



SBI Director Charles Dunn

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SBI Has Undergone Radical Changes

(Editor's note: Staff Writer Harry Smith spent six hours during the past week talking with State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) Director Charles Dunn, 36, has been director of the bureau since January of 1969. A graduate of the University, Dunn is a former columnist for The Daily Tar Heel and worked with The Chapel Hill Weekly and the Durham Morning Herald. He served as administrative assistant to N. C. Gov. Dan Moore before being appointed head of the SBI.)

DTH: The bureau has changed pretty radically since you became director, hasn't it?

DUNN: I think our role is changing very rapidly. We've more than doubled in size, from a total staff (including all personnel) of 58 when I became director to about 135. We now have about half what we need in the field and a third of what we need in the crime lab. We have just moved out of our original headquarters in the Justice Building to more spacious quarters, but even so they are crowded. We'll ask the next General Assembly for a new building.

DTH: Are you going to ask for more agents and better pay for the ones you now have?

DUNN: Yes. We are going to ask to double in size again. The number of hours we are working and the number of requests we cannot honor shows the need. We are moving after a more sophisticated type of criminal. And law enforcement is going to have to get more sophisticated to compete. We'd like to go out of business, but unfortunately it doesn't look like we can.

DTH: What types of cases can the bureau enter into directly without having been requested?

DUNN: We have initial jurisdiction in limited areas, including drug laws, election law violations and gambling. But we generally work in cooperation with local law enforcement officials.

DTH: Does the SBI actually make the arrests, or is it the local police?

DUNN: We all work together. We do, of course, have the power of arrest.

DTH: I noticed a recent report said the number of crime investigations are increasing. Is crime increasing at this same rate?

DUNN: I couldn't tell you. We are getting more requests for assistance now, but we're not able to answer all of them. I don't think there is any question that

crime is going up. The FBI statistics show that it is increasing.

DTH: Why is crime increasing?

DUNN: Crime is becoming more profitable.

DTH: What about the old saying "Crime doesn't pay"?

DUNN: It does. Crime does pay. Professional gangs are working in this state that are well organized and well trained and certainly better paid than some law enforcement officers.

DTH: What is your salary?

DUNN: \$20,000 per year. I'm overpaid. I am the only man in the SBI that is overpaid. My starting pay for agents is \$7,448 for a man with a college degree. He'll generally work 50 to 60 hours per week. The agents should be making a minimum of \$10,000.

DTH: Have you asked the General Assembly for an increase?

DUNN: We've raised the pay across the board five per cent. We are trying to get additional raises.

DTH: What course of study do you recommend to college students who want to go into law enforcement?

DUNN: The main thing is to be concerned with people, to want to do something in life. Law enforcement is the new Peace Corps. We're finding a lot of people entering the field because it's a challenge; they feel this is where the action is; they feel they can do some good for society. We had 300 applications for 10 jobs which became available the first of July.



Tom McSwain, SBI chemist, analyzes drug capsule in the SBI chemical laboratory.

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Insight

Stories and Photos by Harry Smith

Drug Problem: Major Concern Of Dunn

DTH: What means does your department use to combat the growing drug problem in the state?

DUNN: Every legal means we can. In addition to enforcing the criminal laws of the state, we do educational work whenever possible, such as going into the schools and speaking to groups. Because of the demand, however, we try to concentrate primarily on the young people. They have to make the decision. There is still a great deal of disbelief among adults that we have a drug problem. Young people, of course, know what's going on. Most young people know someone who has had problems with drugs, bad trips, deaths, etc.

DTH: Do you feel that the new no-knock law will have any effect on your investigations?

DUNN: I would just as soon not have it. It is a problem going into houses, because if you go knock on a door and tell them you are the police with a warrant, you can hear commodes flushing. It is a problem getting in; I think that there will need to be some very strict safeguards in how it can be used.

DTH: Couldn't it be a danger to your agents? It would seem that if your agents just walked in, they could end up getting shot.

DUNN: Of course, law enforcement is dangerous anyway. I think the main thing is the individual's rights. Perhaps the pendulum has gone too far to the left, possibly because of the mistakes that law enforcement has made in the past because they did not have the training to do the job they were expected to do. The fault there is also the citizens' fault. I would be against the pendulum swinging back too far to the right. We don't want a police state. We need some safeguards. I wouldn't mind seeing law enforcement have the resources it needs for the training and the equipment to compete with the criminals. I don't think these should be infringements on the individual's rights, however.

DTH: How many field agents do you have now?

DUNN: About 70.

DTH: These cover all aspects of crime?

DUNN: Yes. These are field agents.

DTH: All of them have full narcotics training?

DUNN: All of them are able to do narcotics work. We have about 10 throughout the state concentrating full-time on narcotics.

DTH: Does the SBI use undercover agents other than their regular field agents?

DUNN: Well, yes. Our agents work undercover. We do, however, get information from any source we can. A lot of the information comes from people not in law enforcement. Surprising as it may seem, much of our information comes from young people concerned about the problem. Young people have the most to lose with drugs and consequently much of the information comes from the young people themselves.

DTH: Does your department use dogs?

DUNN: We've got one that has been trained. We haven't actually used him in a raid yet.

DTH: Of course, you have informers?

DUNN: Yes.

DTH: Are your informers paid?

DUNN: Most aren't. Most give information, some anonymously, some write letters, some call.

DTH: Are any of them former people who have been arrested for drug violations?

DUNN: Yes, I would think some are. Most of them are concerned people. They might think drugs are getting into the neighborhood. One girl was giving us information because her boyfriend was on drugs and she felt that while she could compete with another woman, she couldn't compete with drugs, so she was trying to cut off the supply.

DTH: Does the bureau use wire tapping?

DUNN: No.

DTH: Do you have any agents permanently assigned to Chapel Hill?

DUNN: Yes. One is assigned there full time as a general investigator. We have several drug men in the area with responsibilities in Chapel Hill.

DTH: Do your agents ever sell drugs?

DUNN: No.

DTH: So there is no entrapment.

DUNN: No, we are very careful about entrapment. We are a professional organization and we're not playing cops and robbers. We're out there to do a job. We have legal responsibilities. We are going to do the best we can with what resources that we have. We are certainly not going to stoop to breaking the law; we are not going to lower ourselves to the level of the people who are breaking the laws.

DTH: Is there one town or area in the state that seems to have the heaviest drug traffic?

DUNN: Drugs go where you have two things: people with money and people with problems. This is just about everywhere. Where you have concentrations of the two then you have concentrations of drugs. Areas around military bases, college communities, major urban areas, even the rural areas, there are very few places in North Carolina where you can't buy something. Where you have major concentrations of people and money, you can buy just about anything you want from grass to heroin.

DTH: Do the public schools, in your opinion, offer an adequate...

DUNN: Most of them don't. At the present time, the most exposure young people have to drugs is part of a seventh-grade hygiene course. It's too little too late.

DTH: Do you think the present instruction on drug abuse is helping or hurting the problem?

DUNN: A lot of the prepared material is not very good. There is a lot of misinformation. We've done a job in our society of selling drugs. For instance, many of the songs, movies and television shows glamorize the drug user and the drug pusher. Many people today went straight from the Fallopian Tube to the Television Tube. The average child spends 1,000 hours a year watching television.

Many people think pills are the answer to everybody's problems. Some of the commercials on television indicate that by popping a couple of pills, your problems will go away. This is bound to have some effect. It has an effect on my generation. We have become, to a degree, a pill oriented society. The average home has 29 dangerous drugs in it during the year.

Nobody ever bothers to explain the difference between legitimate medicine and the pills somebody is selling in the rest room or passing out at the service station. We're giving a bad education on drugs already. What we need to do is to counter-balance this with a good education program showing that drugs can be harmful as well as beneficial. Too much of the educational program is happenstance.

DTH: Do you think drugs are more of a medical problem than a law enforcement problem?

DUNN: To this point, marijuana, acid, and heroin have no medical use in our society. I think people on these drugs are

medical problems, but I don't think being on a drug is any excuse for selling drugs.

DTH: What is the bureau's attitude toward the user rather than the pusher?

DUNN: We feel that the user, by possessing the drugs, is violating the law. But our efforts, because of the scope of the problem, are concentrated on the pusher and supplier. We feel that by picking up a pusher or supplier we are doing more good to curb the drug problem than we would be in picking up 10, 20 or even 35 users. But, nevertheless, our policy is to go in anywhere we can to start an investigation and then go as high as we can to bust. If we can get the key people then I think we do more harm to the drug traffic. We are concentrating on those that are making money. Those making money by preying on the weaknesses and frustrations of others.

DTH: What do you personally think of marijuana, besides the fact that it is against the law?

DUNN: I don't think it is as bad as some of the other drugs, such as the hallucinogenic drugs. It is certainly not as bad as heroin. It is not as bad as some of the legal drugs which are misused. From what I have read, it does apparently have harmful ingredients or rather dangerous ingredients which are harmful in some people.

I feel like we need to know far more about it that we do know. I would be against legalizing it at the present time. It apparently has no medical purposes at the present time. Most of the countries where it has been legal are making it illegal. It is too big a gamble now to legalize it until we know more about it. Of course, I don't think that legalizing marijuana will solve the drug problem anymore than opening up ABC stores put the bootleggers out of business.

There are too many other drugs that marijuana is apparently the appetizer for. Of course, you can hallucinate on good marijuana. But then, we don't get much good stuff. But what do you do about hash or kief which are forms of marijuana as potent as good acid. There are many questions about the problem. Marijuana is an intoxicant. It is a moral question. The only reason you smoke marijuana is to get drunk. Now alcohol, it is a drug too, but it is a depressant. Only in excess does it become an intoxicant. From the size of the problem, I think alcohol is a serious problem. We have 150,000 to 200,000

people in North Carolina who have alcohol problems.

DTH: Do you think if alcohol were just becoming popular it would be made illegal or steps taken to control it more so than today?

DUNN: If we had advanced as far in our civilization as we allegedly have, then I should certainly hope so, when you consider the damage that it has done to society. I don't believe we can afford another problem today as great as the alcohol problem. It adversely affects so many citizens.

DTH: Are most of your speeches about drugs?

DUNN: About two-thirds of my speeches are on drugs now.

DTH: Are you disturbed that many of your speeches are on drugs?

DUNN: I do get tired of talking about the same thing, but I feel that the work that we have done on drugs has focused some attention on the problems. For instance, we made a bust recently in a community where, a week before, no one would have believed drugs existed, certainly not heroin. But his is true all over. Most people don't believe we have a problem until it ruptures.

Frankly, when I came into the bureau, I didn't know what the drug problem was. We had a few drug cases but I've become alarmed about the drug problem. I have been doing as much as I can to try to let (people) know it's coming. (The drug problem) is something that everybody is going to have to make a decision on. Society is not geared for what's here; they don't want to believe it's here.

DTH: Would you prefer that drugs not be a part of the bureau's jurisdiction—that is, would you rather concentrate the bureau's energies and capabilities on solving other crimes?

DUNN: I never thought about it. This is part of the responsibility that we have under the law. I feel that the drug problem is a serious one; I think we have criminals in it. I don't think you can separate the crime of selling drugs from some of the other crimes that we have. I think there are correlations between some of the armed robberies. In Charlotte, I think this has been demonstrated in some of the homicides that resulted from robberies.

DTH: Is this primarily heroin or other drugs some students are experimenting with?

DUNN: Young people are experimenting with heroin. The whole drug culture is coming down. You don't really separate the drugs. The pushers are pushing the whole bit. And heroin is part of it. We have heroin in high schools now in North Carolina. It's available on just about any college campus. The problems of crime aren't limited to heroin. Cocaine and the amphetamines can get you up. I know of several cases where people on acid have done things they would not have otherwise done that resulted in harm to themselves or other people.

In one case that comes to mind, a homicide was committed by someone apparently on acid. I am sure that people on marijuana are doing things to get marijuana. Shoplifting is a major problem. Not necessarily totally because of drugs, but I think it has contributed to it (the drug problem).

A lot of people think that the drug thing is a game. This isn't just a fad or fancy that somebody's gotten a hold of. It's professional. Some of the young people who have gotten involved are pretty good at it. He might be a kid but he may be selling dope pretty heavy and making good money at it.

DTH: What are the penalties now for the usage of drugs?

DUNN: I believe the penalties are for the possession and sale of drugs. The possession of one gram or less of marijuana is a misdemeanor and can lead to two years in prison, but generally will lead to a suspended sentence, depending upon the court. The second offense, or possession of a quantity of drugs, marijuana, hallucinogens or heroin is a felony. With a felony conviction, you lose your citizenship and the right to vote, to travel abroad and to hold public office. It can lead to a \$1000 fine and up to five years in prison for the first offense. A second offense can be, at the discretion of the court, \$2000 and up to 10 years. A third offense can be \$3000 and 15 years to life.

DTH: What do you do with the drugs you confiscate?

DUNN: We analyze them and they are sent back to the jurisdiction for the trial and are destroyed. We do, however, keep some for exhibits and displays.