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**National Guard Counterdrug Lessons Learned**

**10 FEBRUARY 1992**

*Compiled by: The National Interagency Counterdrug Institute*





DEPARTMENTS OF THE ARMY AND THE AIR FORCE

NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310-2500



February 6, 1992

The following are lessons learned extracted from After Action Reports (AARs) submitted to National Guard Bureau, Directorate for Military Support, during FY 1991. Approximately 3,500 AARs were reviewed by the Research and Evaluation Division of the National Interagency Counterdrug Institute (NICI) to develop these lessons learned.

The types of counterdrug support provided by the National Guard continue to evolve. The number of missions performed has increased over each of the past three years. In support of the National Drug Control Strategy, we anticipate these trends to continue for the foreseeable future. To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this support, it is important that we continually review the performance of the National Guard in working with its law enforcement counterparts. Questions concerning this publication may be addressed to the National Guard Bureau, Military Support Division (NGB-MSD) at (703) 746-7744/DSN 286-7744 or to the NICI Research and Evaluation Division at (805) 549-3968/DSN 878-9968.

I hope these lessons learned will prove useful to your future endeavors in combatting the scourge of illegal drugs.

*Francis J. Bray*  
FRANCIS J. BRAY  
Deputy Director  
for Military Support

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Mission #2, Ground Surveillance  
(Drug Interdiction)

**Observation.** National Guard personnel in support of US Customs Service travelled to airfields to record aircraft tail numbers. The uniform was civilian clothes with transportation via rental car. The supported customs office provided pre-addressed, stamped envelopes so that information could be mailed back every two days. Customs also provided a Letter of Introduction explaining the mission of the National Guard personnel. This letter proved useful when local police detained the Guard personnel after they were observed as suspicious.

**Lessons Learned.** Personnel conducting missions out of uniform should carry some type of explanatory document such as a Letter of Introduction that provides a law enforcement point of contact in case questions arise. Planning ahead for information handling, such as carrying pre-addressed, stamped envelopes, facilitates rapid transfer of information back to the supported LEA and reduces the amount of sensitive information handled by Guard personnel at any one time.



**Observation.** Many surveillance operations take place in populated areas and require special considerations beyond digging a foxhole and wearing camouflage. In some locations, such as parks and recreation areas, blending in with the surroundings requires an

OPSEC approach different than that found in traditional military operations.

**Lessons Learned.** Several states indicated that infiltration and exfiltration via civilian vehicles often provided the best OPSEC. In some cases, "recreational camouflage" was believed to be the most successful. For example, personnel conducting surveillance along a waterfront used beach chairs and wore swim wear. In another situation personnel conducted observation from within a recreational vehicle.



**Observation.** Ground surveillance in remote areas often requires the use of civilian lodging. OPSEC especially becomes a problem in small towns where "everybody knows everybody."

**Lessons Learned.** One approach is to spread out surveillance teams into several motels; however, this creates additional transportation challenges. Use of civilian accommodations requires detailed planning, particularly in the area of logistics. Operations should be planned well in advance to provide personnel time to obtain travel advances for lodging. Contracting for quarters or use of government credit cards degrades OPSEC.



**Observation.** Guard personnel were tasked to conduct airfield surveillance in support of a local police department. No coordination was conducted with either

US Customs or the FAA to provide tail number and flight plan checks. Failure to conduct this coordination made the information gathered virtually useless for interdiction purposes.

**Lessons learned.** Coordination with other law enforcement agencies was primarily the responsibility of the local police department as the lead agency. However, proper intelligence planning, to include Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB), by the unit providing support should have identified this shortcoming. The unit providing support could then have recommended that the local police department make arrangements to run tail number checks.



**Mission #4, Aerial  
Reconnaissance (Marijuana  
Eradication)**

**Observation.** Marijuana growing sites are often located in rugged terrain that makes land navigation difficult and restricts line of sight to cultivation plots. In these situations ground eradication teams often have difficulty finding cultivation sites which were spotted from the air.

**Lessons Learned.** Several solutions identified to this problem have drawbacks but have been found successful by some states: 1) The use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) makes possible the precision identification of ground locations from the air and greatly aids land navigation to sites identified. GPS, however, is still

not a practical solution in many situations due to lack of the equipment; 2) Having aerial observers remain in the air to direct ground crews to marijuana locations is effective, but the extra flight hours consumes a great deal of time and fuel; 3) Having eradication teams rappel into marijuana sites seems to be a highly effective method; however, this technique requires special training of air crews and ground teams plus presents a higher safety risk.



**Observation.** Aerial reconnaissance flight hours were devoted to search for marijuana cultivation during periods when plants were too small to observe from the air. No plants were spotted during these missions.

**Lessons Learned.** The local growing season should be considered when scheduling aerial reconnaissance for marijuana. In many areas aerial recon is a waste of time before the growing season and after the harvest. In some cases, however, early aerial recon can identify green houses and signs of construction which may indicate illegal cultivation. Analysis of the growing season and the modes of operation used by growers (use of greenhouses, irrigation systems, etc.) should be a standard part of the intelligence preparation conducted prior to aerial reconnaissance.



**Observation.** Identifying marijuana from the air is very difficult. Untrained

observers often miss growing sites which might have been noticed by more experienced personnel.

**Lessons Learned.** Aerial observers often require special training in marijuana spotting in order to be efficient at the job. The Drug Enforcement Administration's local Cannabis Coordinator may be able to arrange this training for units that provide aerial reconnaissance support.



**Observation.** Some operation plans called for aerial reconnaissance for marijuana locations several days prior to eradication operations. When ground teams arrived on site to destroy gardens the cannabis had already been harvested.

**Lessons Learned.** OPSEC, deception operations, and timely follow-up with eradication of identified sites are especially important as a part of aerial reconnaissance plans. Otherwise, growers may be tipped off and harvest their marijuana before eradication takes place. Also, if arrests are planned as a part of eradication operations aerial reconnaissance may spook growers away from their plots.



**Observation.** While conducting aerial reconnaissance in support of ground eradication teams, an aircrew spotted additional cultivation sites. This information could not be transmitted to the ground team because the aircraft's FM radios were only equipped with

military frequencies while the ground teams used only law enforcement radios which operated on different frequencies.

**Lessons learned.** Eradication operations using aerial recon should plan for ground to air commo.



**Observation.** Even with trained observers, verification of marijuana plots often requires aircraft to drop below 500' AGL.

**Lessons learned.** The need to fly below 500' AGL may rule out the use of fixed-wing aircraft for reconnaissance of potential marijuana sites.



Mission #6, Aerial Transportation Support.

**Observation.** On a day with moderate temperatures, law enforcement officers designated to travel in military aircraft wore T-shirts and shorts. By the time the officers arrived at the aircraft for the mission it was too late for them to obtain warmer clothing. At 1000' AGL the air was considerably cooler and caused the passengers to be uncomfortably cold during the flight.

**Lessons learned.** Law enforcement officers must be briefed on appropriate clothing for flying in military aircraft. This briefing should take place early enough to provide the officers time to dress properly. If sufficient supplies are available, providing flight suits to

passengers is a good idea for both comfort and safety.



**Mission #8, Cargo Inspection.**

**Observation.** Guard personnel assigned to conduct container searches in support of US Customs arrived at the port of entry without the tools necessary for the mission. Customs personnel on site provided some equipment but not in sufficient quantity to equip all the Guard personnel, some personnel were therefore underutilized.

**Lessons learned.** Efficient performance of this mission often requires special tools. Since container searches are not typical military missions, units that have not conducted them before need to plan ahead so they can determine the right equipment and order it through the logistics system. Prior coordination with the supported agency can often identify the equipment usually required for the job. A recommended Prescribed Load List (PLL) for cargo inspections is at the back of this bulletin.



**Mission #10, Aerial Photo Reconnaissance.**

**Observation.** Guard personnel coordinated to provide aerial photo reconnaissance for a law enforcement agency in support of marijuana eradication operations. After

processing, the photos were provided directly to the LEA. Marijuana patches were visible in the photographs but weren't recognized because the law enforcement personnel were not trained in photo interpretation.

**Lessons learned.** The use of military aerial photography should always include arrangements for photo interpretation by qualified personnel.



**Mission #14, Admin, Information, ADP, Log, and Maintenance Support.**

**Observation.** Guard members providing these types of support are often the only military personnel working in an LEA office. The supported locations may be a great distance from the nearest military supervisor. The independent nature of these missions present the potential for the misuse of personnel.

**Lessons learned.** In situations where Guard members work in a different location than their military supervisor a clear job description should be developed in conjunction with the supported LEA. A formal or informal agreement should be created with the supported agency to specify the Guard member's: LEA supervisor, duties, duty hours, and uniform. The supported agency should also provide periodic feedback on the Guard member's job performance.



### Communications, General.

**Observation.** Poor communications is most frequent problem mentioned in AARs. Use of incompatible military and law enforcement radios and insufficient range for the terrain and size of the area of operations are common problems.

**Lessons learned.** Communications planners from both the supported LEA and the military unit providing support must be brought in at the very beginning of the planning process. Wide variations in equipment and the factors of Mission, Enemy, Terrain, Time, and Troops available (METT-T) for each mission makes it impossible to develop a standard communications solution. However, techniques found useful in many operations include: use of LEA radios by Guard personnel, providing military radios to LEA officers, and developing a communications plan that provides critical nodes to link LEA and military systems. Some states have found the use of cellular phones and pagers to be successful.



### Communications Security (COMSEC).

**Observation.** The use of secure communications requires special equipment and reduces radio range. Because of these difficulties, communications during counterdrug operations are often conducted in the clear and thus compromised. Drug traffickers have been found to utilize scanners and sophisticated signal

intelligence (SIGINT) methods which enable them to discover and avoid interdiction efforts.

**Lessons learned.** An assessment of the SIGINT threat should be part of the intelligence estimate developed for every counterdrug operation. Communications and operations planners must weigh the tradeoffs between COMSEC and the potential reduction in equipment availability and capabilities for each operation. Use of communications in the clear will often make interdiction efforts completely ineffective.



### Miscellaneous Issues.

**Observation.** Language skills are often a valuable asset Guard members can bring to counterdrug operations. During a mission providing support to U.S. Customs in the conduct of mail searches, a Guard member translated a note written in Farsi that described a hidden compartment containing drugs in a furniture shipment. This information resulted in a seizure. In another mission, National Guard support of the U.S. Border Patrol resulted in the apprehension of an individual who spoke only Chinese. A quick-thinking Guard member called a Chinese language professor at the local college who then provided translation over the phone.

**Lessons learned.** POMSOs or Coordinators should maintain a list of Guard personnel with special language skills. Depending on the demand for

translation support, states may wish to create a centralized translation "lab."



### Logistics Issues.

**Observation.** Some personnel providing counterdrug support lived within a 50-mile radius of the operation while others did not. This disparity resulted in some team members staying in a hotel while others had to drive for an hour to get home at the conclusion of a 16-hour duty shift. The travel time to and from the duty location forced the commander to either alter the mission plan or accept a safety risk in allowing personnel to operate with little sleep.

**Lessons learned.** There are two possible logistic solutions to this problem: 1) If lodging is contracted for the team, no reimbursement through a DD 1351-2 is necessary and Guard members within the 50-mile radius may use the contracted quarters; or, 2) If the commander so determines, the use of commercial lodging within the 50-mile radius can be authorized by including the following statement on orders as appropriate: "Lodging is authorized within the 50-mile radius due to operational necessity and convenience of the government."



### After Action Reporting

Timely and accurate submission of after action reports is critical to the

success of the National Guard counterdrug support program. Lessons learned identified during operations should be submitted as a part of after action reporting as required by National Guard Regulation (AR) 500-2/ (AF) 55-6. Written reports should be mailed to :

Chief, National Guard Bureau  
ATTN: NGB-MSD  
Pentagon, Rm 2D374  
Washington, DC 20310-2500



Recommended Load List For Container Search Support
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**Item Description**

**Stock Number**

Bar, Combination and Scraper	5120-00-965-0879
Bag, Tool Satchel	5140-00-473-6256
Hammer, Carpenters	5120-00-892-5485
Knife, Craftsman's	5110-00-925-5971
Shears, Metal	5120-00-221-1085
Screwdriver, Flat Tip	5120-00-234-8910
Combination Wrench Set	5120-00-935-7310
Wrench, Adjustable	5120-00-449-8083
Screwdriver, Cross Tip	5120-00-234-8912
Shears, Metal, 10"	5110-00-273-0128
Tape, Measuring, Steel, 50'	5210-00-234-6745
Pliers, Adjustable	5120-00-278-0352
Goggles, Safety	5855-01-228-0936
Cordless Drill w/Charger (Open Purch.)	5120-00-X06-7542
(Various drill bits may required depending on the Customs operation receiving support. 3/8" and 11/32" are common.)	
Suppressor, Sound	4240-00-027-2946

Rags, flashlights with batteries, duct tape, heavy work gloves, dust masks, and miscellaneous office supplies will also be required.

For Further Information...

*The National Interagency Counterdrug Institute (NICI), a federally funded activity of the Department of Defense, was established December 12, 1990, by the Honorable Stephen M. Duncan, Department of Defense Coordinator for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support. NICI supports the National Drug Control Strategy by training representatives of law enforcement and military organizations, analyzing tactics and procedures, establishing a repository of lessons learned, and disseminating information on counterdrug related issues, seminars, and conferences.*

The National Interagency Counterdrug Institute (NICI) provides management-level training in the planning and conduct of joint counterdrug operations to both military and law enforcement personnel. The Counterdrug Managers' Course is a 5 day course presented by NICI approximately 20 times a year. The course is designed to enhance the interoperability of military and drug law enforcement agencies. Classes are conducted at San Luis Obispo, California and various other sites across the United States. Individuals interested in attending the course should contact NICI Student Services at (805) 549-3966 or DSN 630-9966.

The Research and Analysis (R&A) Division of NICI publishes a monthly *NICI Bulletin* to provide information to the counterdrug community (drug law enforcement agencies and their military counterpart) on counterdrug-related conferences and seminars. To be placed on the mailing list for the *NICI Bulletin*, or to have information on your conference or seminar included in the bulletin, contact the NICI R&A Division at (805) 549-3968 or DSN 630-9968.

The NICI Research and Analysis Division also maintains an extensive library of materials on joint counterdrug operations and general drug policy issues. The Division offers a Request for Information service free of charge to the counterdrug community. Contact them to obtain copies of publications or to ask questions concerning military support to counterdrug operations.