

Narcotics Agents' Tactics Under Fire

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A paid government informant's intimidation of a defense witness has caused a U.S. judge to throw out a heroin sale case and has led two Alexandria attorneys to attack undercover tactics of U.S. narcotics agents.

The case involves street people with names like Be-more, Chicken and Bongo, moving in the murky world of drug sale setups and arrests, and raises questions of honor among thieves and the ethics of the stool pigeon's art. Be-more, nicknamed for the city of Baltimore where he began working for the Drug Enforcement Agency, was a paid government informant.

In the course of his job, Be-more last year brought two DEA undercover agents together with a heroin addict named Carter, from whom the agents later claimed to have bought 20 grams of heroin for \$825. Carter's attorney, John Zwerling, wanted a friend of Carter's named Chicken to testify in Carter's defense, but Chicken could not be found.

Sources on both sides agree that Be-more got to Chicken and told him that four gunmen were waiting at the courthouse and would shoot Chicken if he showed up to testify. Chicken promptly went into hiding at the home of Bongo, another friend.

At Carter's trial for narcotics sale on April 2, Zwerling told U.S. District Judge Albert V. Bryan Jr. about Be-more's intimidation of Chicken and the judge dismissed the case.

The judge, it is reliably reported, was angry; DEA officials say they were furious and embarrassed; and Zwerling was not satisfied. He has asked the U.S. attorney's office to indict Be-more for obstruction of justice.

"I am convinced the DEA took a minimal case here and blew it up to make the guy look like a big dealer, then filled Chicken full of dyes and sent him into hiding so he would not blow their case," Zwerling said. He said he knew of other cases where key def-

ense witnesses failed to show up for trial.

"They (DEA agents) aren't all bad, but this case is an outrage and I'm convinced it happens all the time," he said.

Another attorney, James M. Lowe, said yesterday he had another man plead guilty in a different case to a drug offense because Chicken was unavailable to testify for him. He also plans to ask the U.S. attorney's office to take action against Be-more.

Abraham L. Azzam, special agent in charge of the DEA Washington district office, made it clear he has no love for Be-more and was vehement that the agency disavows his action as those of a "stool pigeon gone bad."

Informants, he said, are not DEA agents but are paid mercenaries, street-savvy people in it for the money. "You won't find Be-more's background any worse than any of the defendants," Azzam said.

During the pretrial proceedings, Judge Bryan ordered the DEA to find Chicken and bring him in to testify for the defense, Be-more was told of this, Azzam said. "We kept getting comments from him like, 'I don't know where he is but I might be able to find him if I get some money for it,'" Azzam related.

"He really ran us a wild goose chase... at this point I don't believe anything he says," Be-more, Azzam said, is now blacklisted with the DEA and his informing career is over. Further action is possible, Azzam said, if there are difficulties in a D.C. case in which Be-more is "peripherally involved."

Zwerling charged that the DEA made no real effort to find Chicken, a charge Azzam denies. "We did nothing wrong; we did go out and try to find him. There was no obstruction of justice by the DEA."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Elsie Powell, who prosecuted the case against Carter, said Be-more told her Chicken was in Chicago. "His business is selling information and he didn't feel like giving out free samples."