Detectives to reveal true story behind Operation Julie in TV special

How a chat over a cup of tea sparked a £20m drugs bust

The famous police operation which centred on Ceredigion in the 1970s is featured on S4C this Friday. 10,000 and 20,000 LSD tablets a week — on a regular basis.

The key question that had to be answered was where were these factories that could produce such pure LSD. The surprising answer was rural Wales, and it was literally an accident that enabled the police to put the first piece of the jigsaw in its place on April 13, 1973. An accident involving a Range Rover and a car had taken place in the village of Derwen-las. The driver and passenger in the Range Rover were called Richard Kemp and Christine Bott — the former a brilliant Cambridge chemistry graduate, the latter a doctor.

As police at Aberystwyth discussed the accident over a cup of tea at the town's police station, an officer from London who happened to be there at the time overheard the name Richard Kemp being mentioned. The name rang a bell and it was arranged that the Range Rover would be searched. Small pieces of paper with various letters written on them were found.

After the papers were sorted, the letters were found to spell a crucial phrase — *Hydrazine Hydrate* — chemical used in the manufacture of LSD. This was the first clue to the fact that Bott and Kemp dealt with LSD. The next step was to gather more evidence.

During the programme, many of the policemen who played a leading role in Operation Julie, including then Detective Sergeant Dai Rees and Constable Noir Bowen, share their experiences. They both spent long periods undercover, growing their hair and sporting beards to blend in, in a police operation that lasted two and a half years.

At the time, Bott and Kemp lived in a remote cottage called Cefnlleine, near Tregaron, and travelled regularly to Llyyn Hall in Carno. While the police kept the hall under surveillance from a nearby caravan, keeping tabs on activities at Cefnlleine proved more difficult. Because Bott and Kemp both liked to sit in the garden, a decision was taken to eavesdrop on them — which entailed running a cable through several fields to a transmitter placed near the garden. Unfortunately, the sheep of Tregaron mistook the cable for lush pasture and that plan was scrapped!

Meanwhile, police at Llyyn Hall had uncovered valuable evidence — after collecting refuse samples from the cellar, traces of LSD were found after laboratory tests. The pieces were beginning to fall into place.

At the same time, surveillance officers in London suspected that there was an LSD factory at 23, Seymour Road in the city — while police in Wales were keeping tabs on two men in Llanddewi Brefi who were suspected of dealing in LSD.

Over the following months, police watched, listened and followed. The net was closing and on 26 March, 1978, in an operation involving 300 men, 87 buildings were searched and 122 people arrested. Pure LSD worth £20 million on the open market was also seized.

In April 1978, at Bristol High Court, Kemp was sentenced to 13 years in prison and Bott to nine years — while three other defendants were sentenced to between three and 13 years each.

OPERATION Julie, one of the country's most famous drugs busts, is relived on television next week by the policemen involved.

The police operation which centred on Ceredigion in the 1970s is featured on S4C's Dilyn Ddoe programme at 8pm on 13 March.

It is presented by Aberystwyth-based broadcaster Lyn Ebenezer who was working on Y Cymro at the time. Lyn said: "I was used to writing 'nice' pieces, in a way, and when a friend from the Daily Express phoned to tell me about the arrest in Ceredigion, I never thought it would turn out to be such a big story."

The seventies was a time when a steady stream of hippies moved to live in Wales, concentrated in rural areas like Tregaron, Llanddewi Brefi and Carno. The police were aware that they were engaging in the cannabis trade, and the LSD was also available, to a lesser extent. But no one realized the seriousness of the problem.

At the time, police seized an average of 50,000 LSD tablets annually, but their whole perspective was changed when Sergeant Martin Pritchard went undercover and was offered between 10,000 and 20,000 LSD tablets a week — on a regular basis.

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