

STATINTL

WASHINGTON CLOSE-UP

Homage to CIA Drug Fight Ironic

By JUDITH RANDAL

The American Medical Association, which predictably offers few surprises at its annual meeting, achieved the unexpected this year.

As one entered the convention's exhibition hall in San Francisco's Civic Center, one's nostrils were assailed by an odor more appropriate to that city's Haight-Ashbury district — an aroma strongly suggestive of the burning leaves and blossoms of the female *Cannabis sativa* plant.

The scent fired the curiosity of all in the hall who had ever sampled marijuana and drew from the wife of one physician attending the meeting the remark that she had smelled that odor many times in the back of the school bus she drives.

That was only the beginning of the surprise. Following one's nose, one soon came upon a booth housing an exhibit on drug abuse which featured a display about many drugs, including pot, and a device that generated a synthetic smoke that was close to, if not identical with the real thing.

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There was still more surprise to come in this display, which — it turned out — had won the gold medal in the AMA's coveted Billings Prize competition as one of the outstanding scientific exhibits of the meeting. The exhibitor was no mere doctor or pharmaceutical firm, or even your average, run-of-the-mill science-oriented government bureau. It was that most unlikely of contenders for an AMA award: The Central Intelligence Agency.

Dr. Donald Borcharding of the CIA was on hand to explain the exhibit's origins. Like most agencies, he said, the CIA has an occupational health division whose job it is to promote the well-being of its personnel. When CIA officials at the agency's Langley,

Va., headquarters became worried about pot, LSD, speed, heroin and the like, Borcharding and his colleagues assembled the display.

According to the CIA medic, it was an immediate hit, not only at the Langley "Spook Farm" but also among groups in the community, such as Knights of Columbus lodges and parent-teacher associations. The CIA is thinking about putting together "how-to-do-it" instructions so that other groups can build their own replicas.

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Granted, the crusade against drug abuse needs all the help it can get. But the trouble with the CIA exhibit is that it does not tell things strictly as they are. For example, it implies that the use of marijuana sets the stage for later use of heroin. This issue is by no means settled and, as a matter of fact, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that alcohol, rather than marijuana, is the first drug to be abused by most people who subsequently become heroin addicts.

In any case, many experts believe that if there is any connection whatever between pot and heroin, it is their illegal status and that if the former were "decriminalized," its link with the latter would tend to disappear.

More important to this discussion than an argument about the casual relationship of the two drugs is the point that the CIA does not come into the campaign with completely clean hands. Reporters have been hearing for more than a year that the agency has been supporting the heroin traffic in the Golden Triangle region of Laos, Thailand and Burma, and that this opium byproduct has been one of the more important cargoes carried by Air America, an airline operating in Southeast

Asia whose charter business is almost exclusively with the CIA. The Golden Triangle region, incidentally, is said to grow 70 percent of the world's illicit opium from which morphine base, morphine and eventually heroin are derived.

For more details on the CIA's complicity in the heroin mess, one might consult an article entitled "Flowers of Evil" by historian Alfred W. McCoy, in the July issue of Harper's magazine. Part of a forthcoming book called "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia," the article spells out in detail how Vag Pao, long the leader of a CIA secret army in Laos, has become even more deeply involved in the drug traffic and what role this traffic has played in the importation of heroin into the United States and its use by our troops in South Vietnam.

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Writes McCoy of the situation: "As a result of direct and indirect American involvement, opium production has steadily increased, high-grade heroin production is flourishing and the Golden Triangle's poppy fields have become linked to markets in Europe and the U.S."

The CIA went away from the San Francisco meeting with a gold medal and, no doubt, a good many doctors who saw the exhibit went away impressed. Some of them probably learned for the first time what pot smells like.

But for others there was a bitter incongruity in the government's super-secret spy arm winning a medal for an exhibit on the horrors of drug abuse. To some it was a little like the Mafia getting a top award for a display of the evils of extortion, prostitution and gambling — and a few of the more socially aware physicians present did not hesitate to say so.

MORI/CDF