

# RECORD OF THE SCROLLS

**T**OP detective work by AFP Northern region members has resulted in an Australian record prison sentence being imposed on a convicted heroin courier who appeared in Brisbane Supreme Court late last year.

Chinese-born British citizen Wong Chi Po, aged 30, of Mong Cheng Village, Hong Kong, was sentenced to 25 years' jail when he appeared before Mr Justice Williams after being found guilty of importing 27 kg of cut heroin, with a street value of around \$46 million.

In his report on the operation, Detective Sergeant Ray Wregg revealed the intricate web which resulted in the arrest and conviction of Wong Chi Po.

On 13 April, information was received from Bangkok that it was believed two unclaimed suitcases containing a large amount of heroin had arrived in Australia at either Perth or Brisbane airports and that the heroin was concealed in Chinese Scrolls.

In fact, the smugglers had tried to bring 51 scrolls into the country with them.

Operations Branch detectives Jim McLaren and Greg Lye began inquiries at Brisbane International Airport and the suitcases were located at the Qantas Cargo Bond Store.

They had arrived on Qantas Flight 96 on 6 April and were taken by Customs Officers to the Bond Store.

Close examination of the scrolls by Detective Sergeant Wregg and Detective Constable Lye revealed that the cylindrical bases were hollow and contained a total of 27kg of heroin.

The heroin was removed and a harmless sugar/glucodin mix and two 250 gram parcels of heroin in plastic bags were substituted for a proposed controlled delivery, which began on the following day.

Continuing investigations revealed two possible suspects, Wong Chi Po and another passenger on the same Qantas flight from Hong Kong to Brisbane.

Po left Brisbane again on 8 April but there is no record of the other man having departed. He is still at large and his details have been circulated through Interpol.

Arriving back in Singapore, Po went to Mayfair Travel and claimed his friend had lost their suitcases in Brisbane and a request was made for them to be returned to Singapore.

The controlled delivery was then abandoned and the two parcels of heroin removed from the suitcases.

On 3 May, suspicions were further confirmed when information was received that Po had applied for another visa to visit Australia and had told the Immigration Officer, after lengthy questioning, that he 'wanted to come to Australia to tell the anti-narcotics police about the suitcases'.

His visa application was refused and the matter reported to authorities in Kuala Lumpur.

Sergeant Wregg obtained a first instance warrant for the arrest of Po and details of his and his accomplice's particulars were circulated.

On 19 May, advice was received from Kuala Lumpur that no further contact had been made by Po at Mayfair Travel since 10 May and it appeared the suitcases had been abandoned.

On 23 June, further information was received from Hong Kong that Po was believed to be living in that country. Inquiries were then requested of the Royal Hong Kong Police to locate and arrest him on provisional warrant.

On 31 July, Royal Hong Kong Police advised that Po was in custody. Ray Wregg and Greg Lye travelled from Brisbane to Hong Kong and interviewed him.

After extradition hearings in Brisbane and Hong Kong, Po was extradited to Brisbane on charges relating to the importation of heroin and was later committed for trial. He pleaded not guilty to three charges; knowingly concerned in importation of a prohibited import (heroin); attempt to import a prohibited import (heroin); possess prohibited import (heroin).

Following a 10-day trial and the appearance of 32 witnesses for the prosecution, including four from overseas, and three witnesses for the defence, the jury returned a verdict of guilty on the first and third charges and on the second charge — at the direction of Mr Justice Williams — not guilty, as it was an alternative charge to the first.

Po was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment with hard labour on each of the charges. He subsequently sought leave to appeal against conviction and sentence. His appeal has been dismissed.

At the time, it was the largest seizure of heroin in Australia's history. It still remains the second largest.