

U.S. Says Top Drug Seller Eludes Justice

7/9/72 Cuban's Operation Put at \$25 Million Annually

By Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writer

Confidential files of the federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs show that a 32-year-old Cuban directs a heroin and cocaine wholesaling ring that is perhaps the largest in the nation's capital.

The Cuban, Pedro Antonio Mayari, of 2121 P St. NW, operates a well organized, Miami-to-Washington network that sells about \$25 million worth of narcotics a year, according to the BNDD reports.

This is enough to supply the annual needs of about 5,000 addicts and represents about 30 per cent of all hard drugs sold in Washington, the BNDD says.

Perhaps of greatest significance, copies of three dozen reports by the BNDD and metropolitan police obtained by The Washington Post show how Mayari has eluded prosecution for at least three years.

The reports detail an abortive attempt by the D.C. police to penetrate the ring and raise serious questions about the methods and efficiency of the war on narcotics here.

Mayari's case—call it the "Miami connection"—involves a raw police recruit thrust into a major investigation, an illegal sawed off shotgun, and finally a fiasco in which uniformed police arrested undercover agents.

But, law enforcement officials say that the Mayari case illustrates the difficulty of disrupting the narcotics



Pedro Antonio Mayari is described as dangerous by authorities.

traffic and the dedication of those government agents who would try.

From the reports and interviews with officials, the following account of the most recent attempt to get Mayari emerges:

Five undercover officers, including one police cadet without a gun, scheduled a rendezvous with Mayari to buy heroin last April 30 after meeting at

the Latin-Q restaurant, 1836 Columbia Rd. NW.

This followed a two-month investigation during which the officers spent thousands of dollars, rented an apartment at 13th Street and Rhode Island Avenue and a 1972 Cadillac to convince Mayari of their affluence and their status as big-time drug dealers.

Mayari apparently was unconvinced or grew skeptical. He gathered about 20 of his lieutenants at the Latin-Q the night the heroin buy was planned. He refused to sell the drugs and a fight erupted.

The officer in charge of the investigation reported that he had attempted a week earlier to recruit other policemen to work on the case and be present in undercover status during the narcotics buy.

The officer said that more than a dozen officers declined the assignment because they feared for their lives.

So several days before the scheduled buy, two of the officers purchased a shotgun and had the barrel sawed off. The gun would provide the necessary protection, the officers reasoned, if Mayari showed up with many of his lieutenants.

During the fight at the Latin-Q, the shotgun and one of the officers' service revolvers were fired. No one was hurt, and the officers escaped.

This incident apparently convinced Mayari that the men were not police officers because police do not normally have sawed-off shotguns, and the buy was accordingly rescheduled for the next day.

See MAYARI, A14, Col. 1

MAYARI, From A1

(One police official denied that the buy had been rescheduled but refused to elaborate.)

The license tag number of the undercover officers' Cadillac had been broadcast over the police radio because the undercover officers involved in the shooting incident the night before at the Latin-Q had escaped in it and were wanted for questioning.

While driving to meet Mayari for the rescheduled narcotics buy, the undercover officers were arrested by uniformed police.

They missed the meeting because their superiors were upset about the illegal sawed-off shotgun, they were also all taken off the case.

"We're willing to acknowledge that the investigation went sour," D.C. Police Insp. Robert L. Dollard said in an interview last week.

Referring to the young undercover officer who handed the case and made contact with Mayari, Dollard said: "He knows how to be an undercover agent like I know how to fly out the window."

Learning by Doing

Asked why such an apparently inexperienced officer had been assigned to work on such an important case, Dollard said that the only way the officer could "gain experience was by doing."

The police, BNDD officials and Assistant U.S. Attorney Harold J. Sullivan, head of the Drug Abuse Law Enforcement (DALE) coordination effort in the war on narcotics, here, all strongly urged that The Post not print information on the Cuban ring and Mayari.

Sullivan said that publication of information from the documents obtained by The Post could: ruin their investigation, result in possible pretrial publicity damaging to the government, alert Mayari's lieutenants and cause them to shift locations, and lead to the false impression among confidential informants that they are

not protected.

(In the documents obtained by The Post, confidential informants are identified only by a number and are not described in any other way.)

"An article (based on the documents) could cause an abortion of the investigation and be a tremendous disservice to the public interest," Sullivan said.

Information Issued

The day after Sullivan and the police were informed that The Post had copies of some documents relating to the Cuban ring, U.S. Attorney Harold H. Titus Jr. issued a press release, dated June 30, to announce the arrest a week earlier of a Cuban on a drug charge.

This release said in part:

"The lengthy investigation into a Miami-Washington narcotics corridor was intensified by the BNDD in January of last year. The principal figures in Florida and in the Washington area were identified and through efforts of the BNDD and the Metropolitan Police Department the operation of several have been penetrated."

Several high police offi-

cial, including top aides to Police Chief Jerry V. Wilson, said they were astonished at the press release because it effectively stated what the Post had been urged not to print.

Saying that the Miami-Washington narcotics operation was under "intensified" investigation and that it has been partially "penetrated" could have the same negative effect on the law enforcement effort as publication of an article based on the documents, the police officials said.

In his press release, however, Titus identified only one Cuban, Delphin Lopez, who was indicted on a charge of possession with intent to distribute more than one quarter of a kilogram of high quality cocaine.

June 25 Arrest

Lopez, 47, whose address is listed as 1827 S St. NW, was arrested about 1 a.m. on

June 25 near Washington's Greyhound bus station, Titus said in the press release.

One BNDD report identifies Lopez as "Mayari's lieutenant." Another says that Lopez (also known as Gallego) "usually chauffeurs Mayari and—when in Washington, D.C.—Rogelio Lara."

Lara, 35, is a native of the Dominican Republic and now lives in Miami. The BNDD reports variously identify Lara as Mayari's "connection" and "source" of illegal narcotics and chief of the Miami end of the operation.

In his press release, Titus praises the BNDD agents and local police for their work in the arrest of Lopez.

But earlier confidential BNDD report say that Lopez was, in fact, the person deemed approachable by an undercover agent as a link to Mayari that could result in penetration of the Cuban ring.

Lopez provided the first contact for "introducing an undercover agent into this closely knit and previously impregnable community of Cuban violators," according to one BNDD report.

The approach to Lopez—apparently an incautious member of Mayari's group—could be made by a Negro undercover agent with "a good rap, and a pocket full of money, a report says.

D.C. police were given a copy of that BNDD intelligence report, as is generally the procedure, and the approach to Lopez was successfully made by the young undercover agent.

This in turn led to the two-month, undercover investigation that culminated in the shooting incident April 30 at the Latin-Q restaurant, and the termination of the current D.C. police effort against Mayari.

As one police source familiar with the investigation privately said: "We failed to get Mr. Big (Mayari) so we arrested the contact man Lopez and put out a press release patting ourselves on the back."

"Praised" for Officials

Titus said in his June 30 press release on Lopez's arrest: "I am pleased to join with BNDD officials in their praise of the individual agents who handled this important investigation and the Metropolitan Police Department Morals Division

for the background intelligence it provided."

Insp. Dollard, head of the D.C. morals division, refused to provide more details on the case and the involvement of the five undercover officers.

All five have been transferred to other assignments, and at least one has been cited for buying, carrying and using the sawed-off shotgun.

Abraham L. Azzam of the BNDD said in an interview last month that the Cubans are involved in about 30 per cent of all illegal hard drug traffic in Washington. Another 30 per cent flows here on the famous New York-Washington narcotics corridor, according to Azzam.

He said that the remaining 40 per cent of hard drugs comes from small, "free lance" or one-time wholesalers.

Mayari deals with between 2 to 6 kilograms of high quality heroin or cocaine a week, according to BNDD agents.

One report says that Mayari deals in kilogram quantities of narcotics and "nothing smaller."

A kilogram (about 2.2 pounds) of high quality heroin sells wholesale for as much as \$50,000. It has a street value after being diluted of about five times as much, or \$250,000.

This means that Mayari's operation handles at least

100 kilograms of narcotics a year with an ultimate street value of \$25 million.

Phone Intercept

According to one BNDD report: "Mayari was also the subject of a telephone wire intercept in August of 1970 and has, subsequently, been ordered deported.

"However, due to U.S.-Cuba political relationships, nothing can be done to supervise Mayari's conduct," the report says. Mayari was born in Havana, Cuba.

Mayari could not be reached for comment on his alleged involvement in a Cuban drug ring here.

BNDD Agent Azzam said that a significant factor in the Mayari narcotics ring is the extensive contacts that Mayari has in the black community here.

Azzam said that the Cuban ring is larger than the narcotics operation run by the convicted Lawrence W. (Slippery) Jackson, who along with 55 others was indicted in 1969. Court records described the Jackson narcotics operation as 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The case was the biggest narcotics-conspiracy prosecution here in many years.

BNDD records show that Mayari received a suspended sentence in 1967 after being convicted for possession of marijuana in New York City. In 1970, he was arrested and charged with conspiracy to violate

the federal narcotics laws but the charges were dropped.

When asked about Mayari last week, Sullivan, the U.S. Attorney in charge of drug investigations, said: "No suspected dope organization is impenetrable."

In a series of interviews with other officials and lower level agents responsible for narcotics investigations here it is apparent that there is immense dedication, and those at all levels work very hard—often literally around the clock.

Coordination efforts among all federal and local agencies have really just begun this year with the establishment of the Drug Abuse Law Enforcement (DALE).

DALE is headed locally by prosecutor Sullivan, probably the most respected and best informed local law enforcement official on narcotics.

Within a year or possibly months, many officials and agents are optimistic that Sullivan will achieve a substantial step forward in the war on narcotics.

Robert Hinds, deputy director of the Baltimore-Washington BNDD office, said that members of Mayari's group "know we're looking for them."

"We anticipate a hell of a fine conspiracy case . . . and we're hoping for indictments by October," Hinds said.