



E.R. Physical Evidence Section

An attempt to import 4 tonnes of hashish concealed in a massive turf roller was thwarted by Federal Police, resulting in a 10-year sentence for New Zealander, Ivan Franic.

Operation Flute

Hashish smuggler rolled by an accomplice

By Stephen Simpson, Eastern Region Public Affairs

The sentencing judge in the Sydney District Court described the importation of 4 tonnes of hashish in a giant turf roller as novel, clever, elaborate and well planned.

The method was certainly novel, and the scheme devised to import the hashish from Tonga involved an elaborate deception. But clever? Not quite.

On December 23, 1993, the principal in the importation code-named Operation Flute, New Zealander, Ivan Franic, received a 10-year sentence in the Sydney District Court for what was, at the time, Australia's largest hashish seizure, with an estimated potential street value of \$50 million.

A well-known Auckland turf consultant, 53-year-old Franic was also a race horse owner and punter, but the odds on the success of his scheme to import the hashish began to lengthen when an accomplice in Tonga stole a small amount of the drug from the

4 tonne cache stored on the island. He was caught by Tonga Police when the hashish began to appear on the streets of the island and information he subsequently provided about the planned importation was passed on to the AFP on March 15, 1992.

Franic had won a contract to resurface Tonga's rugby stadium at Teufaiva. He had set up a company, Fine Turf Services, and also had commissioned the design and construction in Sydney of two turf rollers, all apparently for the job. The rollers were later described in court by an expert witness as 'incredibly huge,' so large in fact that they would have been incapable of being towed around any field. Measuring more than 2 metres in diameter, nearly 2.5 metres wide, and made of 6mm thick steel, both rollers were packed with 2 tonnes of sand each, prior to them being loaded into a container for shipment to Tonga.

As part of his ruse, Franic arranged for the container's contents to be classified by Australian Customs as 'Australian made machinery for export and return' which would normally have meant that the contents of the

container would not have been examined on its return to Australia. As well, the huge rollers virtually filled the container, making inspection by Customs officers impossible without removing both of them.

On December 31, 1991, the container carrying the two rollers was loaded onto the MV *Fuakavenga* in Sydney, and when it arrived in Tonga on January 31, 1992, it was delivered to a house in the capital of Nuku-Alofa.

One of the rollers was taken from the container and sent to the Teufaiva sports field; the other roller remained at the house. Of all the equipment used in the alleged re-grassing of the sports field, this was the only piece of equipment taken from the field each night and secured. This act raised suspicion among the field workers.

At some stage, according to Tonga Police, one end of the roller had been removed at the Nuku-Alofa premises by cutting it with oxy-acetylene. The 2 tonnes of sand was removed and 4 tonnes of cannabis resin, in 200 packages weighing 20kg each, was loaded under the supervision of Franic. He then welded the end back on to the roller.

It was consigned in the same container back to Sydney, arriving on March 20 at White Bay. Here, AFP officers began the time-consuming task of examining the inside of the roller which had a fake inspection plate located at one end. After several hours toil, a plate was eventually removed and 4 tonnes of packaged cannabis resin was revealed.

With the plate replaced and the roller's appearance restored, the container was moved to holding yards on March 25 and put under AFP surveillance. The following day, Franic, who had arrived in Sydney on March 23, came to the holding yard and entered the container and appeared to check the roller before leaving. On March 27 he left Sydney for New Zealand and from there made further phone inquiries to the holding yard company about the roller.

Three days later, AFP officers cut open the roller and removed the 4 tonne haul.

On April 10, a warrant was sworn in a Sydney court for Franic's arrest for importing a prohibited import. He was subsequently arrested in New Zealand. A protracted court battle over his extradition ensued over the following 10 months, with Franic taking the matter to the NZ High Court. Extradition was finally approved and Franic arrived in Australia on February 19, 1993.

Following a long committal hearing, Franic went to trial on August 15, 1994. The 23-week-long trial saw evidence given from two senior Tonga Police officers and more than a dozen Tongan witnesses and other expert witnesses from Australia. Franic was found guilty on December 23 on the charge of importing a prohibited import and was sentenced to 10 years jail, with a non-parole period of seven-and-a-half years.



On arrival at Sydney's White Bay cargo terminal, a turf roller being returned from Tonga was found to contain 4 tonnes of hashish.

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Control and coordination

Control and coordination of AFP international operations and liaison interests is undertaken by International Division, within the Investigations Department located at the AFP Headquarters in Canberra. The Division consists of three main branches: Asia Branch, America/Europe Branch and Liaison/Coordination Branch.

The Asia Branch is responsible for all posts within South East and South West Asia. Posts including Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Manila, Kuala Lumpur Islamabad and Jakarta.

The Americas/Europe Branch is responsible for all posts within North and South America and Europe. Posts include Buenos Aires, London, Los Angeles, Washington, Nicosia, Rome and Port Moresby.

The Liaison/Coordination Branch is responsible for coordination of AFP international activity relating to Mutual Assistance requests and extradition matters and initial point of contact for Canberra-based foreign law enforcement

representatives. Members are reminded that enquiries to the FBI Legal Attache or the DEA Country Attache should be directed through International Division. This branch also coordinates visits by overseas law enforcement officials and provides administrative support to all overseas posts.

Through these branches, International Division supervises the overseas liaison network; receives and assesses all communications to and from the liaison posts; coordinates international investigations involving overseas intelligence or inquiries; provides to user agencies and the AFP management a range of services relating to Australian law enforcement at the international level; and coordinates official visits, including those to Australia by foreign law enforcement officials and those overseas by Australian officials.

With the increased number of posts, the upgrading of existing posts and the restructuring and streamlining of procedures within International Division, overseas operations have been substantially enhanced in recent years and seem destined to continue to play an important role in the crime-fighting ability of the AFP.