Operation Extra added to Australia's biggest cannabis haul

By Philip Castle

wo Queensland brothers were convicted in February 1995 and sentenced to 10 years jail by the Cairns Supreme Court after they had been caught in possession of almost 1.5 tonnes of compressed cannabis by AFP officers a few months earlier.



In August, Northern Region officers detained two men driving a refrigerated truck near Mackay. They had been observed loading the truck with nylon bags earlier that day in Edmonton, near Cairns.

In August 1994, within 24 hours of one of Australia's biggest cannabis seizures, Operation Caribou at Hervey Bay, another successful seizure occurred 1500km further north near Mackay, North Queensland.

At dusk on Saturday August 6, 1994, a refrigerated truck travelling south from Cairns was under surveillance by the AFP approximately 100km north of Mackay on the Bruce Highway. At about 7pm the driver turned east down a dirt road that led to a small fishing village, Midge Point. The road had many side tracks which led to a number of small farms.

The truck travelled past Laguana Keys Resort for about 7km when the AFP officers following decided to stop the suspects. It was considered that, given the conditions, the surveillance operation could not continue because the risk of losing the drugs was too great.

The AFP officers detained the

driver and his companion. The two men were brothers, the driver, Anthony James Myles, 36, a carpenter of Parramatta Park, Cairns and Robert Roy Myles, 40, a fisherman of Mooroobool, Cairns.

The brothers were asked what was in the back of the truck, to which they said they didn't know, but thought there was meat inside. Anthony said his brother had told him to turn off the Bruce Highway to stay at a caravan park. He told the officers that the rear of the truck had been locked when he got it and had not seen inside. He could not recall where he obtained the truck. A key for the rear could not be found. Both men and the truck with its contents were taken to the Customs House later that night.

The rear of the truck was opened at Mackay. It contained 60 nylon storage bags and two black sports bags. The bags appeared to contain cannabis. This was later confirmed. There was

also a sizeable quantity of frozen meat in the truck. Each nylon bag held between 20 to 25 blocks of about 1kg of cannabis each. The blocks were vacuumed sealed and had handwritten numbers on them which were believed to be their individual weight. The truck and its contents were taken to AFP Brisbane for closer examination. The total weight was determined at 1.378 tonnes of compressed cannabis.

It was believed the brothers intended to take the truck to a rented house at Midge Point where they would repack the drugs into meat cartons including the frozen meat to try to hide the drugs. They then intended to take the drugs by road to a southern market.

The operation had started earlier that day with the AFP conducting surveillance on a mini storage shed in Edmonton, near Cairns. At 10.06am the brothers were seen opening the roller door to one of the storage sheds and reversing a Mitsubishi refrigerated truck up to it. They loaded a number of nylon bags into the back of the truck. About 10.30am they left Cairns travelling south on the Bruce Highway, only stopping to get fuel.

At the trial the brothers pleaded not guilty. They admitted they had loaded the truck, but claimed they believed the bags contained dried shark fins and they



When drugs were discovered in the rear of the truck, the suspects said they thought they were carrying meat.

didn't know that there was cannabis in the back of the truck. Their defence called a witness involved in the lawful importation of shark fin, who gave evidence that the size and weight of the bags would be consistent with them containing shark fins. However this defence was ultimately rejected with a guilty verdict.

The truck contained close to one-and-a-half tonnes of compressed cannabis.

The DPP prosecutor, Danny Boyle, told the court that the drugs could have fetched \$7,000 per kilogram if sold wholesale as lots rather than "street deals". He asked that the sentence reflect that the brothers had full knowledge of the quantity of drugs being carried and that they had been involved in the loading and transportation of the drugs. In a slight understatement, Mr Boyle said, "It could be comfortably inferred that they had participated in the exercise for personal gain". In sentencing both to 10 years jail Justice Byrne remarked on the enormous quantity of the drugs and the importance of his sentence acting as a deterrent to others. The truck was forfeited to the Crown.

By the end of August 1994, the AFP in conjunction with the French authorities had seized and destroyed 15 tonnes of cannabis from Operation Caribou and almost one-and-half tonnes from Operation Extra bringing the largest total seized and destroyed ever in Australia's law enforcement history. It was also significant that the AFP was able to successfully operate two major operations almost simultaneously.