A tale of two families

Operation Knockout was focused on delivering a body blow to the Nuestra Familia's leadership in the Salinas area.

The gang's activity in Monterey County has remained divided between two factions, long after the FBI's Operation Black Widow sent the gang's top leaders into the federal prison system in 2004.

Power struggles between the two groups are believed to be at the root of some of the violence in Salinas.

The most powerful faction is loyal to new leaders in Pelican Bay State Prison, which, according to the gang's constitution, is the only official "headquarters" for the Nuestra Familia's leadership group, known as the Mesa.

But some families and veteran gang members in the Central Coast remain loyal to the gang's former top generals and captains, many of whom are serving life sentences in federal prison and are expanding the gang's influence to other areas.

California branch
Pelican Bay State Prison
Official Nuestra Familia headquarters

Federal branch
Florence, Colo., supermax prison
Headquarters of national branch of Nuestra Familia

Due for release this year

Alberto "Bird" Larez
of Salinas

Henry "Happy" Cervantes

Other federal prisons

Rico Wayne Garcia
of Salinas, in prison in Florida

Sheldon "Skip" Villanueva
in prison in Louisiana, facing a possible death penalty for allegedly killing his cellmate, a gang "dropout"

Salinas

Larry "Paqui" Amaro
Under federal indictment

Mario "Weasel" Diaz
Turned federal witness

Crystal Ann Morado
Salinas, common-law wife of Tibbs Morado, was found murdered on Hecker Pass Road in 2005