

## American Ingenuity

Call it what you may, American ingenuity, American know how, or the American way but its all the same. Americans are masters at the art of invention or improving upon what others create. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the United States now produces a strain of Marijuana (cannabis) that is far superior to that produced in most other countries, the drugs active ingredient, tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, having a greater pleasure giving effect.

Although the Drug Enforcement Administration rarely involves itself in Marijuana cases in the large east coast cities such as New York, heroin, crack and cocaine being their main targets, it is big business in the mid-west. Each year tons of the clandestinely grown mood altering hemp plant are located in Missouri's farm lands and public areas and destroyed by DEA's Marijuana Eradication Program. However Missouri's growers have also perfected the process of indoor cultivation or what DEA agents call "indoor grows."

Huge profits can be made from an initial investment of a few thousand dollars for irrigation equipment, heat producing lighting and fertilizer. Items which are easily obtainable and openly advertised in publications like "High Times".

On one auspicious occasion in the early 1990's, DEA St. Louis Special Agents raided a loft in a large warehouse within walking distance to the city's famous downtown Arch. And when they entered the immense cultivation area, they felt like they had slipped back in time and were in tropical rain forest with plants ten to sixteen feet high. However the majority of the "indoor grows" take place outside the city where the desolation of rural life provides security. And in a lonely and forlorn field in late 1993, Special Agent Pilot Hawthorne

Lee and Task Force Detective Steve Strahl would become victims of the creativeness of American marijuana growers.

Acting on informant information that a house in the "boondocks" was being used to grow the potent "weed", DEA St. Louis Task Force investigators checked the electric bill for the isolated farmhouse. The monthly charge was exorbitant, far in excess of the other homes in the area and what it should be. A good indication that high capacity lighting was being used to warm the plants.

Arrangements were then made with DEA Special Agent Pilot Hawthorne Lee to conduct a night "fly by" to "flare" the house, a technique, using sophisticated hi-tech equipment, to gauge the heat radiating from the wood frame building. However, on the night of the flight and at the eleventh hour, it was determined to everyone's consternation that the originally delegated "observer" was not checked out with the state of the art equipment in the DEA helicopter. After a quick check with the other Task Force officers involved in the operation, St. Louis Police Department Detective Steve Strahl volunteered to "fly" the mission. He was familiar with the numerous switches and dials and had done it before.

When the ground surveillance was in place, the chopper was "called in." To the agents and police officers in the woods, there was nothing unusual about the smooth "flack flack" of the approaching helicopter and nobody sensed danger hanging thick in the cockpit. But as the helicopter circled the targeted farmhouse, it inexplicably banked sharply and flew into a field. Horrified, the ground surveillance ran to the crash site. The helicopter was lying on its right side and the crushed body of Detective Steve Strahl was entangled in the wreckage. He had been killed instantly.

The choppers left door was pried open and its pilot was still breathing. However Special Agent Hawthorne Lee was in a deep coma, his head had violently struck the dashboard upon impact and his skull had been shattered. Hawthorne would remain in a comatose sleep and close to death for many weeks in a downtown St. Louis hospital and when he eventually awoke, he remembered nothing, not even his loving wife and children. Special Agent Hawthorne Lee would live but his life would never be the same again.

An investigation was conducted into the cause of the crash. Was it pilot error or was it caused by a mechanical failure? No one will probably ever know for sure but had it not been for the greed and ingenuity of American marijuana growers, it never would have happened!

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