

Investigations of Narcotics Cases

There is no profession in this world like the law enforcement profession. Local police officers, federal agents, county investigators and Sheriff's officers have the distinct job each day and night of actually seeking out trouble, and in many instances, finding it. When the dispatcher calls for a marked or unmarked unit to respond to an emergency, the officers assigned begin to feel their adrenaline pumping through their veins, and they can almost hear their heart beat.

Each officer assigned to the street work or "the beat", as it is commonly called, knows that he or she must plan for trouble, must overcome it, but if at all possible, avoid it. In narcotics investigations, detectives and investigators are well aware of the dangers on the streets. Each day arrests are made for narcotics violations committed by children as young as 7 or 8 years of age and grandmothers 78 years of age who deal drugs or work in some other aspect of the illegal drug trade. There is NO age, sex, or race discrimination in the drug world of illegal drugs.

To detect, investigate and apprehend those involved in the illegal drug trade, narcotics officers must learn how these people dress, act, look, talk, and think. The officer must study his or her so well that the officer can recognize the subject at a glance. The narcotics officer must examine everything that might possibly be connected to the subject or target. This type of in-depth investigative technique gives the raid team the necessary information it will need to execute a warrant at a later date.

Investigators and detectives must gather intelligence and make observations of people and places involved with illegal drug transactions that might normally go undetected by the lay person or unexperienced officer. "Each other must match the target's ingenuity; he or she must develop the ability to detect what others might miss. The officer must be alert, observant and cautious." 1

It is necessary that narcotics officers know the street terms used by different ethnic groups in different area. They must know the quantities the drugs come in, the types of drugs sold by one group as opposed to another, and the different names and prices of the drugs under investigation. For example, officers must know the meaning of terms such as "eightball", denoting one eighth of a gram of cocaine, or "key", referring to a kilogram of cocaine. Other terms include "bottle", "clip", "deck:", and "brick"

Prices vary throughout the area based on the following factors: availability, country or origin, trafficker's position with in an organization (for example, importer, wholesaler, retailer, street manager, street level seller) and negotiations between buyer and seller.2

One of the most effective investigations tools a narcotics officer depends on is the informant. Narcotics detectives and investigators work each day on developing reliable confidential informants. These individuals are of vital importance to the development of a case. They are used in many cases to purchase drugs or obtain information on the participants in drug transactions.

Cultivating a good network of reliable informants, and the ability to protect them, are essential weapons in the narcotics officer's arsenal. Whether or not the informer is used, many investigations require undercover officers or "U/C's", as they are commonly called. They enter a known narcotics locations and make a "buy" of controlled dangerous

substance or “CDS”, giving the investigative team the needed probable cause for the warrant or arrest. U/C’S are under the most stressful conditions in law enforcement, and they must convince their counterpart, the dealer, of their need for the drug. When making a buy, the U/C must remember who sold him or her the CDS, what the person was wearing, how many actors were in the location, whether any weapons were seen, how many windows and dorrs were facing in what direction, whether there were any dogs, and any other information that would help the raid team when it enters. It is one of the most dangerous jobs in law enforcement.

To emphasize just how dangerous this type of work is, an incident occurred in August of 1992, where a confidential informer and a U/C set up a “buy and bust” operation in the middle of the block of one of the heaviest drug trading locations in the area. Officers were strategically placed so as to surveil and arrest the actors immediately after the buy was made. Two plainclothes officers were on foot approaching the target location, approximately 50 yards away, from the two different directions. A detective in a surveillance vehicle was monitoring Kel-Receiver, listening to a transaction take place via a body microphone placed on the U/C. Two ther plainclothes units operating as back up teams were also in place waiting for the signal from the detective monitoring the Kel-unit. The U/C and the confidential informer drove up to the actor’s home and sounded the car horn. The actor came out of his home and walked up to the U/C’s car, pulled a clump of cocaine out of his pocket, and the U/C gave the signal to move in and execute the bust. When the officers grabbed the actor, he began to yell and fight, screaming that he was being “ripped off” (street term for robbery). In a matter of seconds, eleven other individuals came out of the actor’s home and from the surrounding buildings. All of the plain clothes officers, seven in all, had identified themselves as police officers, and melee ensued. Five of the eleven who attempted to assist the actor were arrested. Two of the officers were slightly injured. Several ounces of cocaine were found, and two guns were confiscated. If it were not for quick actions taken by the officers, and the assistance of the local police department, a tragedy might have occurred. The narcotics officer is a dedicated, experienced, well trained, hard working, unselfish, caring, individual who, in many cases, has given up his or her family life to answer to the call of duty. Narcotics officers belong to a very closely knit and strong fraternity. They are as the fingers of a clenched fist, strong and tight.

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1 U.S Dept. of Justice, DEA Training Bulletin, Aug. 1992

2 New York City Police Dept., Training Guide, Sept. 1992