

# Dealers stashed morphine and heroin in condoms for protection from the rain

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Native Daughters of B.C., “brings in its wake degeneracy, crime and mental and physical ruin.” The Young Women’s Christian Association called the drug addicts “unfortunate victims of a heartless and commercialized organization which traffics in human souls for sordid gain,” suggesting the city provide a hospital to treat them.

H.H. Stevens, MP for Vancouver Centre, wrote back to say that the existing maximum sentence was seven years in jail and that the law did indeed provide for the deportation of anyone involved in the drug trade who had been in Canada less than five years.

The Opium Act had been amended in 1911 to include morphine, an opium derivative, and cocaine. (Heroin wasn’t added to the list until 1923.) Among white drug users, morphine was becoming the drug of choice.

The 1922 annual report of the federal Opium and Narcotic Drug Branch described how it was sold. “The smaller pedlar... does the drugs up in

small powders or ‘decks’ as they are generally known to the underworld, consisting of from one to three or four grains. These ‘decks’ are sold [for] anywhere from 50 cents to \$3 a piece, depending altogether on the scarcity of the article in the district concerned.”

Police continued to focus on opium smoking. In 1922, the RCMP handled 315 drug prosecutions in B.C., all but 15 against “Chinamen.” Risks aside, the profits for illicit dealers were enormous.

In 1922, a pound of opium purchased by someone licensed to possess it—a doctor, for example—sold for \$3. The street price for a pound of illegal opium ranged from \$50 to \$150.

BY MAY OF 1945, when the Women’s Protection Committee of the Lower Mainland United Way released its report on narcotics, an ounce of morphine—worth \$10 in a retail drug store—had a street value of \$8,700. Drug dealers sold it for \$20 a “grain”—one 480th of an ounce—to Van-

couver’s addicts, whose numbers were estimated at 400 to 500.

Where before World War II, large amounts of opium had been smuggled in from the “Orient” and sold in Chinatown, the report said, the war had disrupted that trade, forcing dealers to fall back on manufactured drugs, mainly morphine legitimately held by druggists and doctors. “Hardly a day passes that a drug store is not broken into or held up and a doctor’s small supply rifled.”

Street-level dealers put their morphine or heroin in a condom, tied it off to keep out the rain, and hid it in a park or someone’s garden. A typical cache of heroin or morphine ranged from five grains to several dozen capsules, and the dealer would take out a little at a time to sell.

The drug squad’s cases, Carter says, would often begin with a tip from a citizen. “They would phone in and say, ‘There’s something funny going on here.’ We’d go and search the area and find a cache of drugs.”



**Edward "Nick" Carter**

Carter tells of one stakeout following a tip from a Kerrisdale homeowner who found condom-wrapped drugs in her front garden. Carter and

his colleagues replaced the drugs with sugar and powdered milk and put the condom back, then waited for the dealer to show up.

“The lady of the house was serving us coffee as we watched her front garden,” recalled Carter. “We knew the fellow whose cache it was. When he came back he looked down at it and we said, ‘Come on, pick it up so we can grab you.’ He went away and came back a couple of times, and when he finally picked it up, we all yelled, ‘Sucker!’ and caught him.”

Then, as now, police concentrated on those higher up in the drug trade. “Our main job was not the drug addict, although we took them in,” said Carter. “A lot of them became our informants. If you got on the good side of them, a lot of them would give you something. With them we were able to develop conspiracy cases.”

The Mounties on the drug squad didn’t always get their man, however. Carter recalls one case from the late 1940s that started when a long-

shoreman found nearly 400 kilos of opium in the windlass—a hauling device—of a freighter originally bound for San Francisco that had been rerouted to Vancouver due to a storm. During a year-long investigation, Carter’s squad traced the drugs back to Hong Kong, then India.

“By the time we finished our case, India had been partitioned, so the case fell into the sink,” said Carter. “We never were able to prosecute. We had a perfect case too—we had all of the evidence we needed to convict the man who was the kingpin of the opium [trade] in the U.S.”

Some drug traffickers threatened to shoot it out with police to avoid arrest. Carter was never shot at by dealers, but was stabbed in the abdomen with a broken beer bottle. His training in jujitsu helped him to subdue and arrest the dealer.

Carter also received a split lip and broken fingers during other scuffles with crooks. He ended up having his nose straightened when he hit

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