

KENTUCKY STATE POLICE

111688

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Marijuana Eradication Report

NCJRS

JUN 7 1988

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FOREWORD

The cultivation of domestic marijuana in Kentucky, at one time considered a minor problem, is now a problem of major concern for the Kentucky State Police.

Kentucky's fertile soil, favorable climate, ample rainfall combined with the state's remote rural locations which offer excellent concealment for the growth of marijuana, provides one of the best locations in the United States to grow cannabis. The state's ranking at or near the top in marijuana cultivation the last five years is evidence of this.

As this report shows, aerial surveillance, particularly with a helicopter, has proved highly successful in the location of marijuana. Cannabis needs to be grown where it can receive substantial sunlight thus, it's dark green color out in the open can be discerned from surrounding vegetation during aerial surveillance.

This aerial advantage, along with other factors including effort, cooperation and information, contributed to Kentucky leading the nation in marijuana eradication in 1986.



Photo courtesy of KSP

ABOVE: Officers cut 492 cultivated marijuana plants in Owsley County and made one arrest.

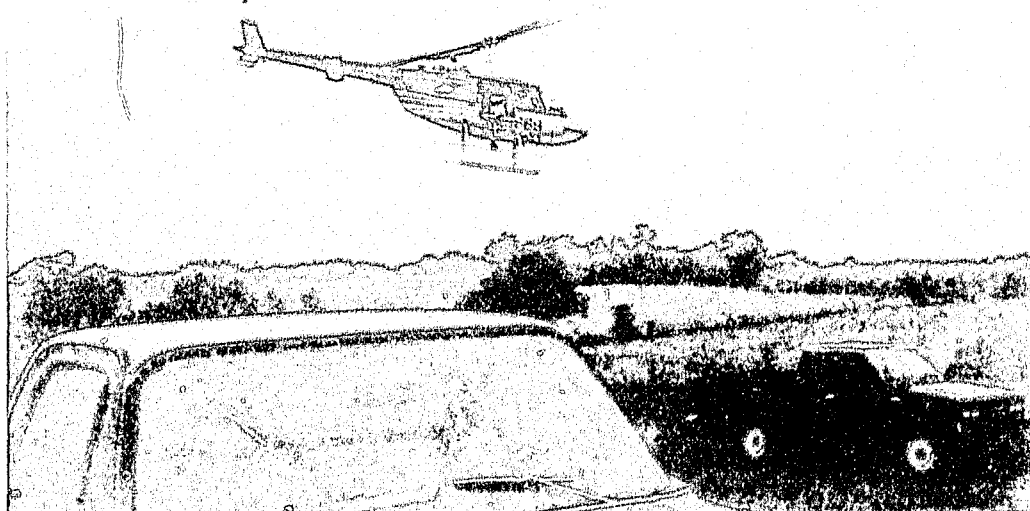


Photo courtesy of KSP

LEFT: Kentucky State Police located one of the largest cultivated fields ever discovered in the nation on this farm in Lincoln County. The KSP helicopter scouts the area where 347,000 plants were found. Federal indictments were pending at time of publication.

1986 KENTUCKY MARIJUANA ERADICATION PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

Kentucky is part of a concerted federal state Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program, which was established to insure a coordinated effort between federal, state and local agencies in order to eradicate domestically cultivated cannabis in the United States.

In 1979, the DEA initiated the marijuana eradication effort in cooperation with Hawaii and California. This program expanded in 1981 to include Florida, Missouri and Kentucky. During the ensuing five years, the program gradually came to include all 50 states. In 1986, these eradication efforts resulted in nationwide destruction of 129,686,033 plants in 33,291 plots, 5,537 arrests and the seizure of 1,646 weapons.

Kentucky, leading the nation in 1986 in the destruction of domestic marijuana, has consistently ranked fourth or higher nationally since the inception of the program in 1981 and is recognized by the DEA as a model program.



Photo courtesy of KSP

KSP officers and sheriff's deputies destroy marijuana in this Garrard County corn field. A total of 649 plants were destroyed and one arrest was pending.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Kentucky not only ranked first in the nation in the eradication of cultivated marijuana, but also ranked second in the number of asset seizures and eighth in the number of individual arrests.

Four factors led to this highly successful marijuana eradication program in Kentucky:

EFFORT

Total involvement and commitment of the Kentucky State Police. A scheduled, organized and concentrated effort was planned over a 90-day period with enhanced equipment and manpower support. Training programs include:

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (a) aerial identification | (e) evidence collection |
| (b) raid plans | (f) federal prosecution procedures |
| (c) search warrants | (g) asset/seizure/forfeiture |
| (d) legal aspects | |

HELICOPTER

Continued use of Kentucky State Police aircraft, which included a Bell 206 helicopter made a substantial impact. The helicopter, a significant tool in marijuana detection, improved aerial identification capabilities due to low air speed and altitude and stimulated enthusiasm from ground teams due to its aerial evacuation potential in the event of an injury. Marijuana was located an average of every 20 minutes during flight time.

COOPERATION

Local and federal cooperation provided much needed support to the program. A total of 85 sheriffs or deputies rode in the helicopter and assisted the program, providing invaluable service with their manpower commitments and information. Federal support came in the form of federal grant monies totalling \$195,000 and the prosecutorial and asset seizure offices located in the east and west districts were instrumental in the program's success.

INFORMATION

As a result of the increased awareness of the drug problem in Kentucky, there was an increase in the involvement of Kentucky citizens reporting information about possible marijuana fields to police.

ERADICATION RESULTS AND COMPARATIVE FIGURES

The success of the 1986 program is overwhelming when compared to 1985, which in itself was a record-breaking year for Kentucky. The following are 1986 final figures and comparative 1985 final figures.

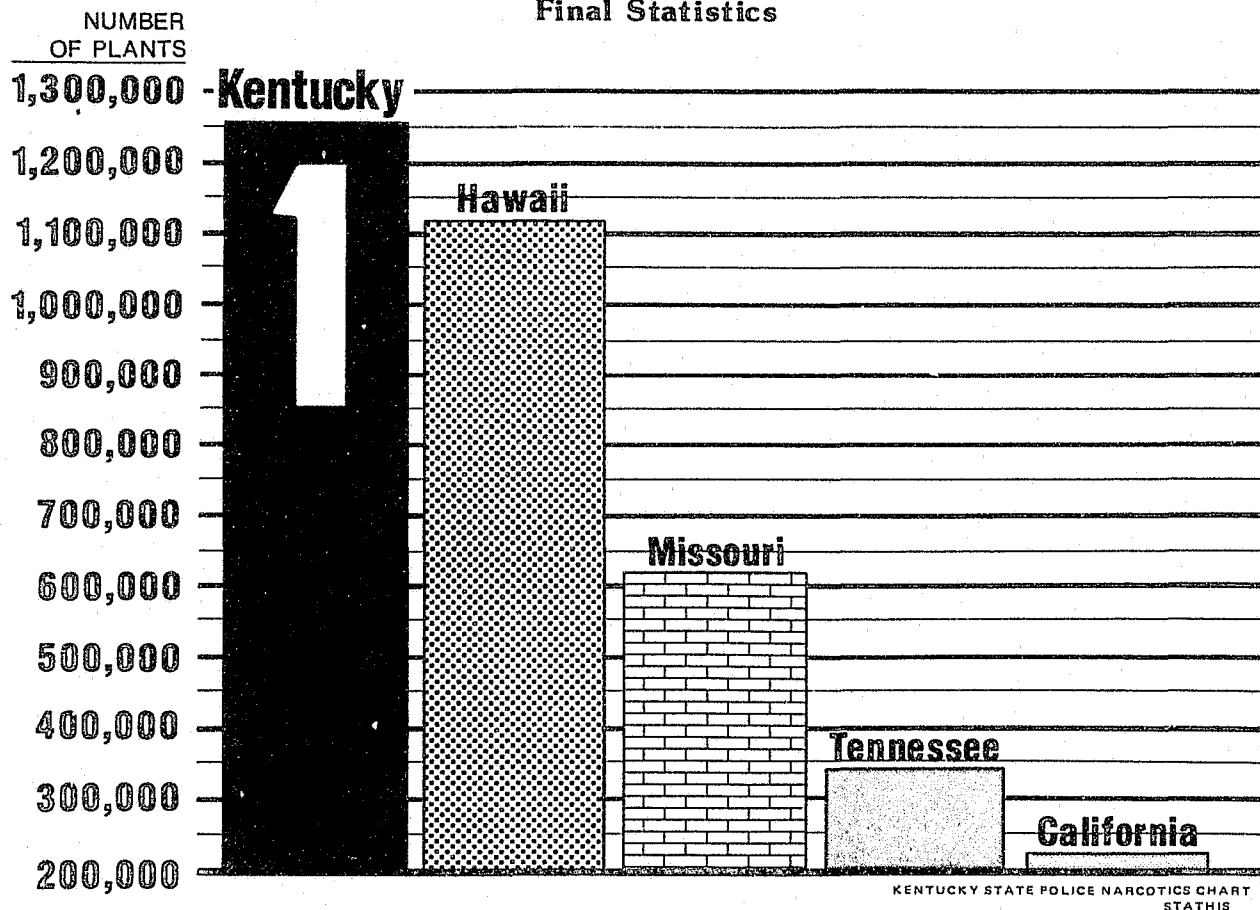
MARIJUANA PLANTS ERADICATED	
<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>
305,907	1,185,887
INDIVIDUAL ARRESTS	
<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>
168	192
PLOTS DESTROYED	
<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>
1,315	1,529

COMMENTS

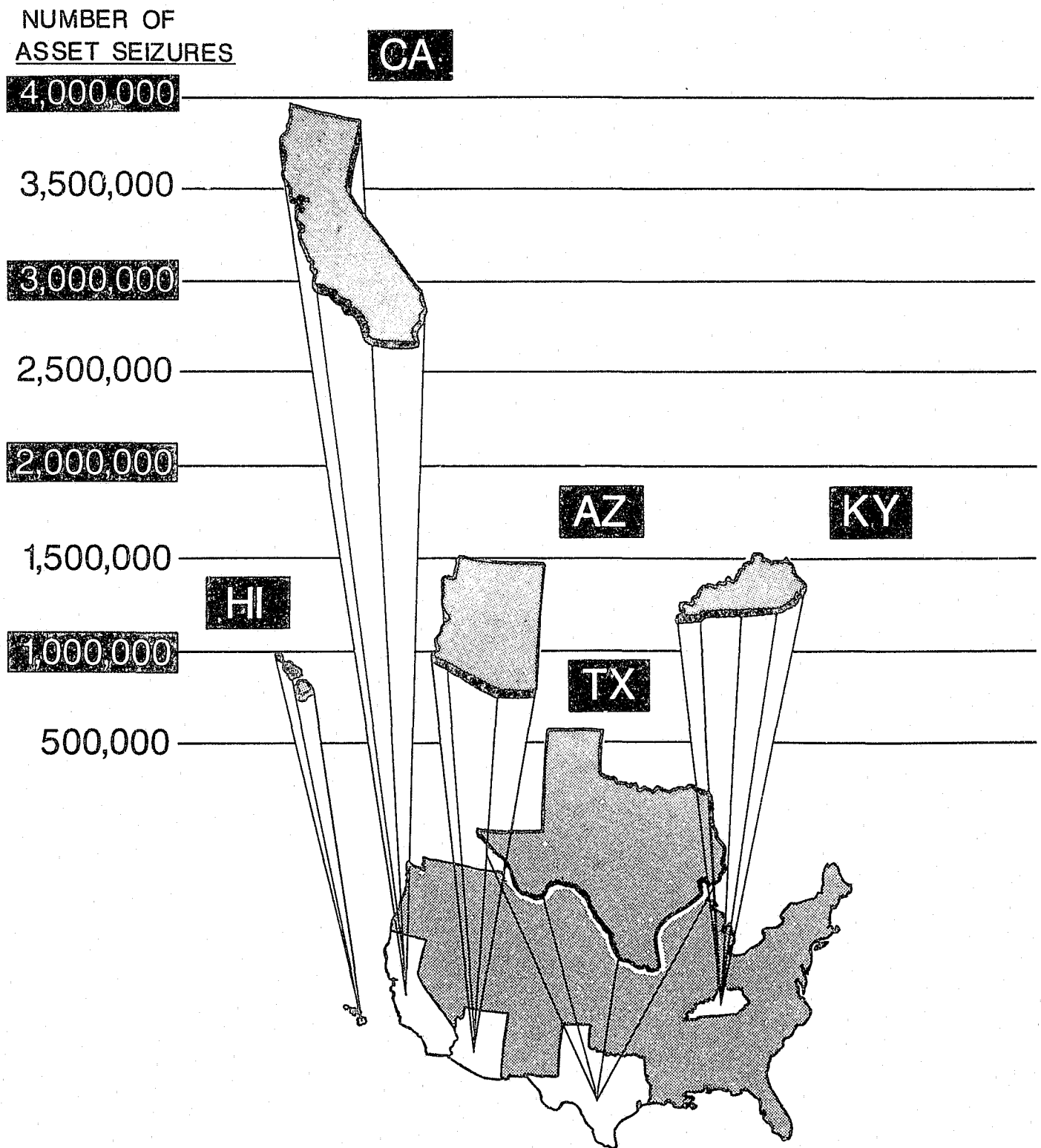
The fact that Kentucky was first in the nation in the destruction of cultivated marijuana (1,185,887 plants) and second in asset seizures (\$1,517,730) is indicative of the hard work and sustained efforts by the Kentucky State Police personnel with local and federal support. The addition of the leased Bell 206 helicopter was an invaluable tool to the KSP and contributed to the record-breaking success of the program.

We can expect future success with the continuance of more funding, equipment to aid in the location of marijuana; federal, state and local support and the involvement of our state's citizenry contributing information concerning the cultivation of marijuana. A continued effort to heighten the public's awareness of the drug problem in the state and in the nation will make the completion of these goals possible.

1986 DOMESTIC CANNABIS
ERADICATION/SUPPRESSION PROGRAM
Final Statistics



1986 DOMESTIC CANNABIS ERADICATION/SUPPRESSION PROGRAM Top Asset Seizures By State



1986 DOMESTIC CANNABIS
ERADICATION/SUPPRESSION PROGRAM
Top Arrests By State

NUMBER
OF ARRESTS

1,100

1,000

900

800

700

600

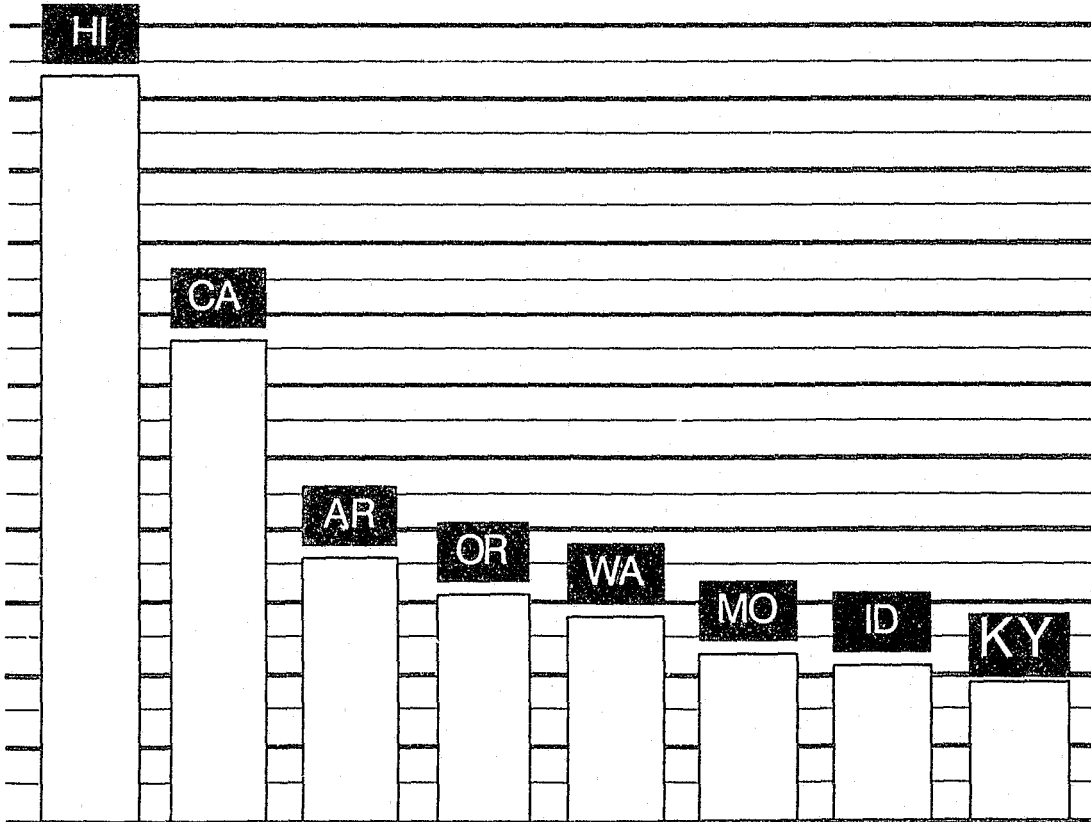
500

400

300

200

100



KENTUCKY STATE POLICE NARCOTICS CHART
STATIS

1986 KENTUCKY MARIJUANA ERADICATION FACTS

- * Kentucky led the nation in the eradication of domestic marijuana.
- * Kentucky was second in the number of asset seizures.
- * The number of arrests placed Kentucky eighth in the nation.
- * A total of 1,185,887 domestic marijuana plants were located and destroyed.
- * The total cash value of the plants eradicated, estimating at \$800 a plant, is \$948,709,600.
- * Asset seizures totalled \$1,517,730.
- * A total of 1,529 marijuana plots were destroyed.
- * Twenty-five weapons were seized in marijuana eradication raids.
- * A total of 192 individuals were arrested during the eradication program.
- * Two greenhouses were discovered during the eradication program.
- * A total of 5,528 hours overtime was worked during the program.
- * Kentucky State Police pilots flew more for marijuana eradication in 1986 than ever before. An all-time record was broken in 1986 for hours flown.
- * KSP aircraft reported 499.3 hours flown with 703,000 plants reported by aircraft.
- * The helicopter accounted for the majority of these findings with 302 hours flown and 569,000 plants reported.
- * Marijuana was reported an average of every 20 minutes of flying time.

KENTUCKY STATE POLICE POST BREAKDOWN AND COUNTY BY COUNTY BREAKDOWN

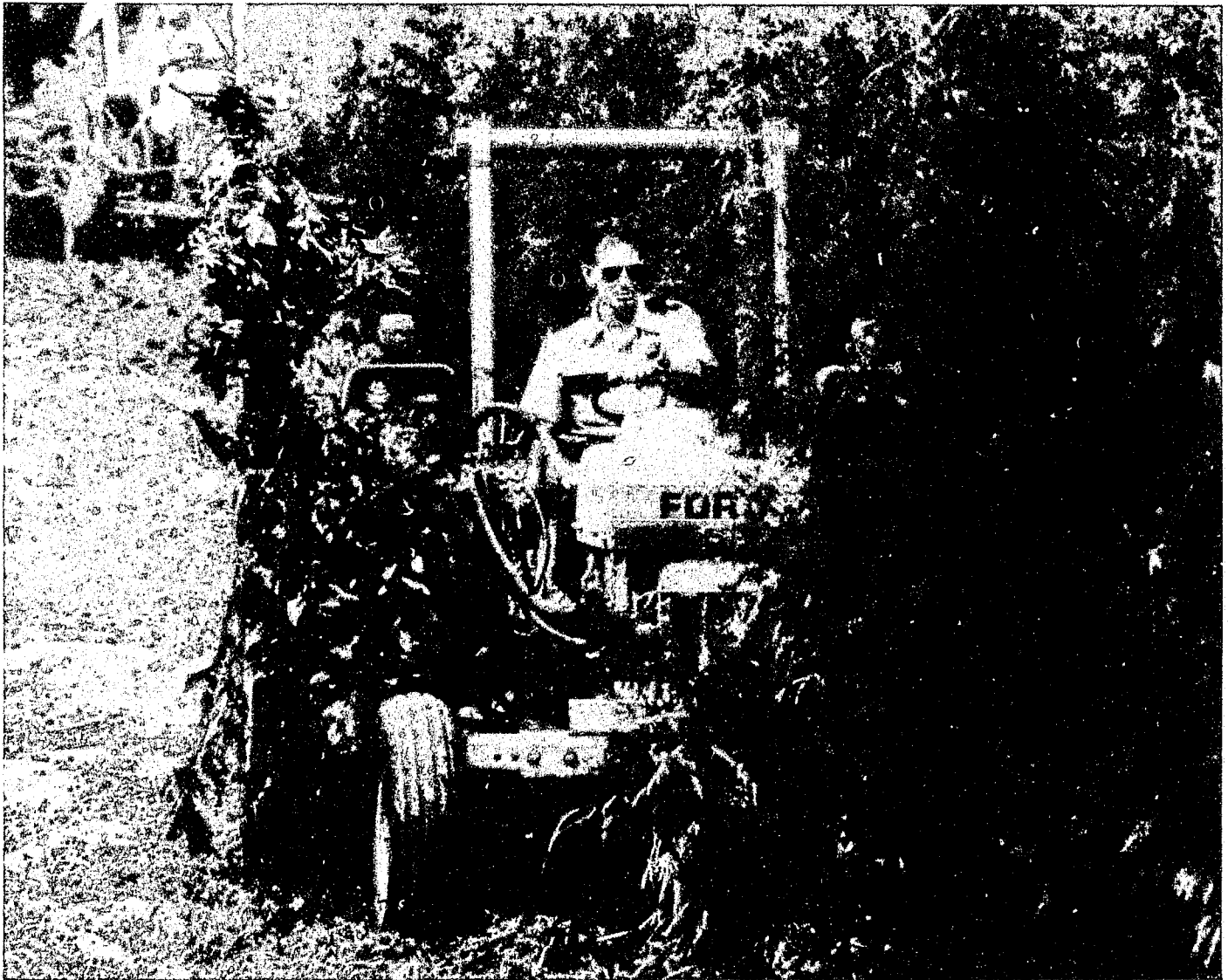


Photo courtesy of the MESSENGER INQUIRER (Owensboro, Ky.)

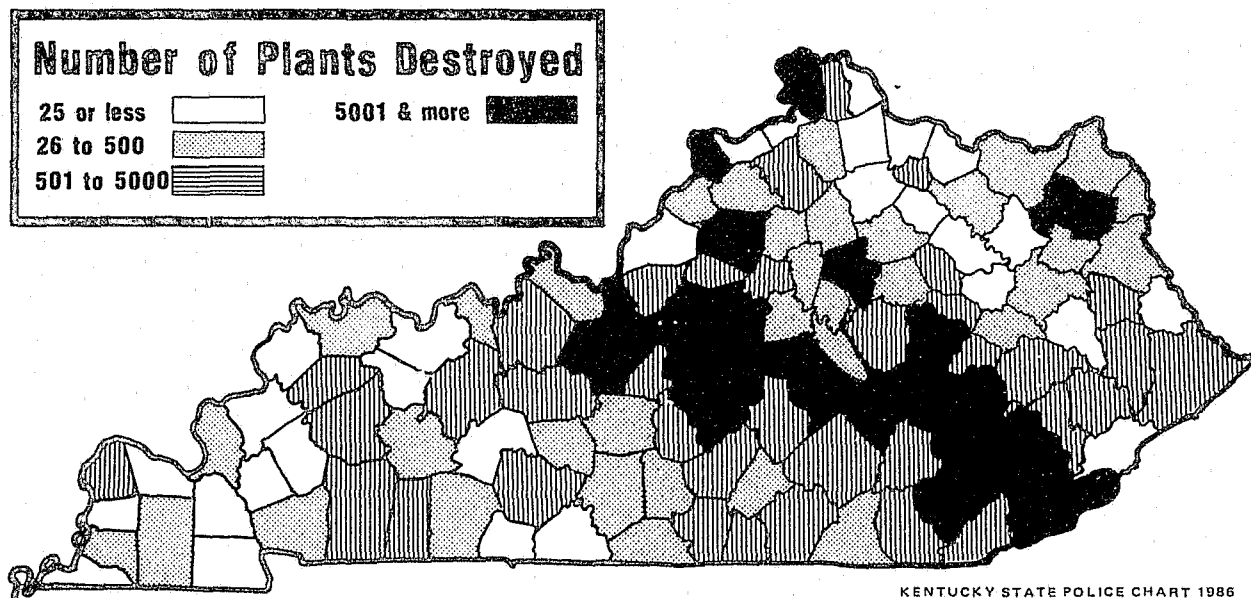
KENTUCKY STATE POLICE and Hardin County Sheriff's Department deputies mowed down a three-acre field of marijuana west of Eastview on Friday. It is located at the end of Roy Lane off Laurel Ridge-Smith Chapel Road.

N/E Mike Douglas

Kentucky State Police

MARIJUANA ERADICATION

Jan. 1 thru Sept. 12, 1986 By County



1986 MARIJUANA ERADICATION STATISTICS BY POST AREAS

<u>POST 1</u>	<u>PLANTS</u>	<u>ARRESTS</u>	<u>PLOTS</u>
BALLARD CO.	618	1	12
CALLOWAY CO.	85		3
CARLISLE CO.	0	0	0
FULTON CO.	0	0	0
GRAVES CO.	996	4	9
HICKMAN CO.	15,429	1	7
LIVINGSTON CO.	107	0	4
LYON CO.	0	0	0
McCRACKEN CO.	76	2	3
MARSHALL CO.	306	2	2
TRIGG CO.	163	2	6
 <u>POST 2</u>			
CALDWELL CO.	22	0	1
CHRISTIAN CO.	580	0	2
CRITTENDEN CO.	28	0	1
HOPKINS CO.	2,371	0	22
MUHLENBERG CO.	113	2	12
TODD CO.	659	5	7
WEBSTER CO.	2,929	3	3
 <u>POST 3</u>			
ALLEN CO.	3		1
BARREN CO.	90	0	9
BUTLER CO.	0	0	0
EDMONSON CO.	456	1	8
HART CO.	165	1	22
LOGAN CO.	120	1	9
SIMPSON CO.	0	0	0
WARREN CO.	1,003	2	14
 <u>POST 4</u>			
BRECKINRIDGE CO.	520	0	2
BULLITT CO.	2,649	0	14
GRAYSON CO.	4,289	7	16
HARDIN CO.	8,811	5	8
JEFFERSON CO.	0	0	0
LARUE CO.	654	1	5
MEADE CO.	180	4	3

<u>POST 5</u>	<u>PLANTS</u>	<u>ARRESTS</u>	<u>PLOTS</u>
CARROLL CO.	506	0	2
GALLATIN CO.	840	0	6
HENRY CO.	6,540	2	5
OLDHAM CO.	501	0	14
OWEN CO.	1,102	3	15
TRIMBLE CO.	35,508	0	4
 <u>POST 6</u>			
BOONE CO.	50,010	0	3
BOURBON CO.	2,955	0	3
BRACKEN CO.	0	0	0
CAMPBELL CO.	12	0	1
GRANT CO.	78	0	5
HARRISON CO.	0	0	0
KENTON CO.	1,000	0	1
NICHOLAS CO.	5	0	1
PENDLETON CO.	948	3	3
ROBERTSON CO.	1,584	1	4
 <u>POST 7</u>			
BOYLE CO.	10,503	0	1
CLARK CO.	110	1	2
ESTILL CO.	12,994	0	16
GARRARD CO.	1,284	2	10
JACKSON CO.	5,317	1	27
JESSAMINE CO.	67	0	1
LEE CO.	1,821	2	14
LINCOLN CO.	386,942	2	18
MADISON CO.	2,967	4	28
MERCER CO.	300	0	1
OWSLEY CO.	9,437	3	77
 <u>POST 8</u>			
BATH CO.	30	0	1
ELLIOTT CO.	524	0	8
FLEMING CO.	34	0	2
LEWIS CO.	477	0	10
MASON CO.	0	0	0
MENIFEE CO.	5	0	1
MONTGOMERY CO.	3,507	1	20
MORGAN CO.	77	2	3
POWELL CO.	2,253	0	2
ROWAN CO.	18	1	1
WOLFE CO.	185	0	7

<u>POST 9</u>	<u>PLANTS</u>	<u>ARRESTS</u>	<u>PLOTS</u>
FLOYD CO.	2,730	1	22
JOHNSON CO.	642	5	9
MAGOFFIN CO.	4	1	3
MARTIN CO.	12		2
PIKE CO.	2,684	16	40
 <u>POST 10</u>			
BELL CO.	507	1	13
HARLAN CO.	25,852	3	15
KNOX CO.	18,082	4	55
 <u>POST 11</u>			
CLAY CO.	10,981	2	76
LAUREL CO.	1,120	7	24
MCCREARY CO.	55	0	2
PULASKI CO.	2,129	2	2
ROCKCASTLE CO.	6,236	3	39
WAYNE CO.	4,309	4	30
WHITLEY CO.	1,956	3	16
 <u>POST 12</u>			
ANDERSON CO.	1,983	0	16
FAYETTE CO.	14,808	0	2
FRANKLIN CO.	37	0	3
SCOTT CO.	210	1	4
SHELBY CO.	5,021	4	10
SPENCER CO.	3,062	3	24
WOODFORD CO.	82	0	2
 <u>POST 13</u>			
BREATHITT CO.	2,921	6	29
KNOTT CO.	3,572	1	33
LESLIE CO.	24,215	2	136
LETCHER CO.	22	0	3
PERRY CO.	1,977	10	31
 <u>POST 14</u>			
BOYD CO.	358	0	10
CARTER CO.	6,669	8	31
GREENUP CO.	27	0	5
LAWRENCE CO.	96	3	4

POST 15PLANTSARRESTSPLOTS

ADAIR CO.	1,400	1	7
CASEY CO.	2,735	6	11
CLINTON CO.	3,468	5	45
CUMBERLAND CO.	3,658	7	25
GREEN CO.	591	1	9
MARION CO.	64,469	7	49
METCALFE CO.	326	1	7
MONROE CO.	115	0	2
RUSSELL CO.	369	1	11
TAYLOR CO.	330,213	1	9
WASHINGTON CO.	34,050	1	38

POST 16

DAVISS CO.	6	0	2
HANCOCK CO.	47	0	2
HENDERSON CO.	176	0	2
McLEAN CO.	0	0	0
OHIO CO.	544	0	7
UNION CO.	0	0	0

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>PLANTS</u>	<u>ARRESTS</u>	<u>PLOTS</u>
HICKMAN	15,429	1	7
HOPKINS	2,371	0	22
JACKSON	5,317	1	27
JEFFERSON	0	0	0
JESSAMINE	67	0	1
JOHNSON	642	5	9
KENTON	1,000	0	1
KNOTT	3,572	1	33
KNOX	18,082	4	55
LARUE	654	1	5
LAUREL	1,120	7	24
LAWRENCE	96	3	4
LEE	1,821	2	14
LESLIE	24,215	2	136
LETCHER	22	0	3
LEWIS	477	0	10
LINCOLN	386,942	2	18
LIVINGSTON	107	0	4
LOGAN	120	1	9
LYON	0	0	0
MADISON	2,967	4	28
MAGOFFIN	4	1	3
MARION	64,469	7	49
MARSHALL	306	2	2
MARTIN	12	0	2
MASON	0	0	0
MEADE	180	4	3
MENIFEE	5	0	1
MERCER	300	0	1
METCALFE	326	1	7
MONROE	115	0	2
MONTGOMERY	3,507	1	20
MORGAN	77	2	3
MUHLENBERG	113	2	12
MCCRACKEN	76	2	3
MCCREARY	55	0	2
McLEAN	0	0	0
NELSON	17,114	2	69
NICHOLAS	5	0	1
OHIO	544	0	7
OLDHAM	501	0	14
OWEN	1,102	3	15
OWSLEY	9,437	3	77
PENDLETON	948	3	3
PERRY	1,977	10	31
PIKE	2,684	16	40
POWELL	2,253	0	2
PULASKI	2,129	2	2
ROBERTSON	1,584	1	4
ROCKCASTLE	6,236	3	39
ROWAN	18	1	1

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>PLANTS</u>	<u>ARRESTS</u>	<u>PLOTS</u>
RUSSELL	369	1	11
SCOTT	210	1	4
SHELBY	5,021	4	10
SIMPSON	0	0	0
SPENCER	3,062	3	24
TAYLOR	330,213	1	9
TODD	659	5	7
TRIGG	163	2	6
TRIMBLE	35,508	0	4
UNION	0	0	0
WARREN	1,003	2	14
WASHINGTON	34,050	1	38
WAYNE	4,309	4	30
WEBSTER	2,929	3	3
WHITLEY	1,956	3	16
WOLFE	185	0	7
WOODFORD	82	0	2

AERIAL SEARCH

Aviators and Spotters Guide to Marijuana Detection

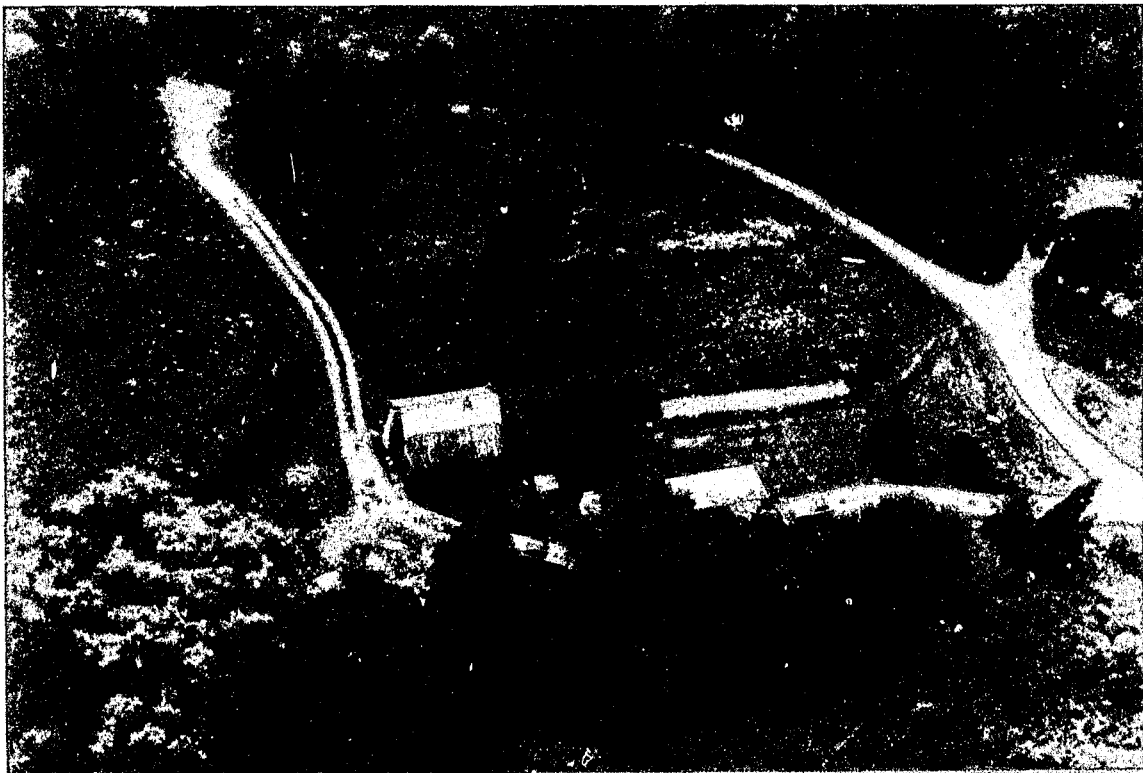


Photo courtesy of KSP

THIS PICTURE, taken from the KSP helicopter, reveals cultivated marijuana growing on an Owsley County farm. The marijuana is behind the clump of trees at the bottom of the photo just to the right of center.

DETECTING GROWING MARIJUANA

Three main factors contribute to the detection of cultivated marijuana:

1. Color Difference
2. Location
3. Things "Out-of-the-Ordinary"

However, a successful find will usually be detected not by a single factor but by a combination of all three.

COLOR DIFFERENCE

The color difference is the most difficult to explain, although it is usually apparent between growing marijuana and surrounding vegetation. During optimum lighting conditions (i.e., 10:00 a.m. to mid-afternoon) the color stands out. A rational explanation for variation in color is that growing marijuana enjoys the attention that surrounding vegetation does not receive, such as irrigation, nitrogen, cultivation, etc. Color variation is almost extinct when marijuana is planted between rows of corn.

When you see an unusually "thick" field of corn, take another look. Last year, many fields of corn were found to contain marijuana. Several locations had fully matured marijuana that was twelve to sixteen feet in height mixed in with the corn. Nylon cord was used to tie the tops of plants down, forcing the plants to grow laterally so that they would not extend above the height of the corn.



Photo courtesy of KSP

ABOVE: KSP narcotics officers cut marijuana from this corn field in Lincoln County. This was the largest marijuana field ever discovered in the nation with 347,000 plants. Another Lincoln County field, sighted by spotters in the KSP helicopter during the 90-day eradication program, contained 40,000 plants.

LOCATION

Marijuana plants in Kentucky, especially in southern and eastern Kentucky, are found in areas that have been cleared from a thicket of trees. This method of planting obviously conceals the crop from detection on the ground, but also stands out like a neon sign to aviators. Very successful finds last year occurred in the Boone National Forest.

In an aerial search, aviators should scan wooded areas when overflying. Usually, when one clearing is found to contain marijuana others are nearby-- a search outward from the area includes paying note to trails leading to or from the area.

Another terrain feature requiring attention is waterways--rivers, lakes, creeks and streams. Marijuana demands a great deal of water to grow and planters pick their sites with this in mind. Small islands along all waterways are places to check. They offer difficult access by others and are usually in very remote areas. Common throughout Kentucky is farmland with fencing marking boundaries, etc. Many times, the grower will plant along a fence line to make the plants appear as weeds that are growing wild.

The grower goes to great effort to make his crop the "undetectable crop". Instead of planting his crop in square patches in a field, he may deploy a circular pattern or an "L" shaped pattern.

Many fields were found in central and western Kentucky last year where marijuana was apparently seeded with an automatic seeder. These fields were very thick with marijuana. The plants were somewhat undersized because they received very little individual attention, unlike sinsemilla. This unusual method of planting is sometimes hard to detect because the marijuana will look like soybean from a distance, causing the aviator to overlook the obvious.

THINGS "OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY"

Although the "Location" factor and "Things Out-Of-The-Ordinary" are closely related, there is a distinction between the two. For example, plastic water pipe running into a wooded area has been found. Closer overflight revealed a marijuana patch in a clearing of woods. Plastic swimming pools have been found in the woods with no civilization nearby. Further investigation revealed an automatic watering system to a crop nearby. A green roof was noticed on an aluminum building near Elizabethtown. As the aircraft flew over the building, it was discovered, in fact, that no roof existed. The green roof was the tops of marijuana growing inside the building. Shacks, vehicles, tractors and garden tools seen in remote areas should be checked.

Man has a certain need for order about him. It is human nature to arrange things in a pattern. Mother Nature, on the other hand, does not have this need. Man will usually arrange growing things in rows or, in some cases, circular patterns.

SEARCHING TECHNIQUES

The morning hours are the best time of day for aerial surveillance. Marijuana plants have a fresh, radiant appearance in the morning as opposed to a wilted appearance that often occurs on hot afternoons. Experience has shown that growing marijuana is easier to detect if the aircraft is positioned between the sun and the plants. In this position, the observer is looking at the sunlit side of the plant, as opposed to the shadow side, which makes shade variation more apparent.

There are three techniques that provide systematic methods for conducting visual aerial observations:

1. side scan
2. motive
3. stationary

However, we will discuss only one.

The side scan is most suited and is, therefore, recommended for marijuana detection. This technique is normally applied when the aircraft is operating at an altitude of 100 feet above ground level or higher. Over most terrain, the observer systematically:



LEFT: KSP officers found 200 sinsemilla plants of the highest grade in a house located in a Richmond suburb in Madison County. The entire house, except for one small area where the owner slept, had been converted into a greenhouse. The individual, who was arrested and eventually convicted in connection with this greenhouse, had been traveling to Alaska to sell the marijuana.

Photo courtesy of KSP

- (a) looks out toward the horizon approximately 1,000 meters and searches in toward the aircraft;
- (b) looks out one-half the distance (500 meters) and searches in toward the aircraft;
- (c) looks out one-fourth the distance (250 meters) and searches toward the aircraft.

Persistence is especially important. If reliable information indicates that plants are growing in a certain location, the aircrew should not give up easily, particularly in wooded areas where the plants may be visible from only one position. Before leaving the area, the observer should know exactly where the plants can be found.

ALTITUDES FOR AERIAL SURVEILLANCE

A higher altitude is more beneficial, since the aircrew will have more time to scrutinize the area. Most aerial discoveries are made from an altitude of 500 to 800 feet AGL (Above Ground Level). Safety should be of foremost concern to the pilot and should not be jeopardized under any circumstances.

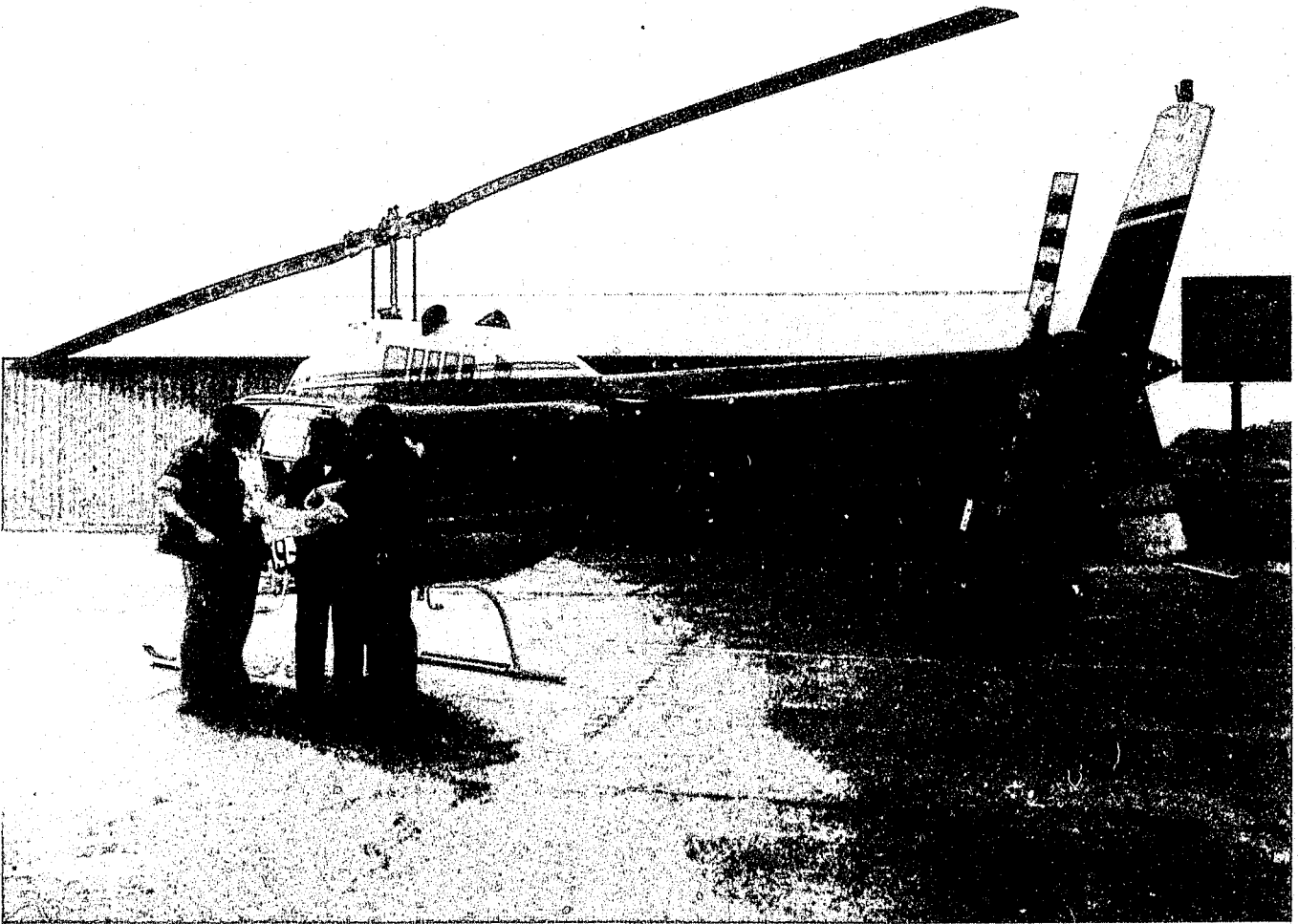
TIME OF THE YEAR FOR SURVEILLANCE

The most productive months are July, August and September. By then, the plants are maturing and are much easier to detect and identify. Flying earlier in the year (i.e., in the spring) is beneficial in locating areas being prepared for planting.

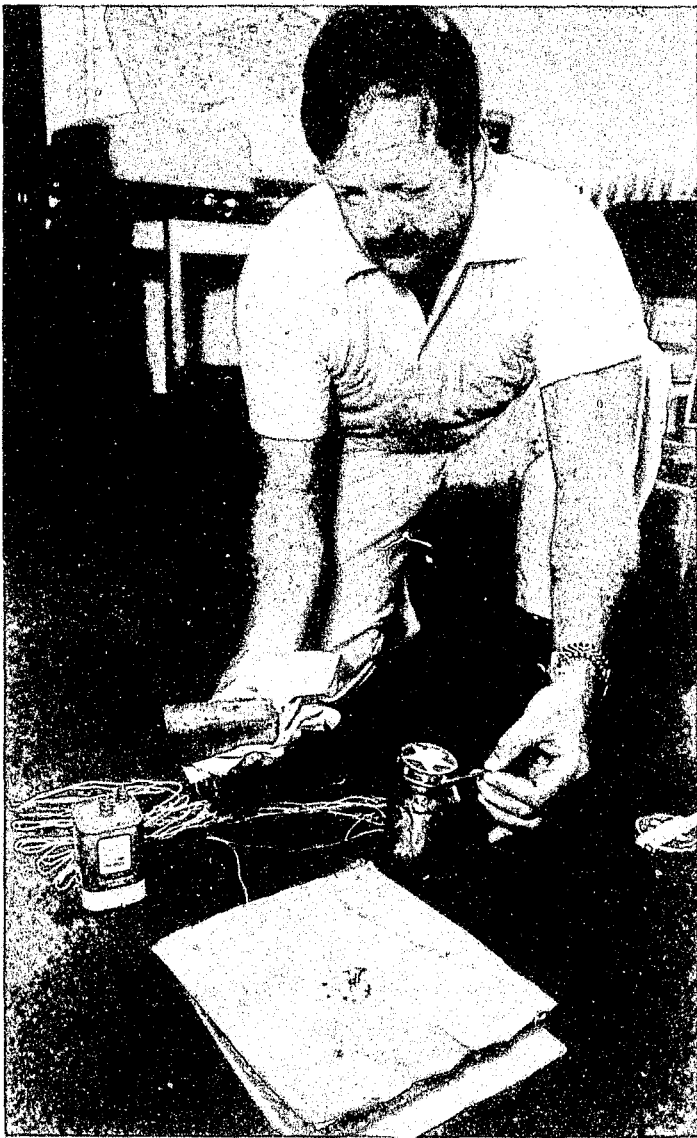
THE THREAT

Kentucky has already had one state police officer killed in a marijuana field. The threat of encountering small arms fire does exist. It is not highly unusual to see marijuana fields occupied. Due to the speed and movement capability of aircraft, many times, subjects cultivating marijuana are suddenly surprised by an aircraft on location. In such a case, spotters are recommended to pinpoint the location on their map and report the situation immediately.

Another threat is other aircraft. Several instances have occurred where suspected and/or known criminal aircraft would be occupying the same airspace as the police aircraft. It has been reported through Intelligence that the criminal element often utilizes aircraft in order to search out marijuana to steal or for criminal surveillance. Aviators and spotters should always be aware of the type of activity when in or around other airports. Many times, what seems to be a friendly discussion or "hanger talk" will have deeper meaning. The criminal element may appear at any airport in the state; therefore, discussions with outsiders regarding any mission should never be discussed.



HART COUNTY SHERIFF Charles Lisenby, and State Policemen Nick Stephens, Stan Harlow and Richard Herron, pilot, check a map before flying over Hart County last Thursday in search of marijuana crops.



(Staff Photo by Mark Workman)

Federal agent O.B. Combs displays booby trap.

Police escape booby-traps

By HUNTER REIGLER
Daily News Staff Writer

Two Warren County men were arrested Tuesday in a marijuana patch booby-trapped with dynamite, some of which exploded near a state police detective.

At about 4:30 p.m., state police detectives Cary Eaton and Roger Castle and troopers Tommy Garrett and Jerry Smith went to a patch four miles northwest of Bowling Green on Camel Road.

The patch had two booby traps in it, according to Agent O.B. Combs of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and firearms.

One of the booby traps, consisting of a fishing line trip wire connected to a soft drink can containing dynamite, exploded about 40 feet from Eaton, but police don't know what triggered it.

"It was possibly exploded by an animal of some kind," Combs said.

Fortunately for Eaton, he didn't step on the pressure plate.

"At the minimum it probably would have blown his leg off," said Sgt. Tommy Loving of the state police.

Other members of the state police, Combs and ATF Agent Dennis Price were called to the field after the explosion.

Combs and Price took charge of an unexploded device consisting of two pieces of sheet metal used as a pressure plate. If stepped on, the plate would have triggered an explosion of a half stick of dynamite in a jar next to the plate.

Both explosive devices were found in the middle of the patch, which consisted of 18 plants about 6 to 8 feet tall.

Police arrested two men working in the field, Thomas Neal Cox, 36, and Walter Hale, 76, both of 1847 Greencastle Road.

They were charged with possession of an unregistered destructive device, criminal attempt to murder and cultivation of marijuana. Cox was also charged with carrying a concealed deadly weapon and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. A .22 caliber rifle and a .22 caliber handgun were recovered at the scene.

ATF agents are continuing their investigation, and there is a possibility of federal charges.

Price said authorities recovered additional dynamite that could have been used to make more devices, and he said the way the explosives were used was unusual.

"It wasn't a warning device," he said. "It was intended to maim."

Explosives intended to scare people away from fields are set a distance away from where the person triggers it, Price said, while the dynamite in this case was right next to the trigger.

Ray Wilt, resident agent in charge of the Bowling Green ATF office said he's concerned about the safety of people, such as hunters, who might stumble across marijuana fields.

Should anyone find such a field, they should back off and call the authorities, Wilt said.

GREEN/GRAY SWEEP

After the main marijuana cultivation period had ended, the Kentucky State Police and the Kentucky National Guard conducted a concerted joint marijuana eradication effort on October 6, 1986, in a day long final sweep of the state.

Eighteen National Guard helicopters and their crews were activated by Governor Martha Layne Collins and assigned to the 16 state police posts to fly marijuana identification/location/eradication missions.

The crew for each helicopter consisted of three National Guard personnel and two Kentucky State Police personnel acting as the primary and secondary marijuana spotters. The primary spotter was the designated resident narcotics officer and was thoroughly familiar with the area.

The statewide effort resulted in the destruction of 27,229 plants and six arrests.



Photo courtesy of the ELIZABETHTOWN NEWS MESSENGER (Elizabethtown, Ky.)

DETECTIVE JOE SMITH of the Kentucky State Police explains how National Guardsmen and state troopers searched the six-county area covered by the Henderson state police post Monday for marijuana plants. No fields were found in the area, but 33 were found statewide.

State troopers, Guardsmen raid marijuana fields

From staff, AP reports

National Guardsmen and Kentucky State Police Troopers found 27,000 marijuana plants Monday in an aerial assault directed at the height of the pot harvest.

Helicopter crews reported spotting 33 marijuana fields in 21 counties, and troopers began converging on the sites on foot, chopping and burning the plants, said Maj. Thomas Rakestraw, commander of the state police special investigations unit.

A conservative estimate of the marijuana's value was \$27 million, he said.

"If we found one field, we thought it was worth it," said Gov. Martha Layne Collins, who put 60 Guardsmen on active duty for the one-day "Operation Green-Gray Sweep."

"Marijuana growers are criminals. They take an opportunity to make a quick, easy buck," she said at a news conference.

Helicopters carrying three unarmed guardsmen and two armed troopers apiece were dispatched to each of the 16 state police posts.

State police investigators from the Henderson post, which includes six counties including Daviess, had little luck. They began at 8 a.m. and were searching until the sun went down, but did not find any plants, said Joe Smith, a detective with the Henderson post.

The helicopters flew at 200 to 300 feet above ground, a risky procedure according to guardsmen and troopers. The wind from the rotors caused the silvery underside of the marijuana to turn up, mirroring sunlight and making them easy to spot.

It was the first time Kentucky used guardsmen in direct support of state police in marijuana eradication, Collins said. The Guard's involvement had been limited to reporting marijuana fields spotted during training missions.

Last year, state police destroyed 305,000 marijuana plants, and an estimated 1.1 million plants have been destroyed this year, said State Police Commissioner Morgan Elkins.

Hickman County, on the Mississippi River in western Kentucky, apparently yielded the largest single find: 10,000 to 15,000 plants growing among sugar cane.

Nine small fields were spotted in Rockcastle County in eastern Kentucky and three fields were found in Laurel County, also in the east. Jackson County in southeastern Kentucky and Spencer County, southeast of Louisville, yielded two fields each.

The remaining counties, each with one field spotted, represented nearly the expanse of the state: Caldwell, Fulton, Warren, Crittenden and Grayson counties in the west; Grant and Pendleton counties, north central; Clinton County, south central; Perry, Greenup, Carter, Elliott, Knott, Lewis, Leslie and Johnson counties in the east.

Collins said she believed the series of raids was the "largest of its kind ever conducted in this country."

The raids also seemed aimed at Kentucky's status as one of the nation's premiere marijuana producers. The state's history as a hemp producer, its climate, terrain and abundance of remote areas, including vast tracts of federally owned forests, have contributed to that status. Collins said an "all-out war" was needed against marijuana growers and the illicit drug trade in general.

"I don't want Kentucky being the No. 1 marijuana-producing state in the whole country," she said.