

**UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS SURVIVAL
IN NARCOTICS INVESTIGATIONS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

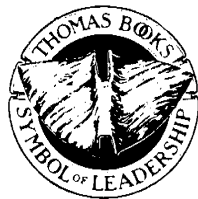
Tony Alvarez has been a police officer for twenty-one years with the Los Angeles Police Department. The last sixteen of these years he has been assigned to work in the field of narcotics enforcement. He is presently a Detective Supervisor in charge of a narcotics detail.

In the last eight years he has conducted classes and seminars which deal with undercover operations and officer survival and he presents training in local agencies throughout the nation. He has instructed at the F.B.I. Academy in Quantico, Virginia, the U.S. Customs in Los Angeles and San Diego, and is a lecturer for the California Narcotics Association at their annual conference and local training sessions.

UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS SURVIVAL IN NARCOTICS INVESTIGATIONS

By

TONY ALVAREZ



CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER

Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62794-9265

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© 1993 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
ISBN 0-398-05871-7 (cloth)
ISBN 0-398-06005-3 (paper)
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 93-13542

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*Printed in the United States of America
SC-R-3*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Alvarez, Tony.

Undercover operations survival in narcotics investigations / by
Tony Alvarez.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-398-05871-7. — ISBN 0-398-06005-3 (pbk.)

1. Undercover operations—United States. 2. Drug traffic—United
States—Investigation. I. Title. II. Title: Undercover operations
survival.

HV8080.U5A44 1993

363.4'5'0973—dc20

93-13542
CIP

PREFACE

Undercover work is some of the most dangerous and complicated type of investigations which can be undertaken by law enforcement officers. No one in this field has all of the answers with which these officers can operate and conduct those investigations. Most of the expertise developed in the field of narcotics enforcement is a result of on-the-job training. More experienced officers train the younger officers.

In this book I have attempted to relate my experiences and the experiences of officers with much expertise in this area. Even after spending seventeen years as a narcotics investigator, I find myself learning new ways in which to operate and conduct undercover operations. I have travelled extensively throughout this nation. I have been fortunate enough to instruct agents from the FBI, the U.S. Customs Service and numerous local law enforcement agencies. I have found that narcotics officers are yearning for knowledge in this area. Their questions display the fact that their training is minimal at best.

This book was written, as a reference, to be used for years to come by officers involved in the field of undercover operations. The stories which I cover are real cases. These have been painful occurrences which caused the deaths of some of the officers involved. I cover these cases in the hopes of giving the reader a better understanding of the principles which are outlined. Perhaps these cases would have been handled differently by other officers. It is my hope that the reader will be able to avoid committing the same type of mistakes if they were to undertake similar operations.

It is not my objective to criticize any of the agencies or officers involved in these investigations. These officers were and are heroes. Their mistake was costly and we should never undermine their decisions. Going over these cases, I attempted to point out those factors which I felt caused the breakdown in the operations.

While I do not single out, by name, any of the officers I have worked with, I must tell you that I am in their debt forever. Their dedication and

professionalism are without par. I have been lucky to have been associated with many outstanding officers throughout my career.

I have met and worked with undercover officers who are the cream of the crop. They have taken their time in teaching me the tricks of the trade. I have personally made many mistakes while working in an undercover capacity. I have been lucky, avoiding injury, while working in an undercover capacity. Sometimes it is better to be lucky than smart, especially if it keeps one alive. However, we can not count on luck all of the time. I'd rather rely on expertise, experience and professionalism.

After working in law enforcement for twenty-one years it is difficult to dedicate this book to a certain individual or individuals. I think of the first captain or lieutenant who gave me a chance to work a section within narcotics, the partners who took me under their wing and taught me everything they knew and more, my family who put up with the long hours and the mood changes, the supervisor who believed in me and got me started in the field of undercover operations, those who worked for me and gave me their all, the district attorneys from the major violators section who prosecuted the good and the not-so-good cases I brought them, the California Narcotic Officers' Association who have presented outstanding training for all narcotics officers, and last but not least, all of my brother officers in other local, federal and state agencies who assisted me in cases and investigations which we worked together. All these people and others, whom I haven't mentioned, should be given credit. Without all of them, I would not have been successful in my quest to excel in the area of officer survival and undercover operations.

This book will keep the memory of our fallen comrades alive. Individuals like Blackie Sawyer, Norm Eckles, Tommy De La Rosa, Raymond Hicks, Kelly Key and hundreds of others whom I do not mention. These fine, dedicated officers must not be forgotten.

T.A.

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**UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS SURVIVAL
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Chapter 1

UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS

Undercover operations are used as a tool by law enforcement officers in the handling of certain types of investigations. While the undercover investigation is most prevalent in the field of vice and narcotics, this type of operation is also utilized by other sections within law enforcement. Because undercover operations are used daily by narcotics officers, most of the examples and cases which we will cover will involve narcotics investigators and investigations.

The techniques and procedures which will be outlined throughout this book could be easily adapted to any undercover operation.

There is a danger which is inherited in any law enforcement operation; however, undercover operations are one of the most dangerous and challenging types of investigations. It is because of this that we find ourselves in need of much tactical preparedness prior to the investigation and close, continuing assessment during the operation. Unlike other operations, the undercover operation is a very fluid type of investigation. By labeling an undercover operation as fluid, try to visualize the operation developing as it unfolds. Without much planning this type of operation can proceed very rapidly from a normal situation to an explosive conflict. In an undercover operation this change occurs without warning and at the least predicted moment.

Under the best of circumstances and with the best planning possible, it is difficult to regain control of the operation and the people involved once a suspect or suspects decides to take lethal action towards the undercover operator.

Because of all the unknowns and the possibilities of harm occurring to the undercover operator and his covering team, it is most important that we understand the wide range of investigations and the planning necessary to execute a safe undercover operation.

It is also very important to undertake every undercover operation with much care and concern. This type of operation must not fall into the category of complacency.

As law enforcement officers we have seen our peers approach vehicles and houses with very little care and with no anticipation for safety issues. This holds true due to the fact that officers become complacent as they repeat procedures while in the discharge of their daily duties.

All of the law enforcement officers involved in undercover operations must not let complacency become part of their vocabulary, as it pertains to law enforcement operations (in particular undercover operations). There is no such thing as just another undercover operation. The safety and well being of the officers involved, in undercover operations, becomes the most important aspect of that operation. It must be the goal of the supervisor and all of the officers involved to place their safety as the most important factor. There is no investigation, suspect or amount of narcotics/money worth the life of an undercover officer or any member of the covering team.

Because undercover officers are considered experts in their field and because there are many factors which have a bearing in the outcome of an undercover operation, it is very important to note that for the most part undercover operations fail, approximately, 70 percent of the time. The failure rate has no bearing in the ability or expertise of the undercover operator nor the information received by that officer. Many other factors come into play such as, informant involvement, location of operation, the suspect's feelings toward the undercover operator and any other factor having no bearing on the operation as it unfolds but which is viewed by the suspect as a negative factor.

It is because of all of the unknowns, as the operation unfolds, that we must not forget what is the mission of the undercover operator and the covering team. Simply put, they are there to seize contraband, obtain evidence and arrest the violator. Even when a meet or operations is concluded without an arrest or any seizure of contraband, if the officers involved are safe to go home that night the operation has to be labeled a success.

To point out how outside factors and pressures have a bearing on undercover operations, I will recall an operation involving one of my partners who was negotiating with a suspect to purchase 5 kilos of cocaine.

Every time that the undercover operator met with the suspect the conversation and negotiations would go without a problem. After the meet, the surveillance team would follow the suspect to his house where the suspect would go into his back yard and remove a pigeon from a cage.

The suspect would throw the pigeon up and watch it fly away. Three separate times, after meeting the undercover operator, the suspect would go through the same ritual. Each time he would call the undercover operator back and tell him that the time was not right and that they would get together again in the future to consummate the deal.

On the fourth time the suspect went back home and repeated the same procedure. This time however, he came out with the 5 kilos of cocaine. He was arrested. During the interview we ascertained that his witch doctor (the suspect was a Cuban national and was a strong believer in the Santeria religion) had told him to throw a pigeon up in the air prior to doing any dope deal. The witch doctor told him that if the pigeon flew to the left not to do the deal, but if the pigeon flew to the right to go through with the deal. Needless to say the first three times the pigeon flew to the left. The last time it went to the right and the suspect went to jail!

It is easy to understand why these operations don't have a higher rate of success. As it was pointed out before, there are too many outside factors and pressures which will have an impact in the outcome of the operation. These types of obstructions will take place regardless of the undercover operators' expertise, planning of the operation and investigative work done by all involved.

Nonetheless, undercover operations are one of the most challenging and unpredictable types of investigations in law enforcement today. If done properly and safely they will bear immediate gratification to all involved.

