

One of the tableting machines seized in Mexico City is examined by Mexican federal agents. In the same room was a supply of raw powder ready to go into the hopper.



production, and it looked as though they were each more prolific than any predecessor. When the CENTAC concept came along, the minibennie traffic was a natural target.

More than half of all the minibennies seized had been reported by U.S. Customs at San Ysidro, California, just south of San Diego at the crossing point from Tijuana. Amounts found at any other port of entry along the border were negligible. The largest wholesalers in the country were in San Diego and Los Angeles. Obviously, the tableting machines were in Mexico, and the financiers and major traffickers in Tijuana.

During January 1974 plans were made for CENTAC 4. I served as the supervisor, and seven special agents were chosen for the special assignment from various domestic regions.

DEA Administrator John R. Bartels, Jr. sent a teletype to all regions on January 25, 1974, outlining the plan. Any case developed with over 25,000 minibennies was to be reported to CENTAC 4.

By the end of February, CENTAC 4 had moved into office space in San Diego and begun its work. The first step was to take all pertinent files and extract anything which could be used - any combination or extrapolation of facts and any names of potential informants. An organizational chart of the violators started to take shape.

The legwork began, checking motel records and all the other routine tasks. Interviewing witnesses was tricky because we wanted to maintain security and had to use indirection. If word of the investigation had hit the street, it would have been too easy for the California violators to step across the border into Tijuana or for the suspects there to move their operations.

By the middle of March we had the first witness before a federal grand jury. Meanwhile, as the special agents assigned coordinated the work of the regional offices, the organizational chart kept growing.

On April 1, a major break came along. The agents turned up an informant who could fill in the chart with names all over Mexico, going back to the beginning of the minibennie labs. He was a veteran violator from Tijuana, now living in California. And he was willing to testify.

During the first couple of months it became evident

that other DEA offices around the country, in response to the Administrator's teletype, were trying to put together their own minibennie conspiracy cases. Seattle and Phoenix had good cases underway, and Milwaukee was just getting started.

This trend gave rise to the final plan, which was in outline as follows. Encourage as many offices as possible to proceed with multiple-defendant conspiracy cases. Coordinate them to go to a grand jury for indictment at about the same time. Obtain sealed indictments nationwide and wait for a simultaneous roundup. Take all the evidence against the suspects in Mexico and present it to the Mexican Attorney General. Allow time for the Mexican Federal Judicial Police to make arrests and search for the laboratories. Then, as soon as significant action occurs in Mexico, give the signal for the domestic roundup.

It worked out exactly as planned. But I was never sure that it would, and there was nothing easy about it. During a trip to Mexico, Administrator Bartels met with the Attorney General Pedro Ojeda-Paullada and discussed the operation. We were assured of his cooperation.

On May 21, we held a meeting of Assistant U.S. Attorneys from the various cities cooperating in the investigation at the Justice Department offices in Washington. They were the ones who would handle the grand jury indictments in San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Phoenix, Milwaukee, Miami, and Boston. This list was to change a bit later on when some could not make the schedule, while others were added with new cases.

The CENTAC 4 agents in San Diego now had enough miscellaneous leads to keep them busy for a year. Conceivably, these local leads could have been developed into evidence to indict a couple of hundred defendants in California. But we did not have a year, and such a case would have become unmanageable. We concentrated instead on the major Mexican sources. New informants were developed and their testimony checked.

On July 17, a few of us went to Mexico City and briefed the DEA Regional Director and his staff in the