

U.S. Plans to Sell Huge Opium Cache



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THE FEDERAL government, believe it or not, is America's biggest opium trafficker. The authorities are quietly planning to unload hundreds of tons of the addictive drug from the secret hiding places beside the gold at Fort Knox and elsewhere.

Actually, the government opium peddling is all on the up and up. Besides being the source of the killer drug heroin, opium is also refined into the useful pain-killers morphine and codeine. The United States began building up an opium stockpile after World War II.

At the beginning of this year, there were 634 tons of opium in the stockpile, mostly refined into opium gum, morphine sulphate and codeine. Simultaneously, a bad opium crop in India created a codeine and morphine shortage.

Thus, the United States decided a good deal of the federal opium stash could be sold off for medical purposes and Congress is now considering approval of the sale to private industry.

Meanwhile, according to classified information from the Justice Department, the opium is under 24-hour guard at Fort Knox, at West Point and at a Naval Supply Depot in New Jersey, among other sites.

The precautions by the federal government are wise: a huge heroin cache in the custody of the New York police was recently stolen from under their noses by big-league drug traffickers.

PRESIDENT NIXON, the nation's most famous recorder of private conversations, was himself secretly recorded by a California editor two years ago in an embarrassing conversation.

At the time, Interior Secretary Rogers Morton had announced that he personally had decided to ban two new oil rigs from the pollution-plagued Santa Barbara Channel. Under federal court decisions, it is the Interior Secretary, and no one else, who can decide on such bans.

But at a press reception, Santa Barbara News-Press editor Paul Veblen began to question Mr. Nixon about who really ordered the ban on the rig platforms. President Nixon, astonishingly, claimed he, not Morton, did it. Unknown to the President, Veblen's pocket tape recorder was producing this verbatim record of Mr. Nixon's admission:

"Oh, we had him (Morton) make the announcement. But I made the decision. I made the decision. But he made the announcement. (In a lower voice) You know, really, they take a lot of heat. So I told Morton. I told him, I said, Rog, you go out there and make the announcement. But I, of course, made the decision, (Mr. Nixon chuckles). But give him the credit."

Morton got the credit, but now Mr. Nixon is getting the headaches. The big oil companies are trying to show the Morton decree was illegal, in part because Mr. Nixon, not Morton, really ordered it. And the tape could become a vital part of their arguments.