



Herald Photo by Robert P.

SLEEPY MOSS LANDING HARBOR GLISTENS UNDER MIDDAY SUN IN THIS AERIAL VIEW  
... some of the marina's fishermen and boats were used to smuggle marijuana in multimillion dollar operation

# Workings of Big Drug Ring Disclosed

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(First of a three-part series)

Several Moss Landing fishing boats and Monterey Bay fishermen smuggled marijuana with a street value of \$500 million to \$1 billion as part of an international ring that operated between South American countries and San Francisco Bay during the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

The smuggling ring is described by federal prosecutors as the largest ever uncovered on the West Coast and one of the largest drug operations in the nation.

It involved a handful of fishing boats carrying more than 200,000 pounds of marijuana from Costa Rica and Colombia to Red Rock Marina in Richmond, according to federal court records.

But only a fraction of the pot — 20,000 pounds seized by the Coast Guard on a boat off the coast of Los Angeles in 1981 — was confiscated by federal authorities.

## Profits Laundered

More than 50 people have been indicted and convicted on various federal drug charges and a dozen



cases are still pending in connection with the ring that spanned the United States and South America. Profits from the smuggling were laundered in a Sarasota, Fla., financial service.

About a dozen Monterey County residents were involved in the smuggling operation, including a dentist who formerly practiced in Carmel, a bartender who was a Seaside police officer in the 1950s and the owner of a Moss Landing fish-packing company.

Through research of federal court documents, interviews with members of the ring, and a jailhouse interview with Bruce Perlowin, 35, the kingpin of the organization, The



Herald has pieced together the inner workings of the smuggling ring and the roles of Monterey County residents, who ranged from boat crew members to radio surveillance monitors and salesmen.

## Well-Operated

Perlowin ran the operation as if it were a "Fortune 500" company, said Deputy U.S. Attorney James Lassart, chief of the federal Drug Enforcement Task Force in San Francisco.

"He wound up with the fortune and we wound up with the '500,'" Lassart told The Herald, exaggerating the number of people convicted in connection with the ring.

"This case involves the destruc-

tion of one of the largest narcotic trafficking organizations in the country," Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Merkle said in Tampa, Fla. in November 1983 after Perlowin pleaded guilty there to federal charges of racketeering and conspiracy to commit income tax fraud.

Sentences meted out to those convicted ranged from 15 years to probation.

The Herald has also learned that:

- Some of the fishing boats used to haul marijuana from Costa Rica and Colombia to Northern California were owned by a partnership of local businessmen, First Cabal General Limited.

None of the local investors in the Moss Landing boats has been charged by federal authorities. Prosecutors say their investigation of the smuggling ring is virtually complete.

Two of the partners, Philip Vit DiGirolamo, 42, of Monterey, and Michael Morris Martin Jr., 48, a dentist who formerly practiced in Carmel and is now a resident of Redlands, managed the fishing boat venture. They have pleaded guilty to various charges related to marijuana smuggling.

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