



Ed Ramos Case Study¹

As you read this case study:

Try to develop a list of hypotheses that would help explain the behavior of Ed Ramos.

- *Highlight or underscore what you think might turn out to be discriminating information that would help you decide which hypothesis is the most credible.*

Tom Wheeler had just started to move into his new job as Latin America Division Chief at DEA Headquarters. He was trying to straighten out the mess in the cramped HQ office that he would occupy for the next couple of years, and had just finished unpacking his books. Tom was busy arranging some photographs of his children when his afternoon appointment showed up promptly at 1030.

“Hello, I’m Hank Gooding,” said the lean, brown-haired man with glasses at the door.

“I’m Tom Wheeler,” Tom replied, and they shook hands. “Please come in and sit down. Sorry about the mess.”

Wheeler had heard rumors of trouble people said Gooding was having at his post in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Gooding was due to return to Washington shortly and was at DEA HQ on a temporary visit. Tom had never met Hank before and knew nothing about him. As he sat back to listen to his visitor, Tom vowed to keep an open mind.

Gooding began:

I had been a DEA agent for 14 years when I got orders to go to Port-au-Prince as the deputy office director. It was my first management position overseas. I was pleased with the assignment, although I believed it should have come

¹ This case study was prepared by Pherson Associates, LLC in October 2004 to illustrate the Analysis of Competing Hypotheses (ACH) methodology. It is a slightly fictionalized version of a true case study prepared by Thomas W. Shreeve & Associates for the Intelligence Community Case Method Program. The case is based on real events. The study is copyrighted and cannot be reprinted without permission from Pherson Associates, LLC (library@pherson.org).

sooner in my career—just like everyone else! I am an experienced agent with three postings in the United States and two overseas tours. I am 48 years old. Unlike a lot of other people around here, I came up the hard way. I grew up in a poor neighborhood in Boston, and I joined the Marines right out of high school. I was in the Marine Corps for ten years, and came out a sergeant. I earned a Bachelor's Degree while I was on active duty. I worked for a several years in law enforcement and then joined DEA. After a several domestic tours in Washington and to our field offices in Houston and Los Angeles, I was assigned to Puerto Rico. From there I went to Santo Domingo where I perfected my Spanish.

It really bothered me not to get an assignment to Bogotá but the opportunity to assume a managerial post in Port-au-Prince kind of made up for that. I was confident in my ability and I was eager to bring my many years of experience to bear on the really challenging problems there.

Like other agents sent overseas, I studied a lot about Haiti before arriving at my new post. I already knew the office director, but we were not close friends. I was looking forward to working with the team.

After I started reading in on the job, I learned that Ed Ramos would be going out to Port-au-Prince about the same time as me. I wasn't pleased with this news. Ramos was a young agent, only 34 years old who had moved up through the ranks very quickly. On several occasions, he got promoted with minimum time-in-grade. People referred to him as a "fast-tracker," and one of my colleagues at HQ told me he would be getting one of the best assignments in Port-au-Prince.

Wheeler knew that Ramos had been hired out of the New York Police Department where he had worked on both the drug and counterintelligence beats. He had a Bachelor's degree from Rutgers and a Master's from Columbia. Tom recalled Ed vaguely as an athletic-looking guy with finely honed features who always had a smile. He seemed popular with nearly everyone. He had a reputation as a sharp young officer with a bright future, a good talker, and a good writer.

Wheeler remembered, too, that Ramos was known as a good linguist. He could speak several different "brands" of Spanish fluently and had a decent command of French. Partly because of his language skills, Ramos had done tours in Puerto Rico, El Paso, and Mexico City. The job in job in Port-au-Prince was his fourth tour.

Gooding went on with his explanation:

Ed Ramos arrived in Port-au-Prince a few weeks before I did. We both lived “up the hill” in Petionville, which was in a good part of town but a difficult commute to the US Embassy. I usually left early for work around 6:30 am to beat the traffic. Ed usually opted to wait it out, work on his computer, and drive down after the rush hour cleared around 9:30. Ed’s wife, Marie, came over from Mexico City a few weeks after Ed arrived. I have heard from others that Marie was from a wealthy Miami family but she seemed very naïve to me. She told me one time that she had no head for figures, and that Ed handled all the finances in their household. I think maybe her father was sending them money from Miami, but I don’t know that for sure.

Over the first three or four months following our arrival in Haiti, Marie became close to my wife Kate. Often they would shop together or plan outings involving other Embassy wives. Marie often turned to my wife for advice and companionship as it was a small community.

During this same time period, Ed was becoming very active at work. He was given the assignment to work with the HNP—Haitian National Police—leadership. This was one of the best assignments in the office. The chief assigned Ed to these positions because of his excellent record and his knowledge of French. Ed was very pleased with this assignment, of course, and naturally let everyone know it.

Within six months of Ed’s arrival, his contacts with the police leadership in the capital and across the island were truly impressive. He was reporting information derived from the Police Chiefs in Gonaives, Cap Haitian, Jacmel, and the Haitian Coast Guard. He also had some leads into local gangs in Port-au-Prince and the surrounding suburbs. I had never seen someone so successful so quickly against such a difficult target.

The reporting that Ed produced from these sources tended to be somewhat general in nature, but it was widely regarded as an outstanding performance. Of course, addresses and phone numbers are not that easy to find in Haiti, but he often had trouble coming up with specifics; he said that most of his contacts did not have cell phones or that they were relying on a local system and everyone would know if the contact had given Ed his number. The cell phone service was only a few years old in Haiti, so he may have had a point. The Chief was confident that, with time, Ed would be able to obtain more detailed information and better tip-offs as he got to know his on-island contacts better. Comments on the volume of Ed’s reporting from HQ were highly favorable, particularly since no one before had been able to develop so many reporting sources on the island. He also managed to pick up operationally useful

information or lead data on every major drug trafficking organization operating on the island. Still, something about this whole thing bothered me. I just couldn't believe that anybody could be so lucky.

As Ed began to report information from his sources, his counterparts at HQ began to generate ideas for operations or and seek answers to specific questions posed as field requirements. Several HQ analysts had some really good ideas that Ed could pursue with the contacts he had made. "I met with Ed several times to encourage him to respond to these cables," Gooding continued, "but he seemed slow to do so." Of course this was not unique to Ed. HQ personnel continued to comment favorably about all the reporting, but some noted that many of his answers to specific questions seemed dated. In some cases, his reports seemed only minor variations of material already available in the files.

Gooding continued:

In the process of developing his informant network, Ed traveled several times to Miami. When he returned he brought expensive items with him, which he explained were gifts for his sources. This included well-tailored clothing, electronic equipment, and other things you could never buy locally. After he returned from one trip wearing an expensive Rolex watch that he proudly showed off around the office, I began to become concerned about his rate of personal spending. In spite of my uneasiness, I did not do anything except mention it casually to the boss that Ed seemed to be living beyond his means. The chief replied: "He's getting the job done. So what if he wants to show off a little? It is none of our business as long as it does not interfere with his work—and it hasn't!"

A couple of weeks later, Kate and I went to one of the regular parties the Marine Guards throw on Friday nights. Marie was there as well and she had had a few too many drinks. She began to complain bitterly to a small group of us about Ed having affairs with a number of women. As far as I know, there was no evidence of this apart from Marie's accusations. I knew the hours that Ed was working and I doubted he could have found the time for a series of romantic affairs. Also, the American community in Port-au-Prince was not that large, and I was sure something like that would have gotten out.

In spite of long hours at the Embassy, Ed did seem to be having trouble getting his contact reports and other reporting out promptly. He was taking several days to complete his paperwork, and both HQ and I found that

excessive. He would work long hours, often doing research on drug networks in the region. One evening, working late, I ran into Ed still at his desk. I told him he was taking too long to complete his reports. He was not happy to hear this, and he stormed out. After he left, I looked down at his desk and saw stacks of Internet printouts about Colombian and Mexican drug connections. There was also lots of basic background information on several of Haiti's outlying cities.

The next day, I learned later, Ed met with the boss and told him he saw no need to have to report to me on his activities. He wanted a direct line to the top. I told the chief I didn't like this arrangement and felt insulted by it. Either I am in the chain of command or I am not, correct? In spite of my objection the boss agreed with Ed's request, although he did show me Ed's reports if there was anything important to know.

The following month, we decided to launch a special technical operation. Some visiting technicians concealed microphones and recording equipment in a safe house that Ed would use for a meeting with one of his best contacts. We tested the equipment before the meeting and it worked fine. Static and interference obscured the conversation, however, the night that Ed met with his contact, and the tapes were useless. We checked the gear afterward, and couldn't find anything wrong with it. Maybe it doesn't mean anything—that fancy electronic stuff craps out all the time, as everyone knows. We proposed setting up another such operation, but Ed was reluctant saying we had no guarantee it would work if we tried it a second time.

About nine months after we arrived in Haiti our chief was reassigned to Washington and a new chief arrived. He also was deeply impressed with Ed and the number of contacts he had developed. We seemed to have a very good network established, he had generated a series of interesting background reports, and the unit was getting poised to launch some important operations. The new boss told me that the big bosses in Washington had heard that I was "harassing" Ed and weren't pleased about it one bit. One senior agent told our new chief: "That boy Ed is more productive than all of our field offices in the Caribbean put together. Your deputy must have a personality clash problem with Ed and, as the new chief; it is your job to get a handle on it."

Since I have been back to HQ on this TDY, I have gotten pretty tired of hearing what a great job Ed is doing. It seems that no one else shares my feeling that there is less there than meets the eye. I've told this to both my former and my

current boss but I can't get anyone to listen. OK, it is no secret that I don't like the guy, and I am beginning to wonder if I am letting my personal feelings cloud my judgment. I am concerned that pushing this matter any further will do damage to my own career. I've been thinking about this a lot, and wonder if you have any advice.