

CHICAGO, ILL.
SUN-TIMES

M - 536,108
S - 709,123

JAN 29 1973

A ton of opium slips through U.S. hands

By Morton Kondracke
Sun-Times Bureau

WASHINGTON -- A ton of opium, equivalent of 200 pounds of pure heroin, was returned to Chinese smugglers by U.S. and Thai officials last March at the time that they seized another 26 tons, House investigators have charged.

The investigators reported that the American officials explained that they had been provided government visas to acquire the 26 tons, but lacked the money to get the 27th.

Despite reports to the contrary, the 26 tons was burned, according to a House Foreign Affairs Committee staff report.

It said, however, "it is unfortunate that there is no official explanation available which could indicate what actually did happen to the 27th ton of opium. It could have been returned to Burma or it could have been smuggled to Bangkok, Hong Kong or elsewhere."

The U.S. and Thai governments paid \$1,870,000 to get the 26 tons, according to the House report, or about \$71,000 a ton. Two hundred pounds of heroin, when cut for U.S. addicts, is worth some \$52,000.

The House report, entitled "The U.S. Heroin Problem and Southeast Asia," was prepared by committee staff members John J. Brady and Robert K. Boyer after a seven-nation Asian trip last August. The report was released Jan. 12, but attracted no attention at the time.

House staff members declined to identify the agency represented by U.S. officials who allowed the ton of opium to leave Thailand. They said the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs which engineered the acquisition of the 26 tons, was not responsible.

BNDD officials characterized the House report as "unverified raw intelligence" whose accuracy they doubted.

U.S. should "get tough" with foreign drug sources, says Illinois congressman, Page 30.

but could not disprove.

Nelson Gross, former State Department drug chief, said in a telephone interview that he, too, had been unable to verify whether a 27th ton was delivered, but he said that any U.S. official who advised returning it "never reported back" and was operating "absolutely contrary to instructions."

Seizure of the 26 tons of Burmese opium was the result of an arrangement whereby \$1 million in U.S. funds and another \$800,000 in Thai money was used to purchase and clear land for resettlement by two groups of ethnic Chinese irregular military forces which had acted as smugglers.

In return for the land, the Chinese were to turn over all of their opium stocks to the Thai government. The 26 tons was turned over and burned on March 7, 1972, said the House report.

BNDD officials inspected the cache before burning and watched it burn, but they were not present when it was turned over by the Chinese, according to both House investigators and the BNDD.

The investigators said they first learned from a "high-ranking Thai official" that "the Chinese actually brought 27 tons of opium to the turn-in point, but Thai and U.S. authorities refused to accept the additional ton. . . . Instead, the (Chinese) were told to get the additional ton out of Thailand."

"When questioned as to why the ton of opium was refused, both Thai and U.S. officials told the survey team that there was no additional money authorized to pay for the extra ton and that they did not wish to negotiate further with the (Chinese), lest the whole deal be thrown off."

(1) The investigators could find no evidence that the Central Intelligence Agency, the U.S. Customs, Air America, or the CIA-financed secret army of Meo tribesmen in Laos was involved in drug traffic, as has been alleged.

(2) Despite suspicions, the investigators could find no solid evidence of continuing involvement in the drug trade by high-ranking officials in Thailand, Laos or South Vietnam. In Vietnam, the House team did find that the father of Gen. Ngo Dzu, former commander of Military Region 2 and newly

named to the cease-fire supervisory commission, was "believed to be implicated in a heroin trafficking ring."

(3) The increased use of heroin by American GIs in Vietnam "coincided" with a U.S. military crackdown on marijuana in a . . . Military authorities launched an "all-out effort to eradicate marijuana smoking" in 1966 by defoliating fields where the plant grew and strictly disciplining marijuana users, said the report.

(4) Despite some bureaucratic inefficiency in Washington, the House staff reported successful meshing of U.S. anti-drug forces with Southeast Asian governments in all countries except Burma, where the United States has few programs and little influence. The report said that more than half of the illicit opium produced in the so-called "Golden Triangle" of Southeast Asia is grown in Burma.

APPROVED FOR RELEASE □
DATE: 29-Oct-2009