

## 20 tons of coke seized at sea

*by UPI*

ALAMEDA, Calif. - U.S. Coast Guard officials Monday showed off more than 20 tons of cocaine they said comprised the largest maritime seizure ever.

The 765 plastic bags filled with the illegal drug, slapped with a street value price tag of about \$300 million, were placed briefly on display in Alameda, Calif., under the watchful eyes of armed federal agents, the Contra Costa Times reported.

The crew of the Sherman found the drugs March 17 in cargo containers on the deck of the Panamanian freighter Gatun while patrolling off the coast of Panama. The crew also arrested 14 crew members.

"About halfway through counting the bags we knew we must be close to the record in terms of seizures," said Boatswains Mate 1st Class Michael Aguilera.

The Coast Guard's largest cocaine seizures before the discovery aboard the Gatun were 13 tons from a Cambodian-flagged vessel in 2001 and 15 tons from the unflagged Lina Maria in 2004.

Uttam Dhillon, a Department of Homeland Security official and ex-federal prosecutor, was among those watching the Sherman crew unload the cocaine.

"I never prosecuted, or dreamed of prosecuting, a 20-ton cocaine case," Dhillon said.

Copyright © 2007, by United Press International. All Rights Reserved.