

HEROIN VALUED AT \$70 MILLION REPORTED SEIZED

By David Bird

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Federal agents said yesterday that they had seized 115 1/2 pounds of heroin that had been smuggled into the United States from Italy in elaborate espresso machines. They estimated the street value of the drug to be \$70 million.

William von Raab, the Commissioner of the United States Customs Service, who announced the seizure, said that it was "probably the most important heroin seizure since the days of the French Connection." He said it was the largest shipment intercepted in New York in seven and a half years.

In the French Connection smuggling operation, heroin was concealed in cars that were shipped to this country from Marseilles. That operation, which inspired the movie called "The French Connection," began in 1962 and ended in the early 1970's.

Mr. von Raab, who came to the city from Washington, spoke at a news conference at the Drug Enforcement Administration's headquarters, 555 West 57th Street, where he was surrounded by clear plastic bags of heroin and wooden packing cases containing the bright gold espresso machines. Dealing a 'Crippling Blow'

He said that while there had been one larger seizure since the French Connection - 164 pounds in August 1974 - the current one was important because it was hoped that it would mark "a crippling blow to a major international drug-smuggling operation." Mr. von Raab did not, however, provide details as to how the latest seizure would curtail the flow of heroin, which authorities have said has been increasing over the years.

Customs agents said that, last January, they became suspicious of a large shipping container that had been unloaded in Newark from an Italian cargo ship, the Arcadia, and consigned to a shop called the Interbar Gift Palace at 4604 Avenue N in Brooklyn's Flatlands section.

The container held two old cars and 13 espresso machines. The cars were stripped first, agents said, but nothing was found. Then they found the heroin in the boilers of eight of the espresso machines. Agents said the powdery white heroin had been wrapped in plastic and tinfoil, then packed in stainless steel containers whose lids were sealed with wax to avoid detection by sniffer dogs. Heroin Replaced With Quinine

To find out who was receiving the heroin, agents let the shipment go through after replacing the heroin with harmless white quinine powder.

Agents raided the gift shop last Saturday, seized the machines in the basement and arrested John Notaro, to whom the machines had been consigned.

Agents said Mr. Notaro, was as 32-year-old native of Italy and a resident alien who lived at 2726 East 63d Street in the Mill Basin section of Brooklyn.

Mr. Notaro was arraigned in Federal Court in Brooklyn before Magistrate Simon Chrein and held in \$10 million bail. Magistrate Chrein set a hearing date of March 8.

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