

## Operation Soy

# Drug conspiracy foiled

Operation Soy ranks as one of the AFP's longest running and most complex drug prosecutions and at the time, it was the largest heroin seizure in Australia's history. The operation demonstrated how the AFP, through its overseas network of liaison officers, was able to work with the Royal Hong Kong and Vanuatu police to track the activities of an international drug syndicate and successfully prosecute its members.

Operation Soy ended in July 1993 when the final member of the syndicate, Hong Kong customs officer Ying Lun Cheung, was sentenced to life imprisonment with a non-parole period of 21 years for his principal part in the importation of 50kg of heroin into Australia in 1989.

Case officer, Detective Sergeant John Beveridge from Eastern Region's Drug Operations Division, provides this report.

Kong company that had business dealings in Vanuatu and Mr Cheung recommended that the heroin be shipped to Vanuatu under that company's name. At the first meeting with Mr Soy, Mr Cheung advised that he would arrange 'receivers' for the drugs in Australia and gave Mr Soy his mobile telephone number.

Mr Cheung introduced Mr Soy to another syndicate member, Yun Choi Ng in early September, and made further arrangements about exporting the heroin from Hong Kong. In October, Mr Cheung and Mr Soy discussed concealing the heroin in a van to be purchased by Mr Soy's business and shipping it to Vanuatu, and at a further meeting in December, Mr Cheung organised for Mr Soy to provide Mr Ng and another man with a cheque to purchase the van. Mr Soy was then given \$HK50,000 by

Operation Soy, currently regarded as the second largest seizure of heroin in Australia's history, ended on July 6, 1993. On that date Ying Lun Cheung, a senior Hong Kong Customs Officer, was sentenced to life imprisonment, with a non-parole period of 21 years. He was the last of nine people convicted in Sydney courts over the 50kg heroin importation, which was one of the longest and most complex prosecutions in which the AFP has been involved.

The operation began on April 24, 1989, when an AFP protected witness, code-named Mr Soy, arrived at Sydney airport and asked to speak to AFP Detective Superintendent Cliff Foster. He had with him an article about a drug operation involving the AFP which had been published in Hong Kong. The article contained a photograph of Detective Superintendent Foster.

Mr Soy was taken to the AFP Eastern Region headquarters where he told Drug Operations Division officers that he had been recruited by a group of Hong Kong criminals, known as the Big Circle Group, who had planned to import 50kg of heroin into Australia from Hong Kong via Vanuatu.

In August 1988, Wai Man Cheung, a Hong Kong-based principal in the syndicate, approached Mr Soy, who was his informant, about exporting high grade heroin from Hong Kong to Vanuatu and Australia. Mr Soy had an involvement with a Hong



Unloaded at Glebe Container Terminal on May 8, 1989, this container held 50kg of heroin.



*Hidden in a freezer and a hot water system were 148 blocks of heroin.*

Mr Ng to book a container to ship the van and other objects to Vanuatu.

In the meantime, the shipment of heroin had been tracked by the AFP from South East Asia's Golden Triangle to China, where it was then sent by speed boat to Hong Kong. Mr Soy, who was given \$HK150,000 to cover costs of the export, organised the container and early in December 1988, Mr Ng drove the van, a Toyota minibus with a hidden cargo of 148 blocks of heroin weighing 50kg, to the container. It was loaded on board a vessel which arrived in Port Vila, Vanuatu, in February. Once landed, the heroin was then secreted inside a restaurant hot water system and a freezer and sent to Sydney on the Pacific trading vessel *Nimos*. It arrived on May 8, 1989.

Throughout this time, Mr Soy had been in contact with the Big Circle Group and had travelled to and from Hong Kong and Vanuatu. He then travelled to Sydney, arriving on April 24, 1989.

Once the *Nimos* docked at the Glebe Container Terminal, the AFP removed the container and took it to a Customs warehouse where it was unloaded. Then, over a number of days, the AFP installed listening devices and telephone intercepts in several premises in Sydney and Melbourne and placed a number of Chinese Australians under surveillance. Several Hong Kong-based criminals who had recently entered Australia on holiday visas were also placed under surveillance.

Numerous telephone calls were monitored between members of the syndicate in Hong Kong and Australia, as well as between Mr Cheung and Mr Soy. The calls concerned delays being encountered in the delivery of the heroin and the transport and delivery arrangements once it had arrived in Australia. As well, the calls implicated many of the people under surveillance in the importation. The delay had also caused concern in Hong Kong where members of the syndicate had kidnapped one of Mr Ng's relatives to safeguard their investment in the heroin shipment. During these calls a mobile telephone being used in Hong Kong had been identified. This was the same telephone that was given to Mr Soy by Mr Cheung.

The AFP notified the Royal Hong Kong Police of the investigation in early May 1989 and the RHKP then became an integral part of the

international operation. The co-operation that had been established during earlier joint operations with the AFP had become useful in expediting inquiries. After a number of meetings in Sydney between syndicate members, the heroin was delivered on May 11, 1989. The consignment was under the strict control of the AFP and the informant who delivered it to the syndicate members in Pelican Street, Surry Hills. Under surveillance by the AFP, the heroin was taken by the syndicate to a safe house in Camperdown to be unpacked. The AFP and RHKP then conducted a series of co-ordinated raids in Sydney, Melbourne and Hong Kong. Arrests were made in the three cities as a result of these raids and the substituted 50kg of heroin was recovered.

More than 150 AFP staff were involved in Operation Soy conducting monitoring and surveillance duties as well as intelligence and operational teams controlling all incoming information and intelligence analysis. Those arrested in Hong Kong and Melbourne were extradited to Sydney to face trial.

The nine people arrested have now been sentenced to lengthy jail terms in Australia ranging from 10 years to 28 years and include Wai Man Cheung, aged 33; Lok Ping Tyrone Tsui, aged 41; Yat Kai Law, aged 39; Kam Wah Chan, aged 34; Tak Leong Chi, aged 32; Chiu Chun Law, aged 46; Sik Lam, aged 43; Yun Choing, aged 36; and finally Ying Lun Cheung, aged 40.



*A controlled delivery of a heroin substitute led to the arrest and conviction of nine men.*