

THE WAR AGAINST DRUG SMUGGLERS

A Special Report

Reorganization Plan No. 2, effective July 1, 1973, consolidated drug abuse enforcement agencies into a single agency within the Justice Department known as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). As a part of the reorganization, about 500 Customs investigators (agents) were transferred to DEA, along with a number of airplanes, boats, and other enforcement equipment. The Customs Service is still charged with halting illicit drugs along our borders and ports of entry; however, drug seizures made by our officers—Customs inspectors and Customs patrol officers—are now turned over to DEA agents for investigation.

Electronics, detector dogs, informants, and inter-agency and international cooperation helped the U.S. Customs Service achieve some record-setting drug seizures during the past year in the relentless battle with smugglers.

Typical of the general public's cooperation given in the President's War on Drug Abuse was the fisherman and his teen-age son who rowed 20 miles to alert Customs agents of a possible marijuana cache which turned out to be the largest seizure of hashish in Customs Service records.

Special agents were flown by Coast Guard helicopter to South Carolina's remote Bay Point Island on December 20 to stake out 11 duffle bags containing 845 pounds of hashish, which the fisherman had described.

Agents arrested four men in a 16-foot motorboat when they arrived to pick up the contraband and two

other arrests followed. The smuggler's 40-foot yacht, *Ailanthus*, was also discovered in the area. Investigations showed that after purchasing the yacht in London, they had loaded hashish aboard near Casablanca and sailed to South Carolina.

Continuing investigations revealed on April 6 an additional 10 bags containing 714 pounds of hashish buried on Bay Point Island. The total haul was 1,559 pounds of hashish, the largest amount recorded in a U.S. Customs Service case. Agents had been assisted by a private citizen, the State Wildlife Resources Division, the U.S. Marine Corps, and the U.S. Coast Guard in the logistics of the arrests and seizures.

Other outstanding cases during the past year are capsulized in this photo section.



Swept Up

Customs agents in a helicopter swept down on unsuspecting smugglers en route to Austin, Texas with 400 pounds of marijuana in their Winnebago mobile home on March 6. Confidential information alerted the Customs authorities that the contraband would be transported across Falcon Lake and driven to Austin. The smugglers were towing the 16-foot boat at the time of arrest near Dripping Springs, Texas

Film Flop

Opium smugglers failed in an apparent attempt to evade mail inspection by using a religious organization's return address and claiming exposed, undeveloped film. The Customs Mail Facility in New York intercepted 59 pounds of opium in 50 metal movie film canisters addressed to Phocis Films in Chicago, from TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. An investigation revealed that TEAM has no Thai missions. A controlled delivery was made to Theodore Richard Norcutt, the Phocis proprietor, who was subsequently arrested. More opium was recovered in this case than the total of 52.4 pounds seized by Customs agents during the entire calendar year 1972.

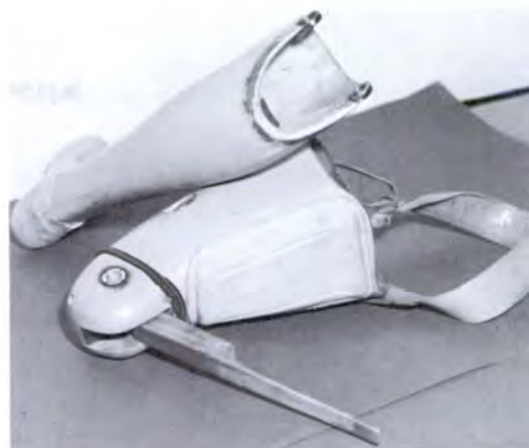


Plane Talk

An Ecuadorian-owned twin-engine Beechcraft arrived at Opa-Locka Airport near Miami, Florida, via Colombia, on March 8 carrying 46 pounds of cocaine hidden in a suitcase inside the plane's tail section. Three days later, the plane's owner and a confederate were arrested as they removed the suitcase. By means of a controlled delivery, agents were able to arrest three more Colombians and seize \$38,733.06 in contraband and expense money.

Brick Hauler

An immediate response from the Treasury Enforcement Communications System (TECS) helped Customs agents at the United States-Mexico border crossing in Hidalgo, Texas, to positively identify a 1966 Oldsmobile sedan as a smuggler's auto. Agents removed four metal compartments bolted to the undercarriage and found 136 bricks of marijuana weighing 142 pounds.



Shank's Mare

Acting on a confidential tip 3 days earlier, Customs agents were waiting on April 2, 1973 at New York's JFK International Arrivals Building when suspected smuggler Jaime Zapata-Reyes stepped off Braniff flight 906 from Panama with his artificial leg full of marijuana. The suspect, a Colombian, was traveling under the alias of Oscar Hincapie. He was arrested for violation of 18 U.S.C. 1546 (false passport), 18 U.S.C. 1001 (false Customs declaration), and 21 U.S.C. 952 (conspiracy to smuggle narcotics). Investigations led agents to three other passengers on the flight, apparently traveling with Zapata.

In the girdle of Maria Leonor Jaramillo de Celis was found one kilo of cocaine. William Ochoa, alias Francisco Seco-Rojas, was also wearing an artificial leg which contained another kilo of cocaine in the hollow limb. The third member of the smuggling team, Otoniel Pineda, was arrested by the Immigration and Naturalization Service for possession of a fraudulent passport in the name of Jose Omar Mustaffa-Arias. The quartet was arraigned the next day, held in lieu of \$100,000 bail, and each was sentenced to 4 years in prison.



Roof Garden

Acting upon a tip from an informant, Customs inspectors at San Onofre, California, on October 20, 1972, discovered 354 kilos (77.8 pounds) of marijuana concealed within the false roof of an empty trunk. Customs special agents are atop the false roof.





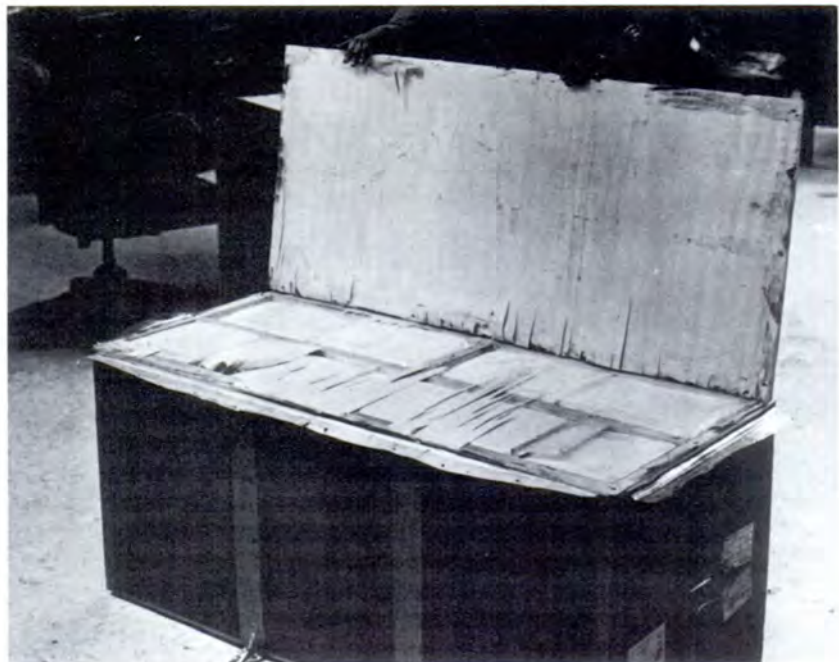
Barge In

A tip from two fishermen about a barge beached at the mouth of a creek near Jena, on Florida's Gulf Coast last March 5, resulted in the seizure of 18,280 pounds of marijuana—the largest ever made by the U.S. Customs Service. While agents and local law enforcement officers were on the scene, seven smugglers arrived in two vehicles and were chased and arrested. The marijuana, in 495 bags, was believed to have been smuggled from Jamaica. Authorities stored the seizure in a bunker at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station but within the month thieves stole 245 pounds. Three men were arrested on April 4 when they tried to sell the pilfered contraband to undercover agents. Investigations led to five more arrests. Except for samples used for trial purposes, Customs agents destroyed all 9 tons of marijuana by burning according to standard procedure.



Trunk Space

When the steamer *Cristoforo Colombo*, en route from Naples, Italy, was diverted due to bad weather from its destination of Halifax, Nova Scotia, to New York, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police notified U.S. Customs of a smuggler aboard ship transporting two trunks containing 32 kilos (70.4 pounds) of heroin in false bottoms and sides. On January 19, Customs agents replaced all but 2 pounds of the heroin with flour and allowed the trunks to proceed by air to a suburban home in Toronto, Canada. Surveillance was maintained until January 27 when Mounties arrested the unsuspecting courier and eight others, including Benedetto Zizzo, considered a major figure in Canadian heroin smuggling.



Off Course

Los Angeles Customs agents searched and found 7 tons of marijuana among the contraband being smuggled in a converted World War II freighter which had won fame for its part in the movie, "Mr. Roberts." The marijuana, in 384 wooden crates, was concealed under ground coffee in a hold that also contained such unmanifested cargo as canned tomatoes, tequila, and a vehicle. The 109-foot freighter *Don Miguel*, slated for an upcoming television "special," was also used to smuggle cinnamon, nuts, birdseed, and heavy machinery into Mexico where it was registered. The investigation began when amounts of untaxed, duty-free liquor purchased from a bonded warehouse by the crew seemed excessively large. Agents suspected that the liquor was being resold illegally. As a result of the seizure, five persons were indicted. Mexican authorities followed through to seize 29,000 pounds of marijuana, destroy 12 marijuana fields in the Mazatlan area, and arrest 25 persons including the ship's owner.



Surface Slick

Customs agents arrested five members of a hashish oil ring responsible for having smuggled an estimated 500 pounds of hashish oil since 1969. The oil, so potent that it is consumed one drop at a time mixed with smoking tobacco, was transported in shipments of personal effects from Calcutta to the U.S. and Canada. The contraband was contained in double layers of prophylactics and hidden in the sides, tops and bottoms of the crates.

Agents became suspicious on March 2 when Thomas Robert Morse demanded that Customs officials in Salt Lake City, Utah, deliver to him the crates that contained his two earthenware vases. Agents returned to the air freight office where the vases had cleared Customs and the oil was found secreted in the plywood panels.

Morse, meantime, fled and agents tracked him to his home in Monrovia, California, 4 days later. His arrest led to another member of the ring in Squaw Valley, California, and to the residence of another member in Ben Lomand, California, where laboratory equipment was found ready for shipment to the ring's distillery in Katmandu, Nepal.

Continued probing revealed that three more shipments of hashish oil were U.S.-bound from Calcutta. Working with Indian officials, U.S. Customs agents intercepted the contraband and made a controlled delivery on the last shipment to conspirators in the United States.

The convoyed hashish oil was delivered to a consignee in Aptos, California, where agents arrested two more members of the ring. Three other hashish oil smugglers from the ring are at large.