

Value of pot haul put at \$42 million

Enough to fill half a large moving van

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STAFF WRITERS

The raid on a smuggling operation off the coast of Davenport yesterday morning netted at least \$42 million worth of marijuana, Santa Cruz County Sheriff's deputies said yesterday afternoon.

Sheriff's Lt. Bruce Simpson this morning estimated the haul at 9½ to 10 tons of high-grade marijuana from Thailand, with a street value of \$42 to \$54 million.

That's enough pot to fill a large moving van half full, Clare said.

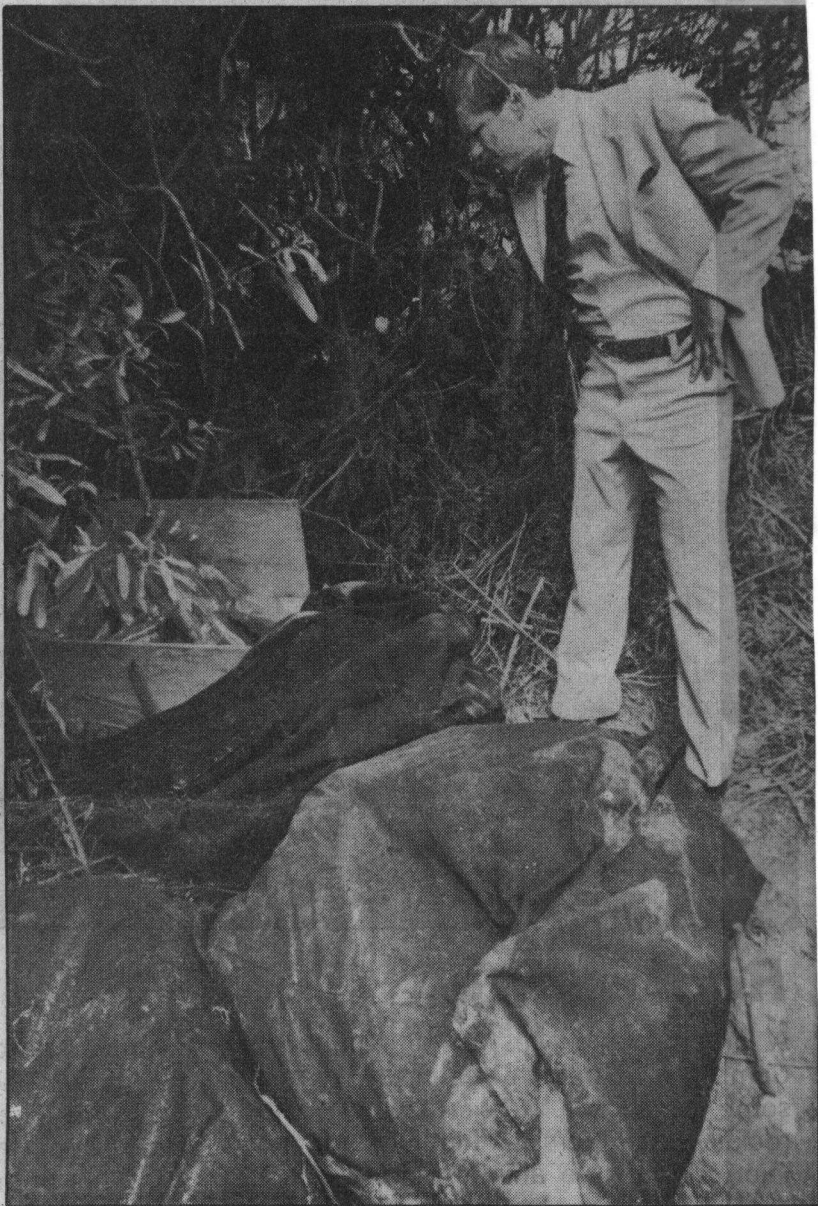
At mid-morning yesterday, deputies estimated the haul at 2 tons, already the biggest single seizure of processed marijuana in county history. That was before the boat allegedly used in the smuggling was stopped with 2 to 3 tons of marijuana aboard and more pot was found hidden near the beach, Clare said.

Simpson said deputies arrested five men at Red White and Blue nude beach, where the pot was being unloaded, and a sixth man who sped away in a pickup truck when deputies arrived on the scene. The Coast Guard arrested two more men on board the 50-foot fishing vessel that brought in the marijuana.

The men on the boat were identified by the Coast Guard as Rex Allen Olander, 38, and John Hoine, 35, no address given for either. The two were piloting the Prygos, a boat registered to George Contaxis of Alameda.

On shore, deputies arrested Charles Lawrence Dunlap, 43, of Newport Beach, and Timothy Joseph Flaherty, 29, of Santa Ana. The two were sitting in a rented Ryder truck when deputies arrived.

A third suspect fled in a



Chip Scheuer

District Attorney Art Danner looks at bags of marijuana seized in yesterday's raid.

pickup truck, and was arrested after a high-speed chase to Greyhound Rock near the San Mateo County line. That man was Mikael Robert Ortiz of Summerland, Calif.

Two more men were arrested on a trail leading to the beach. They were Jonathan Lucas, 33, of Santa Barbara; and Randy Martin, 34, of Jacksonville, Fla., Simpson said.

The final suspect was discovered hiding in some bushes several hours later, as deputies were looking for more bales of pot. He is Jody Wayne Ruud, 39, whose address on a jail booking

sheet was given as "North Birmingham, Calif.," a town the Register-Pajaronian was unable to locate in an atlas.

Clare said that Ruud, when found, tried to convince deputies he was a reporter, and showed phony press credentials.

The smuggling was a sophisticated operation, Clare said, with surfboards and a motorized rubber raft to aid the men in getting the pot from the boat to shore. Some of the pot was hidden on the beach under camouflage netting, with a golden

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REFERENCE

dragon symbol on some of the packages.

"It was an organized professional operation," Clare said. "We assume they (the accused smugglers) were familiar with the area. It had to be set up in advance."

Deputies received a tip at 2:45 a.m. from a man who spotted a boat with its lights out in the water off Coast Road and people on the nearby Red White and Blue Beach.

While a Coast Guard helicopter searched from the air, Sheriff's deputies on land found the men.

When deputies arrived, one suspect, Ortiz, revved up the pickup truck in which he was sitting, and sped away, nearly clipping a patrol car as he did so. He was caught about 20 miles away, at Greyhound Rock, after a chase.

During the chase, the accused smuggler "was throwing stuff out the window," Clare said. Deputies speculated it was some type of contraband, but aren't sure.

Near the beach, deputies found a U-Haul trailer, a motor home and six pickup trucks

with camper shells, all loaded with marijuana.

The boat was gone by the time deputies and the Coast Guard arrived, but the resident who provided the original tip had given a description of the vessel.

At 10:30 a.m., the Coast Guard stopped the boat, the 50-foot Prygos, near Waddell Creek, north of Davenport. Officers boarded the boat, arrested the two men and seized the 2 to 3 tons of marijuana on board.

The Coast Guard used three cutters, a utility boat, a helicopter and two planes to search for the Prygos.

Clare lauded the citizen whose tip led to the arrests, noting that he may be eligible for a reward from the federal government. It's reports from citizens, Clare said, that often lead to breaking major crime cases.

Clare wouldn't speculate as to how the cases will proceed in court, but said, "I'm tickled to death either way. They (the accused smugglers) are hurt financially either way" the case goes, because they've lost their investment in the marijuana.



UPI photo

Coast guard officers board the Prygos late yesterday morning.