, more connections arose between Vicente Castaño and Sebastián Colmenares than with Carlos Mario Jiménez. So the links Memo oversaw were all to do with drug trafficking,” said Sena Pico.



Still of alias "Nico" testifying about Memo Fantasma.

The investigations into Memo's criminal career were moving swiftly, but we wanted something on the man himself. The company registration of ACEM S.A., which gave us Memo's identity card, also provided a wealth of other clues, including other investors. One of them, Catalina Mejía, whose Colombian ID card was also included in the company registration, turned out to be his wife or long-term partner.

While Memo had managed to wipe all traces of his personal life, his wife was from a prominent family in Medellín, which owned a big furniture business and was part of the city's social elite. Penetrating that circle was not hard, and soon we found a relative, whom we shall call "Olga," who could shed light on how the young Memo was not only intent on building up his business, but also looking to reinvent himself socially.

"It was clear he was of humble extraction but he always dressed well, usually in European suits," Olga said, delicately stirring a coffee at a cafe in Medellín's exclusive El Poblado district.

When confronted with the notion that Memo was a powerful drug trafficker known as The Ghost, Olga showed no surprise.

"He has plenty of money and is a very calculating man. I believe that he planned to find someone socially acceptable who could give him a leg up, introduce him to the right people and allow him to move freely among high society," she said.

The Ghost was now positioned at the highest levels of the drug trade and the social world in Medellín. His ambition was to go much further.

3

The Ghost and His Paramilitary Army



In 1997, the paramilitary army began its bloody campaign across Colombia, supposedly to fight the Marxist rebels, but really to take control of the cocaine trade. “Will the Ghost,” or “Memo Fantasma,” was funding the bloodshed and using it to strengthen his position at the top of the criminal table.

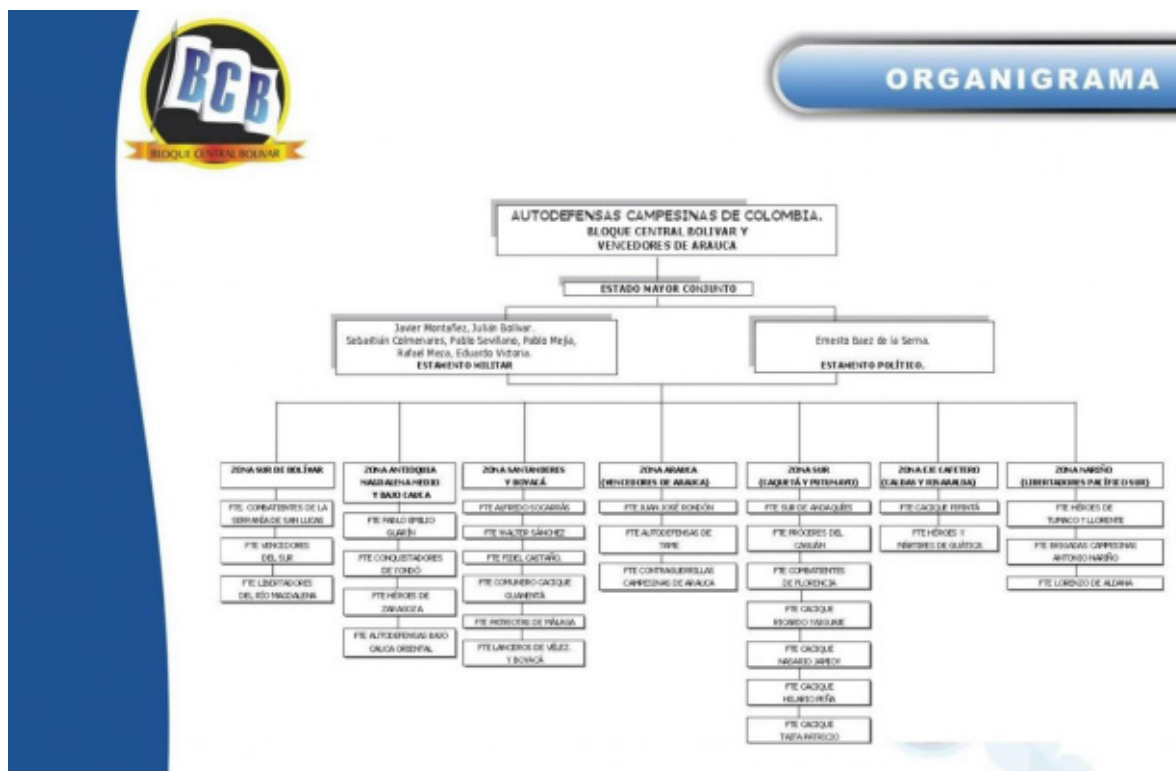
By then, the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC), headed by the Castaño brothers, were busy recruiting the private armies of drug traffickers across the country. Memo Fantasma had already been drawn into the ambit of the Castaños, being tasked by them, along with Carlos Mario Jiménez, alias “Macaco,” to take the guerrilla stronghold and coca-growing region in the south of Bolívar. In 1998, the Central Bolívar Bloc (Bloque Central Bolívar – BCB) was formed. It was to become one of the most powerful fighting divisions of the paramilitary army, with a presence in the departments of Antioquia, Arauca, Bolívar, Caquetá, Caldas, Córdoba, Nariño, Putumayo, Risaralda and Santander.

“Memo Fantasma was actually a leader, or the leader, of the Central Bolivar Bloc, which was responsible for the slaughter of anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 people,” said Peter Vincent, who as judicial attaché at the US Embassy between 2006 and 2009 in Bogotá, had all the files on the AUC and their drug trafficking activities spread across his desk. “It carried out its grotesque narco-trafficking and terrorist activities in Colombia. Not only was the AUC more powerful than either the Medellín or Cali cartels, it was engaging in massive amounts of narco-trafficking and frankly, crimes against humanity and genocide, in a targeted effort to completely remove any threats to their domination of the narco trade.”



In 2001, such was the bloodshed unleashed by the AUC, and such was its control of the drug trade, that it was put on the US list of terrorist organizations.

Command Structure of the Central Bolivar Bloc



Memo Rises to Power in the Central Bolivar Bloc

The division of labor in the BCB was clear. Macaco ran the military end of operations, Memo the money and drug trafficking. In an organizational chart that the BCB published in 2005 on their now dismantled website, Memo Fantasma appeared again under his paramilitary alias, “Sebastián Colmenares.” The chart revealed the territorial reach and military organization of a criminal structure that had control over much of the most important drug trafficking real estate in Colombia.

While Macaco, with his two top military lieutenants, Rodrigo Pérez, alias “Julián Bolívar,” and Héctor Edilson Duque, alias “Monoteto,” were conquering new territory for the paramilitaries and selecting areas where drug crops proliferated, Memo was turning the cocaine into the millions of dollars needed to keep the war machine fed and the paramilitary warlords satiated.

It is hard to underestimate the brutality of the paramilitaries. Covering the BCB takeover of the oil refining city of Barrancabermeja in 2001 was a [lesson in ruthlessness](#). The city was a stronghold of the Marxist National Liberation Army (Ejército Nacional de Liberación – ELN). Led by alias “Julián Bolívar,” whom I interviewed at the time, the paramilitaries offered any guerrilla who wanted to switch sides a job and a reward for every one of their former comrades they identified. One former ELN guerrilla identified more than 12 members of his network, earning himself almost \$20,000, a fortune to a man who lived on less than \$200 a month. The ELN guerrillas and collaborators were then assassinated on the streets of the city, at a rate of up to 10 a day during February 2001. This is what Memo Fantasma was funding and promoting.

Testimony given by José Germán Sena Pico, alias “Nico,” to the Justice and Peace courts, set up as part of the peace agreement between the paramilitaries and the government, stated that Macaco and Memo had produced at least 100 tons of cocaine between 1997 and 2001. Just to give an idea of the value of these quantities, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that in 2000, a kilogram of cocaine in the United States was worth \$29,580 wholesale. That would mean that Macaco and Memo, if they moved their 100 tons to the United States, could have earned anything up to \$2.9 billion.

However, the BCB continued expanding after 2001, taking more territory where drug crops were present. It would have been surprising if Memo and Macaco did not produce at least the same amount of drugs again between 2002 and the paramilitary demobilization in 2006.



Paramilitary fighters of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, or AUC, cheer and wave their guns during a demobilization ceremony Dec. 10, 2004. Photo: AP.

Macaco was extradited to the United States in 2008 to answer charges of trafficking thousands of kilograms of cocaine via Central America and Mexico into the United States while running his paramilitary army. He “exported cocaine from Colombia using helicopters and go-fast boats,” read his indictment. Also mentioned in the indictment was Memo’s first mentor, Fabio Ochoa Vasco, and Francisco Cifuentes Villa, alias “Pacho Cifuentes,” who plays a part in Memo’s story later on. Yet it was Memo Fantasma that really handled that side of the business. Macaco was the visible partner, Memo the invisible.

Looking to get more details on the relationship between Macaco and Memo in the BCB, we found Carlos Fernando Mateus, alias “Paquita.” Paquita was a mid-ranking commander in the BCB operating in the department of Caquetá.



Carlos Fernando Mateus, alias "Paquita". Photo: Colombian National Police.

Paquita first saw Memo in 2001. He confirmed that the photos we had were of the man he knew first as Memo Fantasma, and then under his paramilitary alias of Sebastián Colmenares.

The BCB were having a summit in one of Macaco's favorite properties in the village of Piamonte, in the municipality of Cáceres in Antioquia, north of Medellín. "He arrived in a helicopter with other BCB leaders. A young guy, informally dressed. I did not know who he was, but he was greeted with respect by Macaco and my immediate boss Monoteto [Héctor Edilson Duque]," said Paquita.

"I asked Monoteto who he was. He replied that he was the guy who signed off on everything."

When asked where he saw Memo Fantasma in the BCB pecking order, he placed Memo Fantasma right at the top.

"From my point of view, I saw him as a little above Macaco."

With Paquita's testimony, it was time to go back to Héctor, the paramilitary source who was terrified of Memo and still refused to go on the record. He confirmed almost everything Paquita had said, although he put Macaco and Memo as equal partners, one military, the other money.

"I saw Memo at a big summit of AUC leaders in 2000. It was held by the Castaños at one of their properties known as Finca 21, between Antioquia and Córdoba, on the road to San Pedro de Urabá. He was there with the BCB contingent. This was soon after Memo had promoted the setting up of BCB in Nariño, with what they called "Liberators of the South Front" (Frente Libertadores del Sur.) This was apparently Memo's project and he ran the drugs that came out of there, one of the principal cocaine-producing parts of the country, even today."

This was confirmed during Nico's Justice and Peace testimony on August 25, 2015: "When Nariño was taken, the boss of Nariño was Memo Fantasma ... From 1999 Memo Fantasma was responsible for Nariño."

Yet in the end it was Guillermo Pérez, alias "Pablo Sevillano," who was to answer to law enforcement for all the drug trafficking activity that the BCB ran out of Nariño. Sevillano was the visible commander, Memo remained in the shadows directing the business.

"Memo put Pablo Sevillano to run the operations there," Héctor said. "Sevillano ended up getting extradited to the United States to face drug trafficking charges, but it was Memo's op. He set it up, he bought the weapons, he sold the drugs. He used Sevillano and left him out to dry."

We asked Héctor why he thought Memo signed the BCB documents and appeared on the organizational chart if he never planned to surrender?

"I think Memo was keeping his options open. Sebastián Colmenares was Memo's Plan B, in case he was threatened with arrest and needed to use the paramilitary amnesty. But he never appeared in public at any of the AUC demobilizations. He was very careful."

Memo Under No Pressure to Demobilize

Memo never felt threatened and so never demobilized with the rest of the paramilitary army even though multiple sources, including Nico, put him in and out of Santa Fe de Ralito in Córdoba, where the negotiations with the government were conducted. Various sources stated that he owned lots of properties in and around Córdoba and presented himself as a cattle farmer.

It seems the order Macaco gave to BCB paramilitaries that testified to the Justice and Peace courts after 2006 was to avoid mentioning Memo Fantasma or Sebastián Colmenares altogether.

We asked Héctor why all the BCB high command would want to give Memo a pass, even after they were extradited to the United States to face charges of drug trafficking operations that Memo directed?

"There are two reasons I can think of. The first is that he ran all the BCB finances and was looking after a lot of their money. They were not going to risk losing that. The second is that he was known as a vicious little shit and was a friend of Rogelio's [real name Carlos Mario Aguilar] of the Oficina de Envigado, who ran the Medellín sicario [hitman] networks and who had several policemen on his payroll, including General Mauricio Santoyo."

General Santoyo, who is mentioned and thanked in President Alvaro Uribe's autobiography, "No Lost Causes" ("No hay causa perdida"), was one of the stars of the police force and head of President Uribe's security detail. His relationship with

Rogelio is [well-documented](#) and was confirmed to us by Rogelio's sister, Cruz Elena Aguilar.

Indeed, it was Rogelio's testimony to US authorities that led Santoyo to plead guilty to charges of working with the paramilitaries after being extradited to the United States in 2012. Having a top policeman on the payroll showed the power of the Oficina de Envigado, the successor to the Medellín Cartel, that Rogelio ran under the orders of Diego Murillo, alias "Don Berna." And the Oficina was Memo's criminal home, perhaps even more so than the paramilitaries.

The close relationship between Memo and Rogelio was confirmed again by Nico during his Justice and Peace testimony:

"Another person who respected Memo was Rogelio, the head of the Oficina de Envigado, Don Berna's second, who turned himself in to the United States. I was in various meetings in which he and Rogelio were together."

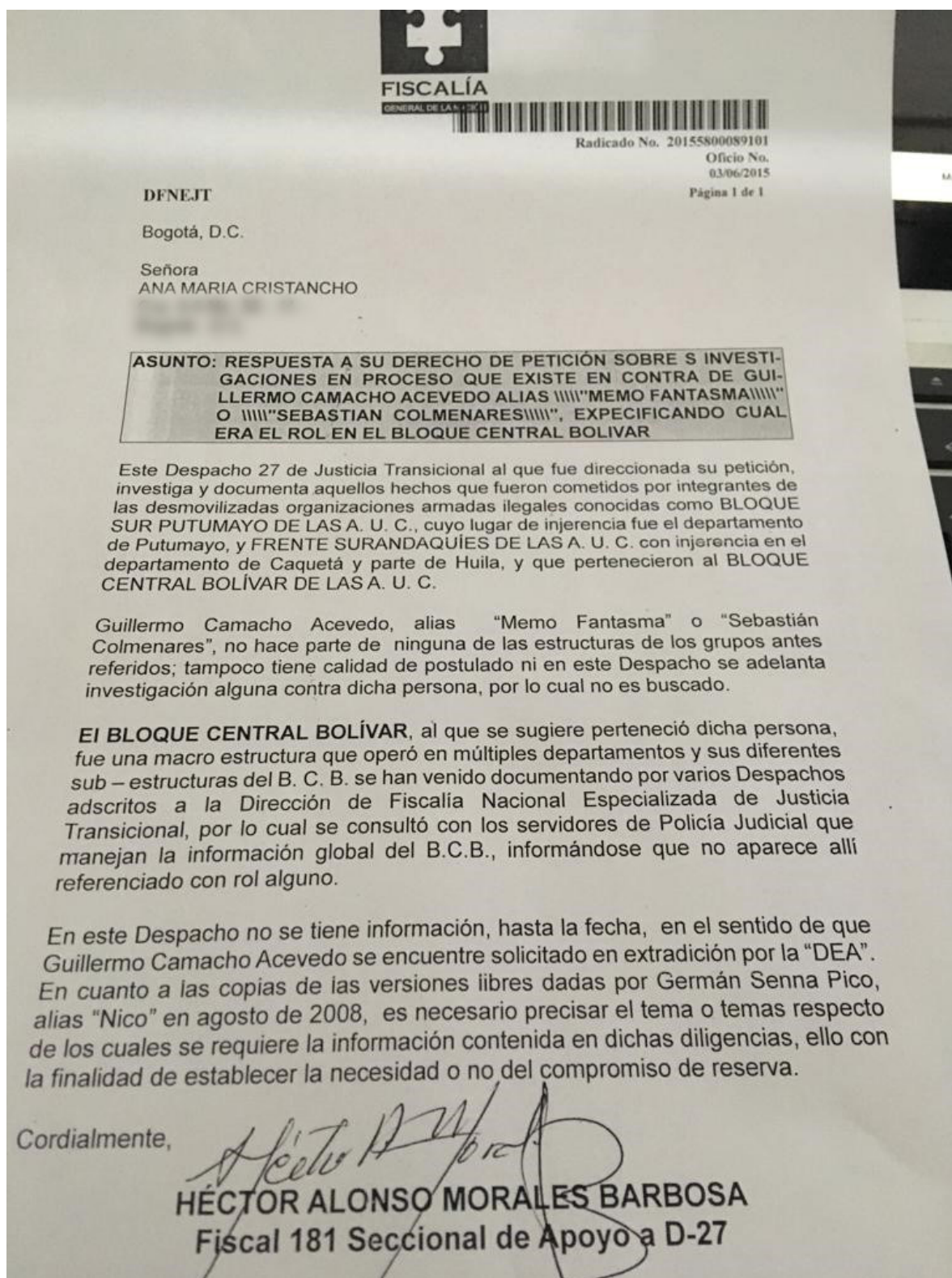
Poring over hours of testimony to the Justice and Peace courts finally turned up a nugget of gold. Buried deep in the thousands of pages under review were declarations by Pablo Sevillano, who worked for Memo in Nariño and was extradited to the United States for drug trafficking. He was questioned repeatedly about Memo Fantasma. Memo is short for William, which is also Sevillano's real name (Guillermo Pérez) and so he was accused of being Memo Fantasma. He denied it and while he admitted he had heard of Memo Fantasma, he denied that he had been linked to the Liberators of the South Front that controlled Nariño.

"Really, I did not know him And I totally deny that he was part of The Liberators of the South Bloc," said Nico.

But under repeated questioning by Judge Uldi Teresa Jiménez, on September 9, 2015, he again denied being Memo Fantasma and offered up a name.

"Look Madam Judge, about Mr. Memo Fantasma, he is called Guillermo Acevedo," revealed Nico.

Yet for some reason, this name was never investigated further and Memo Fantasma remained registered under the false name of Guillermo Camacho. When we made an official request to the Justice and Peace system about Memo Fantasma and Sebastián Colmenares, only the name Guillermo Camacho came back. Somehow Memo's real name was never entered into the records. Was that simply bad luck? Or did Memo manage to get to someone? Memo was extremely surprised when we later told him we had found his name in testimony given to the Justice and Peace Tribunals, created to oversee the legal side of the paramilitary demobilization process.



By the end of 2006, the paramilitary AUC had demobilized more than 30,000 fighters. The single most powerful component was the Central Bolívar Bloc, which saw 7,067 fighters hand over their weapons.

The paramilitary high command was in prison. The Castaño brothers were dead. The paramilitary era was over. Memo was still in play, still handling BCB money and assets, still moving drugs. Not only was he totally in the clear, but Macaco and Pablo Sevillano were blamed for all his drug trafficking activity.

With the paramilitary peace agreement, Sebastián Colmenares disappeared, never to be heard from again. After tens of thousands of deaths, hundreds of tons of cocaine, and hundreds of millions of dollars, one of the top leaders of the most powerful AUC fighting divisions simply walked away. He never contributed to the Truth Commission as it sought to piece together the history of the bloodiest chapter in Colombia's civil conflict, never offered the victims any compensation. Colmenares simply disappeared as if he had never existed.

Memo Fantasma, however, was still very much alive, and richer than ever.

4

The Ghost Loses Drug Trafficking Partners



After the demobilization of the AUC in 2006, the paramilitary high command was behind bars. All except alias “Sebastián Colmenares” and his alter ego, “Memo Fantasma,” who was still moving huge consignments of drugs via Mexico.

The demobilization of the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* – AUC) did little to halt the flow of cocaine from Colombia. A significant portion of the paramilitaries did not surrender and simply returned to their old ways, setting up a new generation of drug trafficking organizations authorities called the *BACRIM* (from the Spanish “bandas criminales,” or criminal gangs).

Memo (real name Guillermo León Acevedo Giraldo) was still working with his principal paramilitary partner, Carlos Mario Jiménez, alias “Macaco,” even though the latter was in prison. According to Macaco’s US indictment, “between March 6 and September 25 of 2007, the defendant did with knowledge and intent ... distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine.” This was almost certainly Memo’s work.

Carlos Fernando Mateus, alias “Paquita,” a middle-ranking commander of the AUC’s Central Bolívar Bloc (*Bloque Central Bolívar* – BCB), which Macaco and Memo had headed, briefly shared a cell with Macaco in 2007. He saw Memo visit Macaco in prison. Afterwards, when questioned about Memo, Macaco stated, “He has left me with just the bones and taken all the meat,” but refused to be drawn further.

Memo's drug trafficking operations seemed intact, even with the paramilitaries officially out of the picture. He still had his routes via Mexico, apparently run out of Medellín's smaller airport, Olaya Herrera, in the heart of the city. Many of our sources spoke of Memo's plane and helicopter company, called Aviel, operating out of a hangar at Olaya Herrera. "Zara," the scorned lover, and "Héctor," the former paramilitary, confirmed Memo had operations out of Olaya Herrera and worked with Francisco "Pacho" Cifuentes.

The Cifuentes criminal clan was a powerful force on the Medellín drug trafficking scene. It had pioneered air routes into Mexico via Central America, first with the Medellín Cartel and then later working with the paramilitaries and the Oficina de Envigado, under Diego Murillo, alias "Don Berna."



Carlos Mario Jiménez, alias "Macaco," Memo's partner and the visible head of the Bloque Central Bolívar of the AUC, sat alongside Diego Murillo, alias "Don Berna," another paramilitary warlord and head of the Oficina de Envigado, the successor of the Medellín Cartel. Photo: AP.

The clan was headed by Pacho Cifuentes and supported by his siblings, among them Jorge (extradited to the United States in 2013), Hildebrando Alexander (extradited in 2014) and Dolly (extradited in 2012). Dolly was married to the brother of President Álvaro Uribe. This was a drug trafficking organization that had top-level political contacts and worked directly with Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel, which after the demobilization of the paramilitaries, began its rise as one of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations in the Americas.

Indeed, Jorge Cifuentes would later [testify](#) at the US trial of Sinaloa Cartel boss Joaquin Guzmán Loera, alias "El Chapo," in 2019.



Hildebrando Alexander Cifuentes (middle) with Joaquín Guzmán Loera, alias "El Chapo".

While many of Memo's allies were in prison, they were still operating from behind bars. Still at liberty were key partners like Pacho Cifuentes and Memo's criminal godfather, Carlos Mario Aguilar, alias "Rogelio," who was now running the Oficina de Envigado with Don Berna in prison. Memo was as powerful and prolific as ever, moving multi-ton shipments of cocaine.

Yet his extraordinary run of luck was about to come to an end.

In April 2007, Pacho Cifuentes was [assassinated](#) in Caucasia, a

town north of Medellín in the department of Antioquia, where Memo also had a lot of properties. While Jorge Cifuentes was to take over the criminal clan, Memo did not have a close relationship with him.

- In November 2007, Mexico registered one of its biggest seizures in history, [26 tons](#) of cocaine found on a cargo container ship that had left the Colombian port of Buenaventura and arrived at the Mexican port of Manzanillo. Sources told InSight Crime that Memo had invested in this shipment via his partners in Mexico, [Nelson Tarazona](#), a Colombian working for the Sinaloa Cartel, and the Mexican Nava Valencia brothers, Oscar, alias "[El Lobo](#)," and Juan Carlos, alias "[El Tigre](#)," who headed the Milenio Cartel, an affiliate of the Sinaloa Cartel federation.
- In May 2008, 14 of the top paramilitary commanders were extradited to the United States to face drug trafficking charges. Among them was Macaco, Don Berna and Guillermo Pérez, alias "[Pablo Sevillano](#)," once Memo's lieutenant in his drug trafficking operations in the Pacific department of Nariño. Suddenly, Memo had lost much of his protection and became utterly reliant on Rogelio and the Oficina de Envigado.
- And in July 2008, Rogelio [turned himself](#) in to US authorities.

Memo was now alone in a rapidly changing drug world. He was very exposed and vulnerable, sitting on a fortune as a new generation of drug traffickers was establishing itself and preying on its predecessors.

Memo Finds Himself Isolated

We had found a new source who, like Memo, had worked with paramilitaries but operated mainly out of the Oficina de Envigado. He refused to be named due to ongoing legal problems. We will call him "Ernesto." He clearly hated Memo and further investigations among elements of the Oficina de Envigado uncovered that Ernesto and Memo were fierce rivals and had some "bad blood" between them.

Ernesto insisted that at this time, Memo began to wipe traces and contacts in the underworld that might lead to him, even going as far as murder.

“In 1998, he founded the Central Bolívar Bloc with Macaco until 2006 when Macaco was captured, but he continued in the business,” he told us. “For that reason, he killed his workers to keep them quiet. He has many police in his pockets and has a Doctor [a term in Colombia used to refer to a high-status professional such as a lawyer] who manages his politicians.”

Zara also suggested that Memo had some Colombian policemen on his payroll and used them to disappear some judicial files and divert investigations that might implicate him. She mentioned two names, Carlos Meza and Roque García.

These two turned out to be infamous in police circles. Former police colonels Carlos Meza Carrillo and Roque García Pedriza were known as [star undercover operatives](#) that infiltrated the Medellín underworld. They worked under former police general [Mauricio Alfonso Santoyo](#), who was later extradited to the United States. One of the general's closest contacts was alias “Rogelio,” Memo's political godfather and leader of the Oficina de Envigado. It seems when Rogelio turned himself in to US authorities, he gave up General Santoyo, among others.

Meza and García [were linked](#) to the Cifuentes criminal clan, Memo's allies, and known for protecting drug traffickers. Both ended up serving jail sentences in the United States, but not before, it seems, they were able to wipe away the criminal trails with the Colombian police force leading to Memo.

It also seemed that Memo bought himself some political protection.

Zara named Mario Uribe, to whom Memo allegedly lent a helicopter during his campaigning and provided funding. Mario Uribe, the cousin of President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010), was elected senator in 2006 and was later sentenced to more than [seven years in prison](#) for taking money from and working alongside the paramilitaries. Mario Uribe was known to be very close to his presidential cousin.



Mario Uribe Escobar.

It seems that Memo had protected himself as much as possible from prosecution in Colombia. But the United States was a very different matter, and with the extradition of his paramilitary partners and Rogelio, he had to assume that he was now on the radar of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

The Ghost: a US Informant?

It was likely that all of the extradited paramilitary commanders knew of Memo's drug trafficking activities. Rogelio turned himself in to US authorities soon after the mass AUC extraditions and cut himself a deal, giving up his partners and much of the structure of the [Oficina de Envigado](#).

Memo had to assume that those now in US custody would talk about him. There are indications that he might have cut a deal for himself, maybe at the same time as Rogelio.

What we know is that there was an open case file on Memo in the United States. We have the name of a prosecutor who was looking into him and the name of a possible DEA case officer. Requests for comment were not answered and another US source stated that the files had been sealed and were classified.

Héctor is convinced that Memo made a deal with US authorities.

"Many people think he became a DEA informant and sold out all the BCB to stay out of prison," Héctor said. "It was Sevillano and Macaco that took the rap for all of the BCB drug trafficking activity, when really it was all run by Memo. From what I hear, now that Macaco is back in Colombia [Macaco left the United States in July 2019 after completing his sentence and was [arrested](#) when he arrived in Colombia], Macaco is convinced Memo sold him out."

Zara also believes that Memo made a deal with the United States because after 2008, "he closed his office in Medellín, and he did not do a single drug deal because, according to some American law, he had five years to clear his name."

Bonnie Klapper, a former assistant US attorney who specialized in drug prosecutions and is now a noted defense attorney, has seen both sides of the US justice system and its interactions with the drug world and its informers. While she had no specific knowledge of Guillermo Acevedo or Memo Fantasma and she thinks no formal indictment against Acevedo exists, he could have worked as an informant and therefore received lenient treatment.

Asked how tolerant US agencies would be to criminal activity by a source, she replied: "Quite tolerant, so long as the source is working at the agency's direction."

Asked if it is usual for a drug trafficker to get a complete pass, Klapper replied, "not very common, but not unheard of. I have represented two individuals in the past eight years who were given a pass. However, neither had a high profile nor was there any violence. They weren't given a pass because their cooperation was so great -- though it was excellent -- but simply because the agents were not interested in pursuing the case -- not big enough, conduct was old, etc. -- or the informants just slipped through the cracks and the statute ran out."

Whatever the truth, Memo Fantasma departed Medellín after 2008 and left behind him the paramilitary alias of Sebastián Colmenares. He had no arrest warrants pending, neither then, nor now. The Ghost simply vanished and took his millions with him.

5

Tracking the Ghost: Follow the Money



“The Ghost” had fled Medellín, tied off loose ends in the underworld and perhaps suspended his drug trafficking activities. He disappeared with millions of dollars. That kind of money is hard to hide.

We found out who Memo Fantasma was via a company ID card. The card said his real name was Guillermo León Acevedo Giraldo, of Inversiones ACEM S.A., which engaged in property development. It was a familiar tale: construction has long been a favorite tool for money laundering. And Memo had made millions of dollars as a top paramilitary drug trafficker. He had to have stashed that money somewhere, so in order to find the Ghost, we decided to try to follow its trail, starting with this card.

There used to be a well-established path for drug traffickers and their money. First, they simply spent it. Soon it began to attract attention. Then, they started to launder it, creating companies through which the money could pass, before being able to spend it again.

These companies were usually put under the names of family members or close friends or relatives, until there were no more trusted third parties. Then, they got more sophisticated -- going international, creating a labyrinth of different companies, which opened and closed, across different financial and legal jurisdictions. The tactics made money well-nigh impossible to track except for those with specialist forensic accounting skills.

The longer drug traffickers are in business, the more money they earn and the more sophisticated their laundering operation becomes. Still, there are always traces, even with the best of them. By 2008, while still only 37, Memo had been in the drug business for almost two decades and had seen hundreds of millions of dollars pass through his hands and those of his paramilitary partners. Surely, he too had left a trace somewhere.

Memo's Investments in Colombia

The first company we could find for Memo was set up on February 1, 1994. It was just after the death of Pablo Escobar and after Memo had stolen the load of cocaine that kick-started his criminal career. It was in his real name, the one we had found on that company ID, Guillermo León Acevedo Giraldo, and it was registered to an address in Envigado, the home of the Medellín Cartel. Memo was just 22 years old. It remained open until 2004, at which point Memo was moving tons of cocaine as part of the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia ([Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC](#)).

“Zara,” the scorned lover, gave us the name of a man she insisted was Memo’s principal accountant, Gabriel Tapias Restrepo. We found his name linked to several companies in Córdoba, where Memo was known to have properties, most linked to ranching activity and a rice production company. Several sources had spoken of Memo having huge ranching properties around the municipality of Buenavista in Córdoba.

“Once we went to his farm in Buenavista, we came via the airport in Caucasia, because he had a plane,” stated José Germán Sena Pico, alias “Nico,” who had worked with Memo in the Central Bolívar Bloc (Bloque Central Bolívar - BCB), a faction of the AUC umbrella network.

We searched through the partners and workers associated with the company ACEM. Many were members of Memo’s extended family. These included his daughter, mother and grandmother, mother-in-law and several cousins. Putting these names into the company databases in different chambers of Commerce, we found 12 more companies in Colombia linked to these or other relatives, with assets in the tens of millions of dollars. It seemed we had found a network of relatives in different businesses who could be acting as fronts, or “testaferros.”

Also in Medellín we found Guillermo Acevedo’s name on a company called Palome S.A.S., registered alongside a Leydi Daihana Villa.

Alias “Ernesto,” a rival Medellín drug trafficker who appeared to hate Memo, stated that many of Memo’s properties and companies were in the name of ex-wives and girlfriends, who managed much of his money laundering activities. According to Zara, Memo had at least five children with different partners, two with his current wife.

However, without the names of his former lovers and children (we heard one was called Sebastián, perhaps the inspiration for his paramilitary alias “Sebastián Colmenares”). However, if we had found more than a dozen companies fronted by relatives which were worth millions of dollars, how many more existed under the names of these former lovers and their children?

It was clear that Memo was not only using land and cattle to launder his money, but seeking to reinvent himself as a rancher and landed gentry, distancing himself from his early life growing up poor in Medellín. This also coincided with his latest choice of partner, his current wife Catalina Mejía, who came from a high-class family in Medellín.

There were some companies that weren't principally money laundering opportunities, but more linked directly to his business of smuggling drugs. Multiple sources had spoken of Memo's aviation company based out of Medellín's domestic airport, Olaya Herrera. Indeed, it was explicitly mentioned during testimony given by Nico to the Colombian Justice and Peace Tribunals, created to oversee the legal side of the paramilitary demobilization.

“The things that he [Memo Fantasma] managed were very big scale. He used to have a hangar in the airport of Olaya Herrera,” testified Nico.

A couple of sources had mentioned the names “Aviel” and “SASA.” Sure enough, we found a company, had been set up in 1999, just as Memo's criminal career was beginning to take off, while there was another company, Sociedad Aeronautica De Santander S.A.

The name Guillermo Acevedo did not appear on either company papers, but Memo's criminal ally, Francisco “Pacho” Cifuentes, was listed as one of the partners in Aviel, further strengthening the evidence of a [partnership](#) between the two men and the existence of a drug trafficking route leaving the airport in Medellín and bound for Mexico.

Memo's principal company, ACEM, had been set up in 2007 in Bogotá. This seemed like the best place to start if tracking Memo's whereabouts. “Olga,” a member of the social circle of Memo's in-laws whom we have spoken to before, gave us another reason to start looking for The Ghost in the Colombian capital.

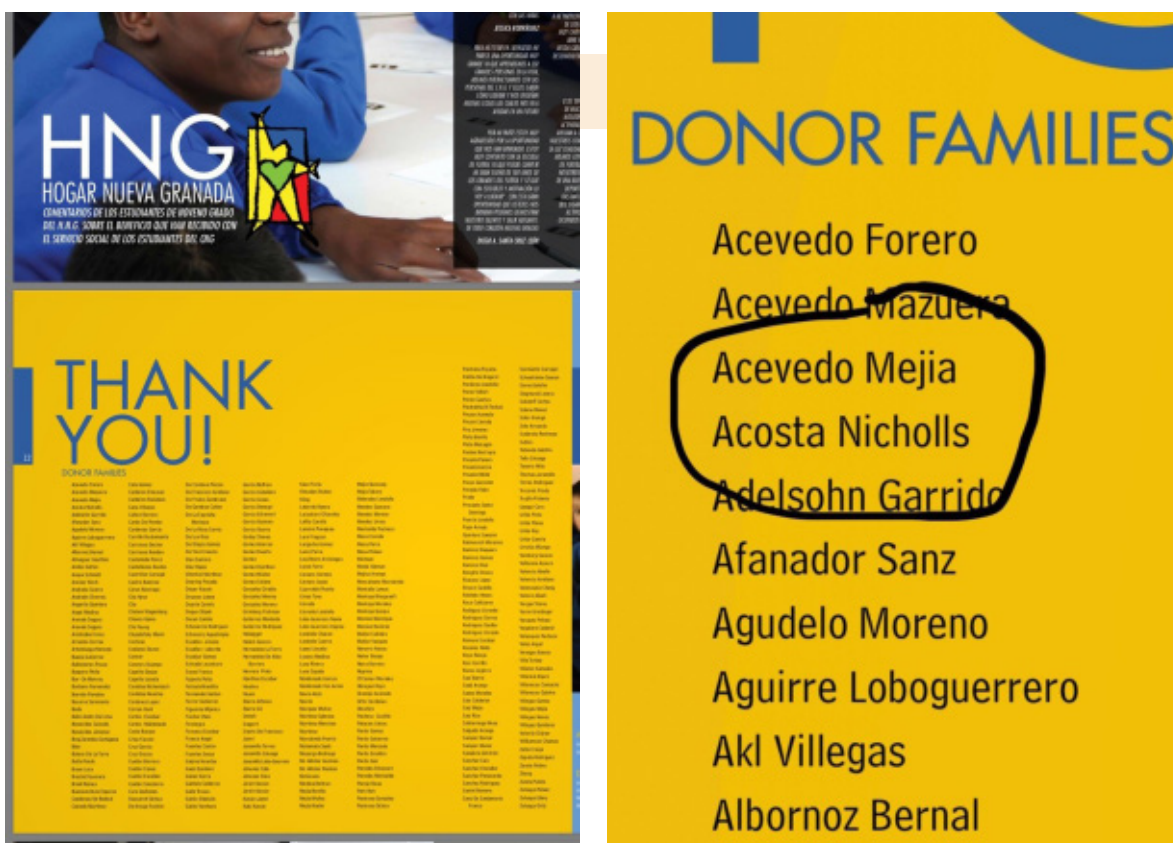
“They moved to Bogotá. We heard that when one of the family members boasted that Memo and Catalina had got their two daughters into the Nueva Granada school, thanks to a recommendation from Marta Lucía Ramírez,” Olga revealed.

This was a heart-stopping moment. I asked whether this Marta Lucía Ramírez was the former defense minister, the former presidential candidate for the Conservative Party and the current vice president of Colombia.

“Yep, that's the one,” said Olga, nodding vigorously.

I now have to engage in full disclosure. I have known Marta Lucía Ramírez for many years, and been invited by her to Club El Nogal, Bogotá's elite social club, on a couple of occasions. I have always admired the role she played at the top levels of the political world, in a country where there has still not been a female president.

Nueva Granada is one of Bogotá's most exclusive schools. There is a long line of parents hoping to get their children accepted. That Memo Fantasma, a Medellín drug trafficker, had managed to get his children in did speak to some kind of influence peddling, or "palanca," as it is called in Colombia. And Marta Lucía Ramírez has that kind of pull. While the school would not give out information on students or their parents, they do publish the list of donors.



One Step Closer to the Ghost

Once in Bogotá, the next step was to visit the office registered for ACEM, at Carrera 14 N° 85-68. Arriving at the building and mentioning the name Guillermo Acevedo, I was stunned to be let through by security. In the lift up to the fourth floor, in quiet panic, I thought about how I would handle actually meeting Memo Fantasma.

The door was answered by a secretary who introduced herself as Jimena. I pretended I had a meeting with Mr. Acevedo and acted surprised to find he was not in the office, which was very small, with a couple of work stations then a big desk and meeting area at the back.

"Where is Señor Acevedo?"

"I don't know,"

"When are you expecting him back in the office?"

"I don't know,"

"Can you give me a contact number for him?"

"No, but if you give me a name and number, I can give him your details," she said.

"I don't think so."

Jimena did not blink when I refused to hand over my details, simply nodding. This was clearly no normal office, no normal business, with no normal way of interacting. It seemed that Guillermo Acevedo was almost invisible even to his own secretary, or that she had orders to never give out contact details or whereabouts. This sounded like our Ghost.

Also registered at this address was another company, Inversiones El Cipre SA. Three of the people listed with ACEM also appeared as being employed by Inversiones El Cipre, although in different roles. Guillermo Acevedo had no direct link to this company, but it was another property development company with ambitious projects around the Colombian capital.

We found Memo's fingerprints, but no direct links to two massive development projects in Bogotá, one near Parque 93, the city's most exclusive restaurant district, and another at the corner of Calle 100 with Seventh Avenue, the capital's main drag. Both of these properties offered the capacity to launder tens of millions of dollars.

Following the names of Memo's extended family, we came to a series of properties in one of Bogotá's most expensive neighborhoods. Using his mother's and grandmother's names, Margoth de Jesús Giraldo Ramírez and María Enriqueta Ramírez, Memo had acquired a series of lots on one city block, Calle 85 with Carrera 14.


He legally had power of attorney for both women, allowing him to act freely in their names. Today, on this block, stands the luxury development known as Torre 85, offering the swankiest office space in the city. Such a development would have cost tens of millions of dollars to build and made tens of millions more in profit.

How had Memo turned the lots he bought into this enormous building? Some further digging led us to the company that had managed the Torre 85 development and construction: Hitos Urbanos Limitada (company ID or NIT: 83012661-5). The shareholders of Hitos Urbanos were Marta Lucía Ramírez, Colombia's current vice president, her husband Álvaro Rincón and their daughter.

Rincón still runs Hitos Urbanos and was happy to answer questions. He admitted to working with Guillermo Acevedo in the development of the Torre 85 project.

1

NV 60201533



ESCRITURA PÚBLICA NÚMERO: 3.549
TRES MIL QUINIENTOS CUARENTA Y NUEVE

OTORGADA EN LA NOTARIA VEINTICUATRO
(24) DEL CIRCULO DE BOGOTA D.C.

FECHA DE OTORGAMIENTO: CATORCE (14)
DE MAYO DEL AÑO DOS MIL OCHO (2008).

MATRICULA(S) INMOBILIARIA(S) NÚMERO(S): 50C-1663430.

UBICACION DEL PREDIO: LOTE DE TERRENO UBICADO EN LA CARRERA
CATORCE (14) NÚMEROS OCHENTA Y CINCO - TREINTA Y SEIS /
CUARENTA Y SEIS / CINCUENTA Y DOS / SESENTA / SESENTA Y OCHO /
SETENTA Y SEIS (85 - 36 / 46 / 52 / 60 / 68 / 76) DE LA CIUDAD DE BOGOTA
D.C. DEPARTAMENTO DE CUNDINAMARCA.

NATURALEZA JURIDICA DEL ACTO

CODIGO	ESPECIFICACION	VALOR DEL ACTO
	MODIFICACIÓN FIDEICOMISO ✓	

PERSONAS QUE INTERVIENEN EN EL CONTRATO:

INVERSIONES EL CIPRES COLOMBIA S.A.	NIT. 811.032.449-2. ✓
MARGOTH DE JESUS GIRALDO RAMÍREZ	C.C.No. 32.542.433. ✓
MARÍA ENRIQUETA (JARIER) RAMÍREZ VIUDA DE GIRALDO	C.C.No. 22.126.509. ✓
GUILLERMO LEÓN ACEVEDO GIRALDO	C.C.No. 98.556.621.
HITOS URBANOS S.A. (antes LTDA)	NIT. 830.126.461-5. ✓
CARLOS ALBERTO GUTIERREZ ROBAYO	C.C.No. 11.348.704. ✓
GUILLERMO LEON ACEVEDO GIRALDO	C.C.No. 98.556.621.

FIDUCIARIA:

FIDUCIARIA LA PREVISORA S.A. -

FIDUPREVISORA S.A.

En la ciudad de Bogotá, Distrito Capital, Departamento de Cundinamarca,
República de Colombia, a los Catorce (14) días - - - - -
del mes de MAYO - - - - - de dos mil ocho (2008), ante mí

ESTE PAPEL NO TIENE COSTO ALGUNO PARA EL USUARIO

NOTARIA VEINTICUATRO
DE BOGOTÁ D.C.

“I just worked with him on this one project. He came to our office and was presented as a rancher looking to move into the real estate business.” Rincón stated. “He was not a partner, he delivered the properties and in return received some money and some of the offices when the project was completed.”

The properties, a series of small houses, were all acquired by Memo in different names. They were later lumped together as part of the development deal that became Torre 85. We found all the documents pertaining to the agreement, some of which were forwarded by Rincón. There was one which put all of the lots into one fund, a normal step before development begins. In this document, Memo, his mother, his grandmother, the company El Cipres and Hitos Urbanos all appear together.

In return for handing over the properties, Memo ended up with at least five offices in the building, along with 45 parking spaces. The properties were delivered in part to Inversiones El Cipre SA, proving that Memo has links to this company as well, although his name appears nowhere on the official paperwork. These offices with their parking spaces, once completed, were worth tens of millions of dollars. These were “clean” dollars, made with a company linked to one of the most powerful women in Colombia. Again, Memo had showed his intelligence, cleaning his money, entering the real estate and property business allied with Bogotá’s elite, while getting his children into the capital’s most exclusive school. In a matter of a few years, Memo had turned “Sebastián Colmenares,” a paramilitary drug trafficker, into a respected and socially acceptable property developer moving in elite circles.



As well as following the money property trail, we sought to discover Memo’s digital footprint. We asked a friend, with a company that specializes in tracking on-line presence, to look into Guillermo Acevedo and his family. He scoured the Internet for any mentions. He came up with a couple of legal business registrations we had already found, but there was nothing on Memo and his wife Catalina. Absolutely nothing. For one of Memo’s daughters, the search turned up an Instagram

page, with the photo only in silhouette, and two other mentions from when she participated in high-level show jumping and had to register under her real name.

“There is no way in today’s world that you have no digital footprint unless you live in a cave somewhere,” our expert said. “For Guillermo Acevedo, there was nothing, not even a picture where he had been tagged by a friend. This is not chance, a professional has wiped their digital footprints and implemented extreme digital security measures.”

But alias “Olga” was not yet done talking about Memo’s movements.

“He is no longer in Bogotá, he now lives in Madrid.”

Yet again, Olga's information was accurate. A search of company databases in Madrid, and speaking to contacts in the Spanish authorities, came back with several results for Guillermo León Acevedo Giraldo. These included two companies, one based in Madrid, Prime Desarrollos Urbanísticos, the other, Promensula Desarrollos SL, operating in Seville. It seems Memo was now in the international property development business and had begun with an investment of more than five million euros.

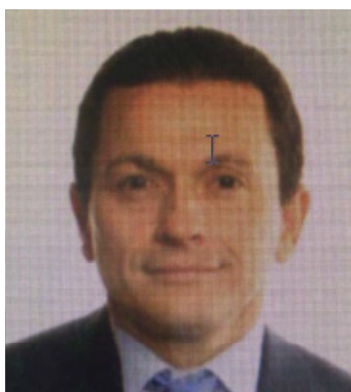
PRIME DESARROLLOS URBANISTICOS S.L. (España)

Información de la compañía			
CIF	B87487070	Sector	INMOBILIARIAS Y SIMILARES
Antigüedad	3 años (04/02/2016)	Nº de empleados	-
Domicilio	C/ Zurbano 34 3º 28010 - Madrid	Cargos directivos - Administrador Único	ACEVEDO GIRALDO GUILLERMO LEON Ver más
Teléfono	-	Matriz	-
Registro	Registro Mercantil de Madrid		
Web	No facilitada		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Propongo un cambio

Datos destacados del BORME de PRIME DESARROLLOS URBANISTICOS SL			
Aumento Capital	2.060.869,00 EUROS	30/12/2016	
Result. Suscrito	2.063.869,00EUROS		
Últimas cuentas	2017 Consigue AHORA las cuentas Anuales de PRIME DESARROLLOS URBANISTICOS SL.		

Información de la compañía			
CIF	B87487070	Sector	INTERMEDIARIOS FINANCIEROS
Antigüedad	2 meses (07/02/2019)	Nº de empleados	-
Domicilio	C/ Zurbano 34 3º lz 28010 - Madrid	Cargos directivos - Adm. Único:	ACEVEDO GIRALDO GUILLERMO LEON Ver más
Registro	Registro Mercantil de Madrid	Matriz	-
Web	No facilitada		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Propongo un cambio

Datos destacados del BORME de PROMENSULA DESARROLLOS SL			
Aumento Capital	3.000,00 EUROS	18/02/2019	
Últimas cuentas	No tenemos constancia de que la empresa PROMENSULA DESARROLLOS SL haya presentado cuentas.		



We found a photo from Memo's Spanish ID card.

He appeared prosperous and happy. It was time to go to Spain and see the Ghost close up.

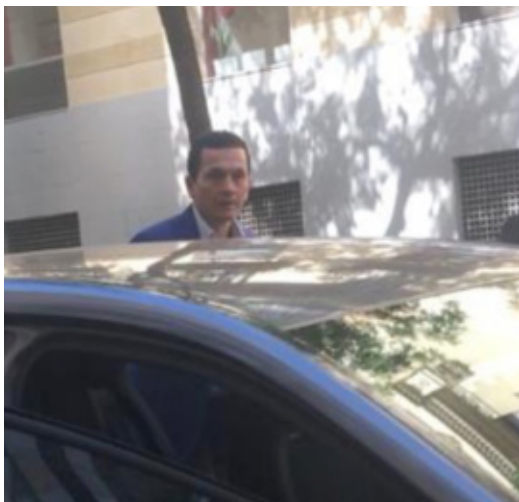
6

The Ghost Lives the High Life in Madrid



The Ghost, a paramilitary drug lord, has moved to Madrid with his millions of drug dollars. He has dodged the Colombian justice system and perhaps secured a pass from the United States after informing. He is free and clear.

A local investigator was able to confirm that “Memo Fantasma,” or “Will the Ghost,” was living in the Spanish capital. He had set up two companies in Spain, both under his real name of Guillermo León Acevedo Giraldo. They had been set up with at least five million euros, but looking at their investments, they were likely worth millions more.



We got a recent photo of him on the streets of Madrid. There was no doubt he was our Ghost.

It was time to go to Spain hopefully to confront Memo, or at the very least deliver a letter laying out our story and giving him the right to reply, before publishing the investigation.

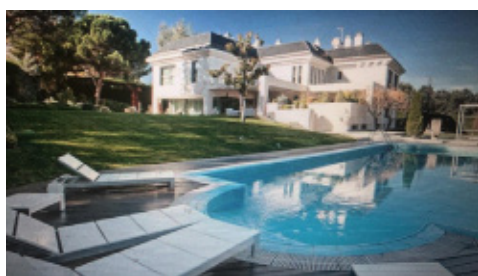
Speaking to Spanish law enforcement contacts, it seemed Guillermo Acevedo had

appeared on their radar, not because of any evidence of criminal activity, but because he had bought property in Spain from two old school Colombian money launderers, Alfonso and Rodrigo Vargas Cuellar, via their company called Bucaramanga. The Vargas brothers formed a criminal structure known as “Las Guaras.” They had been arrested in Madrid in 2003 as part of a huge money laundering network from Colombia to Spain and the United Kingdom, which had washed some \$165 million.

Memo's Madrid Investment Portfolio

As part of his application for a residency visa, Memo had provided an address on Calle Fernández de la Hoz, right in the heart of Madrid. The building had a doorman and the garage exit was on another side of the block. Likely by design, Memo had chosen a property where he could not be surprised.

We also found a house in the outskirts of the city, in a closed neighborhood by a private golf course. Again there was a doorman and no way to peer into the exclusive development. One also couldn't wait outside without attracting attention and no way to orchestrate a surprise encounter there either.



One of the houses inside Memo Fantasma's closed neighborhood in Madrid.

Even though we had a list of Memo's vehicles, a Honda ADV 750 motorcycle, a BMW 1200 motorcycle, a Mercedes-Benz A200D and a Range Rover Sport, there was little chance of intercepting him entering or leaving any of his properties.

Memo's two businesses, Prime Desarrollos Urbanisticos and Promensula Desarrollos, were registered at a law firm, Zurbana & Caracas Abogados, less than 10 minutes' walk

from Memo's apartment. This seemed like the only option to try to get a phone number or at least leave a right to reply letter in a way he could not deny ever receiving one.

I was welcomed into the office, where everyone seems to know of Guillermo Acevedo immediately, referring to him by his first name. I handed over a business card and confirmed that his companies were registered with them, asking if they might be able to give me a contact number. That was not possible. Could I leave a letter for him? That was fine. I was a journalist on deadline and it was quite urgent that I contact him, would it be possible for them to call him while I waited? Sure.

However, when the lawyer returned from her call, the situation changed dramatically.

“You need to leave now, and we cannot receive any letter,” she declared, beckoning to the door.

I told her this was very strange as this was the address given for his companies. Why would they not let me leave a letter, and what had Mr. Acevedo said that would prompt her to throw me out?

Again, I was asked to leave.

“Is this the kind of law firm which facilitates drug trafficking, money laundering and terrorism, as that is what I am accusing Mr. Acevedo of?” I enquired.

An uproar ensued. I still refused to leave and asked to speak to a senior partner. Another lawyer came in.

“We are not his lawyers,” he said. “We simply do his accounts.”

I asked how this changed things, and did that mean the firm did not represent drug traffickers and terrorists, but simply did their accounts? Amid yet more outrage, I was told they would not answer any more questions unless I returned with the police. My work here was done. Memo would definitely get the message.

The idea was to move quickly and see if we could confront Memo Fantasma at one of his properties before he had time to prepare. At the apartment in central Madrid, the doorman stated that neither Mr. Acevedo nor his family had been around for a while. It seemed the flat was being renovated. He happily took one of the right to reply letters.



The housing complex, on the outskirts of the city was, according to a police contact, popular with soccer players and celebrities, as their privacy was guaranteed. It has just one entrance with a security guard, was surrounded by a private golf course, with no way to peer over fences or take pictures with long lenses.

I presented myself at the entrance and asked for Mr. Acevedo. The guard buzzed the house. Someone replied and the doorman badly pronounced my name. Who was I? A journalist. There was a delay. The reply came back that Mr. Acevedo was not at home. It seemed likely he was in the house. I left another copy of the letter.

We had rattled all the available cages. If Memo Fantasma was going to engage with us, it would be now.

Memo Steps Out of the Shadows

It took two hours for him to call me. I was having a coffee on Madrid's emblematic Plaza Mayor. The phone rang. I knew it was him even though the caller ID was blocked, as I had just bought a new British SIM card to attempt to convince him that I was based in the United Kingdom, not Colombia. This number had been given to the lawyers and put on the right to reply letters. Nobody else had that number. A feeble security measure, perhaps, but it worked.

The Ghost was furious.

"What kind of person rings up threatening another?" he asked. "The lawyers said that you threatened them."

I explained what I was doing. He calmed down, then confirmed his full identity. There was no doubt we were speaking to the same Guillermo Acevedo that we had identified in Colombia.

For the next 22 minutes, we played a game where he tried to find out how much I knew and who my sources were, while I tried to get him to agree to see me or make a compromising comment.

When confronted by the accusation, he denied that he was alias "Memo Fantasma" or "Sebastián Colmenares."

"Where did you get that from? I can assure you, you are wrong," he said. "I have no criminal record or arrest warrant."

When I asked him if he had ever been Macaco's criminal partner, he said no, but he did not ask who Macaco was. When accused of being a paramilitary commander and a member of the Oficina de Envigado, he again denied it but did not ask what those structures were.

When I told him that he was named as Memo Fantasma during testimony given to the Justice and Peace courts, he appeared to be surprised.

"Really? By whom?"

I mentioned the name Pablo Sevillano, but once more he did not ask who that was.

“These people are all criminals, you cannot believe what they say,” he replied. “They are trying to cover their own criminal activities. You are a foreigner, and they are manipulating you.”

His outrage turned to supplication.

“I have a wife and children, and these allegations will affect them.”

I thought of the wives and children of tens of thousands of paramilitary victims.

I assured him that we were not targeting his family in any way.

The issue then switched to money. He insisted he was not a rich man. I mentioned two of his properties in Madrid, the ones we had already visited. He said he had mortgages on both. When asked about the vehicles registered to his company and himself, he was also evasive. He offered to share his bank records which would apparently reveal a dire state of affairs.

I then switched to his business interests in Colombia. When asked about his **ownership** of the helicopter company at Medellín’s Olaya Herrera airport and involvement in the Torre 85 development in Bogotá, he admitted to both.

I mentioned the fact that Colombian police and US authorities had records on him, even though they may have been wiped, and that we thought he might have been a US informant.

“It is impossible to wipe records in the United States,” he replied.

He did not address the issue of being a US informant. Then he asked if I had seen his US records, which I have not, since they are sealed.

He then appealed to journalism ethics.

I replied that if he could persuade me that he was not Memo Fantasma or Sebastián Colmenares, I would spike the story immediately.

He refused to meet, insisting he was not in Madrid. But he promised to send me an email.

At the end of the call, I was more convinced than ever that this Guillermo Acevedo was our Ghost. He seemed to know exactly who I was talking about and what I was talking about. A normal businessman would not know these things and would have been confused by all the mentions of Colombian underworld figures.

I was not expecting to ever hear from Memo again, at least not until after publication and then only through his lawyers. However, soon after, I received an email.

From: guillermo [redacted] @ [redacted] <guillermo [redacted] @ [redacted]>
Sent: Thursday, September 19, 2019 3:02 AM
To: Jeremy McDermott [redacted] >
Subject: contacto

Respetado Sr. Mcdermott,

Según nuestra conversación telefonica,aporvecho la ocación para saludarlo, al igual que dejarle mi contacto y poder tener una comunicación directa, logrando de esta manera poder facilitar la información requerida por usted.

He leído sus artículos al igual que la nota dejada por usted y créame que me deja usted extremadamente preocupado, si en algún momento requiere reunirse con migo yo estaré dsipuesto para ello. Espero poder ayuarle en todo lo que este a mi alcance y lo que no lo este poder despejarlo juntos. De ante mano agradezco su interés y seriedad profesional al quererme verificar la información.

Saludos.

Guillermo Acevedo.

English Translation (accounting for frequent spelling errors in the Spanish original)

Dear Mr. Mcdermott,

According to our telephone conversation, I take this opportunity to greet you, as well as leave you my contact details in order to have direct communication, ensuring in this way being able to provide you the information you require. I have read your articles as well as the letter you left and believe me that you have made me extremely worried, if at any time you need to meet with me I would be ready to do so.

I hope to be able to help you in anything that may be in my power and to jointly resolve the rest.

Ahead of time, I appreciate your interest and professionalism in wanting me to verify the information.

Regards.

Guillermo Acevedo.

The email was the first of many communications we would exchange. He promised to talk, to sort things out and to meet. I offered possibilities. But it soon became clear he was simply stalling. The communications revealed little except that Memo Fantasma, while having a brilliant criminal mind, had received little formal schooling.

A Call From the Vice-President of Colombia

I returned to Colombia the day after speaking to The Ghost. On landing in Medellín, I turned on my phone. There I found a message from Vice President Marta Lucía Ramírez saying that we needed to talk. This could not be a coincidence. When we got on the phone, she got right to the point.

"I know what story you are working on," she said.

Now at any one time, InSight Crime is working on a dozen different investigations, but I have found it is usually better to be direct with vice presidents.

"Who told you?"

"A source in Washington," she replied.

"Did you help Mr. Guillermo Acevedo get his daughters into the Nueva Granada school?"

"No."

"Did you know him well?"

"No. He is simply someone that my husband did business with. Not only that but we got General Naranjo to do a background check on him. My husband is available to answer all of your questions and is expecting your call."

Before speaking to her husband, Álvaro Rincón, I spoke to retired General Óscar Naranjo, former Colombian police chief and vice president, whom I know from years of reporting in Colombia. He totally handled me.

"Now I do not remember this specific case, but if the Vice President said it happened, then it happened. People were asking me all the time to do background checks," he said.

I asked him if he had heard about Memo Fantasma, and he said he had, but as a small-time player. I asked if he knew that Memo was also Sebastián Colmenares, a leader of the paramilitary United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC).

"No, that I did not know," he responded.

I asked him if he would mind checking with some of his contacts to see if he could come up with anything about this person. He said he would make some inquiries. Despite some gentle nudging over several weeks, I got nothing. But the former police chief and vice president is a very busy man.

During this time, as well as fact-checking everything for publication, we sought to find any evidence of continuing criminal activity on the part of Memo Fantasma. While his money laundering activities were clear, the question was if they were just for his own funds or whether he was providing "washing" services to other criminals.

The fact that he was associating with known Colombian criminals and money launderers in Spain pointed to the latter. Looking deeper into his business dealings in Spain, particularly a series of development projects in Seville, it was clear that tens of millions of euros were at play. We think that he had certainly earned that kind of

money over his career, but there was also enough room to be taking substantial sums from other players.

“Ernesto,” a Medellín drug trafficker who had also worked with the paramilitary army, insisted The Ghost was still in business. He knew nothing of our discoveries.

“Now he is part of a group called ‘The Fraternity’ [La Fraternidad],” Ernesto said. “There are three or four of them. They pretend they are businessmen, run in high society, involved with big construction projects. What everyone forgets is that these guys are pure narcos, but masquerade as legit businessmen.”



*Héctor Alexis Muñoz, alias “Draculín”.
Photo: Analisis Urbano.*

He also suggested that even with his former protectors, Carlos Mario Jiménez, alias “Macaco,” and Carlos Mario Aguilar, alias “Rogelio,” long gone, he still had contacts in the Oficina de Envigado to get his dirty work done.

“Alias ‘Charley’ is his accountant and his chief of bandits was alias ‘Draculín’ [Dracula], who also collected his payments,” Ernesto added.

We were unable to find “Charley,” but Draculín was well known in the Medellín underworld. His real name is Héctor Alexis Muñoz and was among the most wanted in Medellín until his capture in 2018.

Ernesto also sought to tie Memo to a famous killing, that of Julio César Correa Valdés, alias “Julio Fierro,” a drug trafficker who was apparently cooperating with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). He disappeared in August 2001, and former paramilitaries testified that he was tortured and killed. Ernesto stated that Memo had paid for the killing and been present during the torture. No other source confirmed it, and indications were that he had been killed on the orders of the AUC chief, Carlos Castaño. However, in a last attempt to provoke Memo to engage, I sent him a note asking him about it and about being an informant for the US himself.

From: guillermo [redacted] <guillermo [redacted]>
Sent: Saturday, November 23, 2019 3:22 AM
To: Jeremy McDermott <[redacted]>
Subject: RE: _Atención

Respetado Sr. McDermott,
Nunca he sido, ni seré informante de nadie, no sé de qué habla usted, mucho menos que he tenido un socio de esta índole.
En cuanto está vil acusación que hace usted, es una gran mentira, toda vez que yo no conocí a este tal señor ‘JULIO FIERRO’ mucho menos que participe en tal crimen, yo puedo asegurarle a usted y cualquiera que nunca en mi vida he participado en un crimen. No se que fuente maligna tenga usted y quiera enlodar mi vida, le ruego señor no cometa usted una injusticia al dañar una persona con tan infames afirmaciones.
Estaba tranquilo con este tema, ya que encomendé esta tarea a mi equipo de trabajo (Abogados) y me comentaron que todo estaba aclarado, pero según puedo percibir en su mensaje no es así.
Reitero mi disposición para aclarar toda esta situación, hoy mismo me pondré en contacto con ellos y espero la próxima semana estar reuniéndome con usted.
Es usted muy amable por su tiempo y disposición.
Saludos.

From: Jeremy McDermott < >
Date: Fri, November 22, 2019 9:51 am
To: "guillermo" >

Señor Acevedo,

En la publicación vamos a decir que usted trabajó como informante para la DEA, y entregó información sobre su socio, alias 'Macaco'.

También que usted fue presente durante la tortura y asesinato de alias 'Julio Fierro', también informante de la DEA.

¿Quiere comentar?

Saludos,
Jeremy

English Translation of e-mail from Jeremy McDermott to Guillermo Acevedo on Nov. 22, 2019:

"Mr. Acevedo,

In the publication, we will state that you worked as an informant for the DEA and delivered information about your partner, alias 'Macaco.'"

Also that you were present during the torture and assassination of alias 'Julio Fierro,' also a DEA informant.

Do you wish to comment?

*Regards,
Jeremy."*

English Translation of e-mail from Guillermo Acevedo to Jeremy McDermott on Nov. 23, 2019 (accounting for frequent spelling errors in the Spanish original):

"Dear Mr. McDermott,

I have never been, nor will I be an informant for anyone, I do not know what you are talking about, much less that I have had an associate of that nature.

Concerning this vile accusation you have made, it is a big lie, I have never known this gentleman 'JULIO FIERRO' far less have I taken part in such a crime, I can assure you and anybody that I have never in my life taken part in a crime. I do not know what evil source you may have which wishes to sully my life, I beg of you sir to not commit an injustice by harming a person with such infamous claims.

I was relaxed about this topic, as I entrusted this task to my team (Lawyers) and they told me everything was cleared up, but I now see in your message this is not the case.

I reiterate my willingness to clear up this entire situation, I will be in touch with them today and I hope to meet with you next week.

*You are very kind for your time and availability
Regards.”*

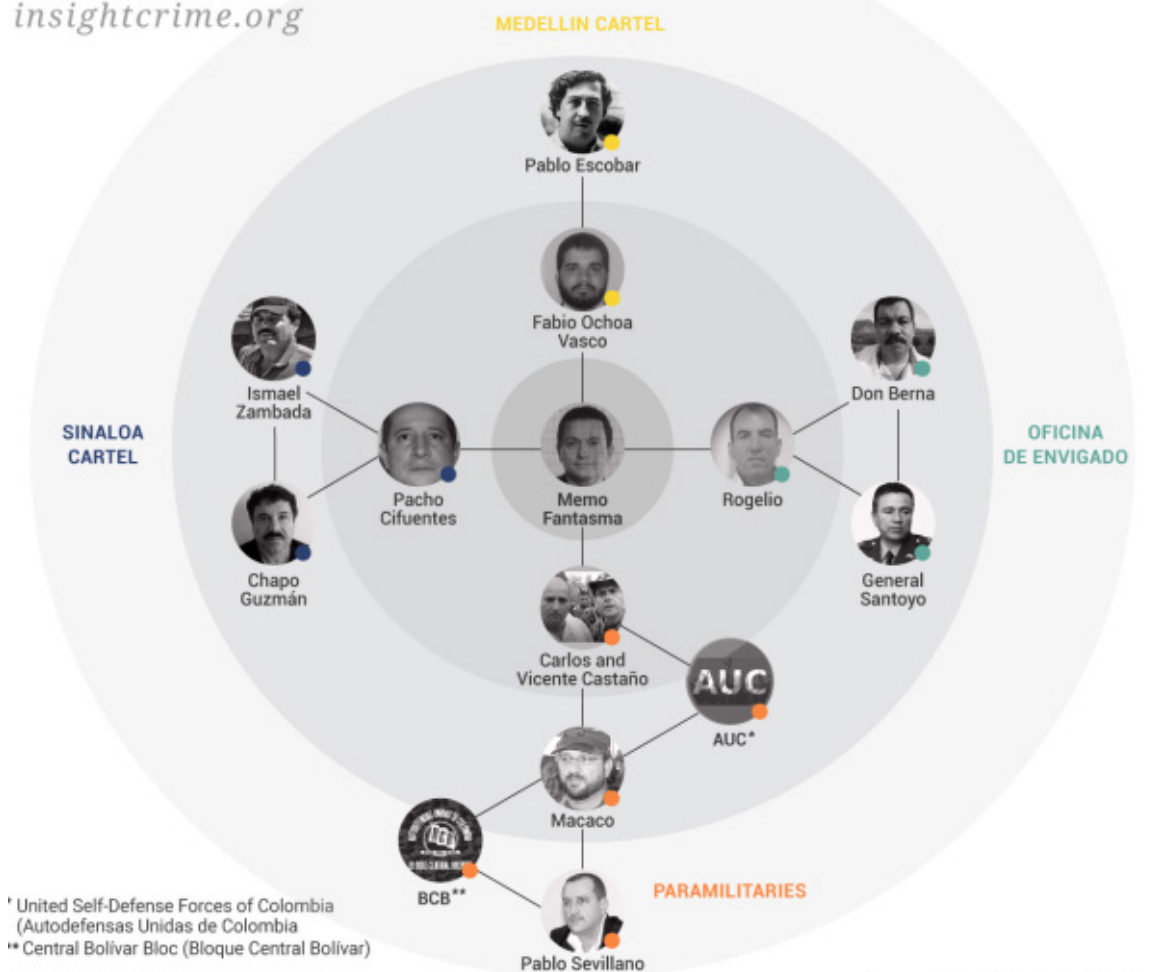
We abandoned any further efforts to get Memo to talk.

Last Man Standing

As all this was happening, it was announced that Memo’s former paramilitary partner, Carlos Mario Jiménez, alias “Macaco” -- who had been sent back from the United States after serving 11 years in prison -- had been **refused admission** to Colombia’s paramilitary amnesty programs. That meant that he was looking at up to 40 years in prison in Colombia, as he had already been charged with drug trafficking, massacres and murders.

The Ghost and His Network

insightcrime.org



Yet it was Memo Fantasma who handled much of Macaco's drug trafficking activity. It was Memo Fantasma, who as the financial brains behind Macaco's operations, funded the military machine of the Central Bolívar Bloc that carried out massacres, mass displacements and rapes across large swathes of Colombia.

Looking at the criminal network connected to Memo Fantasma, one thing stands out. Almost all have been killed or been to prison. Yet Guillermo Acevedo is living the high life in Madrid, utterly unmolested. For more than 30 years, one of Colombia's more prolific drug traffickers has remained invisible.

The InSight Crime Foundation

InSight Crime is a foundation dedicated to the study of the principal threat to national and citizen security in Latin America and the Caribbean: organized crime.

InSight Crime's goal is to deepen understanding on organized crime in the Americas through on-the-ground investigation and analysis from a transnational and policy perspective.

We fulfill this mission by:

- providing high quality and timely analysis of news events linked to organized crime in the region;
- investigating and writing reports on organized crime and its multiple manifestations, including its impact on human rights, governance, drug policy and other social, economic and political issues;
- giving workshops to journalists, academics and non-governmental organizations on how to cover this important issue and keep themselves, their sources and their material safe;
- supporting local investigators through these workshops and by publishing, translating and promoting their work to reach the widest possible audience;
- developing a region-wide network of investigators looking at organized crime;
- presenting in public and closed-door sessions to governments, non-governmental organizations, academics and stakeholders on best practices, strategies and pitfalls in implementing citizen security policy on the ground.

