

Heroin Hotline Nets Mostly Hot Air

By Jack Anderson

The heroin hotline, which President Nixon personally inaugurated with huge fanfare on April 7, has turned out to be a total flop.

It was supposed to be used by informers to tip off federal authorities where to find smuggled heroin. Yet it has helped agents to uncover only a few pinches of dangerous drugs.

As late as July 24, the President assured a gullible public that the fight against drugs had advanced from the 10-yard to the 50-yard line. "We have the ball now!" cried football fan Nixon. "Let's go!"

The cheerleading was echoed by Myles Ambrose, the hotline honcho, who said that "effective information" had been developed from some 5,000 hotline calls.

A secret report by the General Accounting Office, however, disputes these claims. Through June 30, declares the report, the heroin hotline recorded 28,341 calls. But all except 4,363 were totally worthless nut calls, obscene calls and harassing calls.

These 4,363 calls led to the seizure of a grand total of

three grams of marijuana in Los Angeles, two revolvers "and small quantities of miscellaneous dangerous drugs in New York City" and "3,300 dosage units of LSD" in San Francisco.

Up to June 30, in other words, the heroin hotline didn't produce a single sniff of heroin. The marijuana seizures were so inconsequential that they had to be measured in grams instead of pounds or kilograms, which narcotics agents usually use to describe their confiscated booty. Except for the LSD, almost any high school principal could turn up more drugs in a single locker sweep.

All told, the hotline netted seven small-fry suspects between the grand opening and June 30. Yet the hotline system had offices in 23 major cities and tied up narcotics agents who were taken away from more vital work.

Rep. Lester Wolff (D-N.Y.), who ordered the GAO report, confirmed to my associate, Les Whitten, that he had received the secret study. Wolff refused, however, to divulge the final totals. His staff is still studying them, he said, but his preliminary assessment indi-

cates little improvement in the hotline after June 30.

In short, the heroin hotline was a public relations contraption that produced more hot air than heroin. Indeed, even as the President praised it, the hotline was being quietly dismantled. Its long distance lines were reduced from 41 in April to five by the end of June. And the 27 narcotics people, who were borrowed by the hotline system, were cut back to a mere seven.

Footnote: So fouled up was the hotline operation, according to the GAO report, that even those calls described by Ambrose as "effective" were often never assigned to be checked out.

Classified Trash

The Air Force, with a straight face and high level approval, has solemnly adopted an elaborate, expensive new procedure for keeping foreign agents out of its trash cans.

Everyone who works in the civil engineering section must deposit all their daily trash into red-striped "classified disposal bags." These are stored each evening in classified containers, which are lugged to

the Pentagon basement once a week to be destroyed.

This special handling of unclassified trash, of course, costs the taxpayers a bundle. But the Air Force is taking no chances that a crumpled bit of secretarial scrap paper might jeopardize the nation's security.

At least used cigarette packs and empty coffee cups don't have to be treated as top secret. The new regulations direct, however, that "unclassified waste cans will be limited to an absolute minimum." These can be used for "only obviously unclassified waste such as tobacco products, pipe cleaners, coffee cups, glass, plastic or metal containers, paper clips, pencil stubs, tissue paper, paper napkins, etc. . . ."

Footnote: Col. Joseph D. Cooper, who drew up the new security regulations for the generals, explained to us that the unclassified trash is kept with the classified waste so the security men won't have to poke through the garbage and read all the discarded waste paper to determine whether it should be classified.