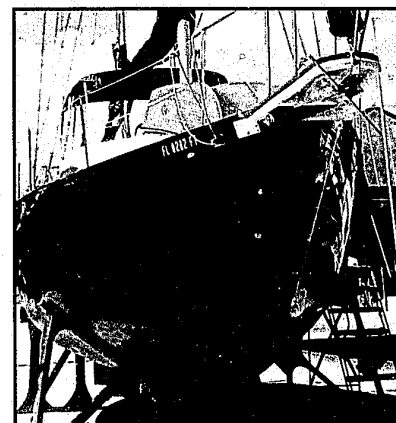
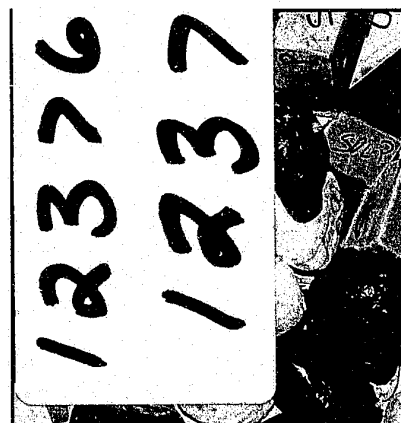
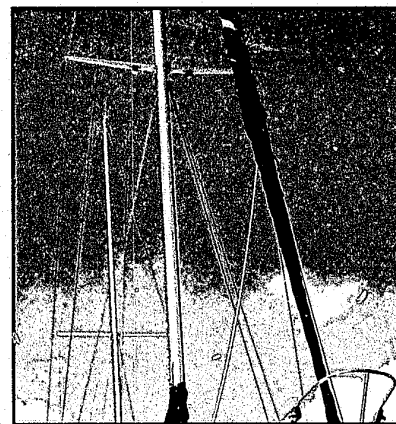
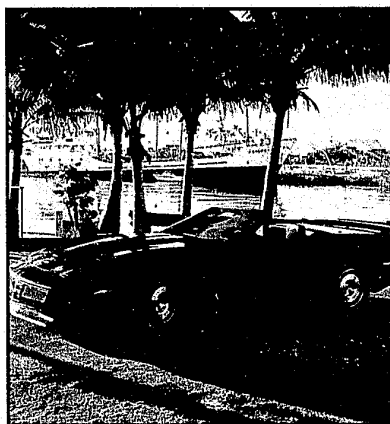
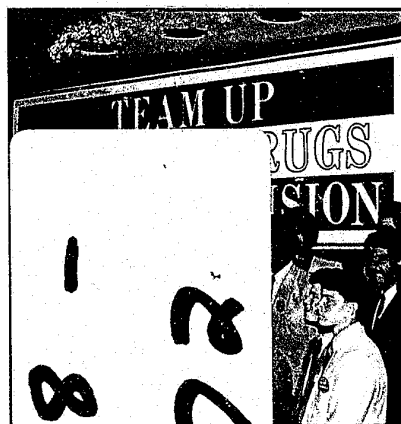
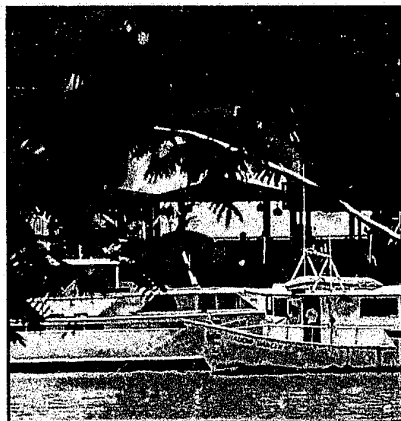




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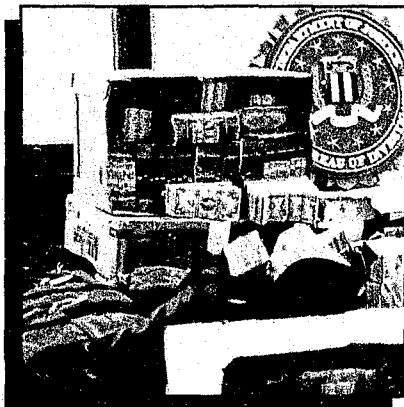
Law Enforcement Bulletin



Combating America's Drug Problem



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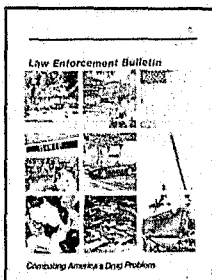
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The Cover: This issue focuses on law enforcement's efforts to combat the drug problem.

United States Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, DC 20535

William S. Sessions, Director

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The Attorney General has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of the Department of Justice. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Editor—Stephen D. Gladis
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The *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (ISSN-0014-5688) is published monthly by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 10th and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20535. Second-Class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Federal Bureau of Investigation Washington, D.C. 20535.

The W.A.N.T. Task Force



Photo courtesy of Claiborne C. Myers, Jr.

By
BILL GORDON

Drug dealers continuously cross jurisdictional boundaries to evade apprehension and prosecution—a common problem faced by law enforcement agencies nationwide. In Paducah, Kentucky, the situation was no different. Drug dealers operated in areas outside of the local police department's jurisdiction. In fact, many dealers lived in one law enforcement jurisdiction and "worked" in another. On occasion, dealers would move

just before apprehension, usually to an area where the police department did not know them or did not have an aggressive drug enforcement program. The dealers became virtually untouchable.

The problem of drug dealers evading apprehension and prosecution was becoming more and more severe. Recognizing this, the Paducah chief of police assigned staff members to identify and implement an effective, but economical,

solution. The concept that emerged was the formation of a regional drug task force.

Pooling manpower, resources, and expertise offered a viable weapon against the area's drug barons. And even though there were specific details to be addressed, the concept of an interagency drug task force gained overall acceptance when proposed to the heads of local police departments in western Kentucky. This article details the estab-

lishment of the Western Area Narcotics Team (W.A.N.T.) task force, an aggressive, long-overdue tool for combating drug trafficking and related crimes in the Paducah area.

Developing the Task Force

During the first part of 1987, local law enforcement agencies met to discuss the possibility of developing a drug enforcement task force. Subsequently, problems were identified, solutions were addressed, and efforts were made to obtain funding through a Federal grant.

In addition, applicable Kentucky State laws were found to specifically address the task force concept. Under Kentucky Revised Statutes (K.R.S.) 431.007, entitled "Request for Mutual Assistance Law," one police department is allowed to request the assistance of another police department for a specific purpose. Unfortunately, this offered a short-term solution and one that required paperwork each time it was used. While suitable for emergency situations and for some short-term specific investigations of mutual interest, this law was not appropriate for longer, more complex drug enforcement efforts.

However, under the "Inter-Local Cooperation Act" (K.R.S. 65.210 through 65.300), government agencies could sign legal and long-term contracts which specifically outlined the circumstances and conditions that would allow law enforcement departments to work together. This was the best applicable law for the purposes of the western Kentucky area.

Review of Other Task Forces

Once it was determined that Kentucky State laws allowed for interagency operations, Paducah police officers reviewed the operational plans of other law enforcement agencies that had already developed aggressive drug enforcement programs or task forces. This was done to study what worked best and what problems commonly arose that could be avoided and/or addressed in advance.

“**Pooling manpower, resources, and expertise offered a viable weapon against the area's drug barons.**”

One task force studied consisted of personnel from city, State, and local Federal agencies. However, this particular task force already worked in the same jurisdictional area; basically, they joined forces to prevent duplication of work and to increase the amount of available resources. Because the main problem in western Kentucky was the lack of overlapping jurisdiction, the proposed regional task force needed an operational plan that would facilitate cooperation between the various law enforcement agencies involved.

Another task force in Kentucky, which had operated under an Inter-Local Cooperation Agreement since 1979, was also studied. This task force dealt with an area cover-

ing 39 cities and 3 adjoining counties with an international airport and a dense population of over 270,000 people, which obviously created difficult working conditions. The participants in this task force agreed to set up a separate agency specifically for drug enforcement. Each member department gave some type of support to this new agency, either in the form of manpower and/or financial support. Yet, while this was the best type of operation for the area, several problems were still encountered.

Problems Identified From Review

During the reviews of both forces, it became evident that both systems had inherent problems.

- **Resentment**

Some police officers displayed obvious resentment toward the task force members. In fact, task force officers readily admitted a lack of cooperation existed among the participating departments and that jealousy prevented the sharing of information freely.

- **Funding**

Maintaining such a unit is quite expensive, which necessitated year-round funding. This required some task force members to spend the majority of their time simply trying to obtain the necessary operating funds, which caused them to make less desirable court plea bargain arrangements for the forfeiture of seized assets. Also, the interagency cooperating

agreement did not provide stipulations regarding funding. A department that was dissatisfied with the way in which an operation was being conducted could terminate or seriously restrict funding at any time, without notice.

- **Personnel**

There remained the issue of personnel assigned to the task force. No arrangement had been made as to the caliber of officer transferred to the unit. Were departments, in fact, sending their most experienced, qualified officers in the area of drug investigations, or were they using the task force assignment for those who were undisciplined, ineffective, or simply just problem officers?

- **Seized Assets**

There were also frequent disputes over the division of seized assets. It was learned that with one task force, departments involved in drug arrests raced to seize property from drug dealers. In some cases, officers would even run past the person to be arrested in order to seize the property. There were also disagreements over which agency contributed the most to the operation.

The Paducah Program

After studying the various issues and task forces, the Paducah Police Department believed that a task force program needed to be designed specifically to meet Paducah's needs. It was concluded

that a more appropriate task force agreement would be to allow each member department to have direct control over drug investigations within its jurisdiction. This enabled each department to protect its own community while showing support of the program. Because each department involved would play as active a role in drug enforcement as it wished, jealousy should be eliminated. And, an arrest in any department's jurisdiction would directly reflect on that department, not on an agency that didn't participate in the operation. Problems could also be resolved more quickly because they would directly affect each respective police department instead of an external agency.

Each department would have final authority over all investigations within its jurisdiction, and the

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**Membership in the
W.A.N.T. task force
required only a desire
to join.**
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supporting departments would have the choice of either to assist in the investigation or to refuse to be involved. Thus, each department could maintain its own standards, prepare its own news releases, and could successfully prosecute in its court system.

Membership in the W.A.N.T. task force required only a desire to join. Therefore, every department could participate regardless of its financial capability or size. In fact,

several departments in western Kentucky had only one or two officers and limited funding, but still became participating members of the task force. It was just as easy for small agencies to be involved as larger agencies, and their voting power within the task force was equal. The belief that brought this task force together was that all agencies in the western Kentucky area were equally affected by drug dealing and substance abuse.

A method for dividing seized property was also incorporated into the agreement. Property would be equally shared by the departments that directly participated in the investigation, after expenses were paid. The shares would be equal whether a department spent 1 hour or 100 hours assisting in the investigation. Therefore, the investigators could focus their attention on the safety of their fellow officers and citizens and on catching the criminal rather than "grabbing" at what they believed was their personal cache.

The W.A.N.T. task force was also organized so that it did not require direct funding. Each department would supply what equipment and manpower it had available at the time of each investigation and would retain control over these resources. Also, since jointly owned property was discouraged, there would be no disputes over when and for which investigations the equipment would be used.

Contact officers were designated within each department so that all participating departments would have a chain of command to

follow when communicating or working together. This assured that intelligence information would reach the proper people so that the case would get proper attention. This also enabled all participating departments to know who was in authority during the task force operation. The head of each department would also be greatly encouraged to select only the best and most competent officers to represent that department in the investigation.

It was recognized early in the implementation stage that not all departments would be able to work well with all the other task force participants all of the time. Therefore, the task force was set up in such a way so as not to require any one department to work with all the other departments in order to function effectively. For example, if one department did not get along well with another department, it could work with those that it did get along with. If one particular department had problems with all or most of the other departments, then the task force agreement required that the individual department work out its differences.

Regular task force meetings fostered confidence and friendships among the participating departments. This prevented frictions from developing over particular philosophies and personality conflicts. Even though the task force was limited to drug investigations, these regular meetings assisted in developing cooperation among the participating departments in other areas of law enforcement.

Conclusion

Since its inception, the Western Area Narcotics Team Task Force has been responsible for over 83 arrests involving serious drug dealers, the seizure of over 3.3 kilos of cocaine, approximately 13.4 pounds of marijuana, and 700 narcotic pills in its first year. Departments that have never been able to

vancement in the area of drug enforcement. The task force members have also received several inquiries from agencies across the United States and are often contacted to speak about the task force concept and to help set up similar operations.

Involvement in the task force has brought about new thoughts and concepts on better drug enforce-

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Regular task force meetings fostered confidence and friendships among the participating departments.
”

effectively deal with drug trafficking are now making arrests that previously might never have been made.

The Paducah Police Department and the surrounding area departments have benefited greatly by the task force concept. Cooperation and unity have been fostered, which has helped inspire community confidence in law enforcement departments. This, in turn, has encouraged citizens to provide more information on drug dealers to local law enforcement departments. In addition, the task force has helped to offset the expenses of catching drug dealers in the area.

The task force is still growing, and it appears that it may be one of the greatest law enforcement advancements in western Kentucky. As an indirect result, cooperation with Federal agencies developed, opening more doors for further ad-

ment and additional resources into play that were not accessible in previous years. However, as in all situations, actions speak louder than words. And, in Paducah's case, the best result of the task force is that the Paducah crime rate has decreased by 42 percent, robberies have decreased by 20 percent and overall thefts have decreased by 18 percent in just one year. This decrease, which is the first in Paducah's recent history, has been a direct result of this task force. With drug violation arrests up over 31 percent, needless to say, selling the idea of the task force is no longer a problem in the Paducah area.

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Commander Gordon heads the Special Investigations Unit of the Paducah, Kentucky, Police Department.
