Pot-Laden Barge Sets Bust Record

An unusual cargo was brought last week into the Port of Iberia — 75 tons of high-grade marijuana confiscated by police.

U.S. Customs officials and state narcotics agents set a new record in South Louisiana last week when they seized a barge carrying about 75 tons of Columbian marijuana worth $112 million. The bust, which resulted in the arrests of four men from Florida and Alabama, is the largest ever recorded in the United States. The previous record was 60 tons of marijuana seized near Galveston, Texas.

State police spokesman Lt. Ronnie Jones said the tugboat "Trooper," which was towing the marijuana-laden barge, was boarded by various law enforcement authorities about 7:30 p.m. Oct. 29 in the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway at Bayou Sale, Saint Mary Parish. No shots were fired as the four-man crew was arrested. One state policeman later told a reporter the crew was eating dinner when they were arrested. He said the crew barely raised a collective eyebrow at the intrusion. "They never stopped eating," he added.

Charged with possession with intent to distribute more than 100,000 pounds of marijuana each were: Harry D. Hart Jr., 53, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., boat captain; James P. Kilcoyne Jr., 27, of Anniston, Ala., deck hand; Michael P. Dunan, 32, of Miami, Fla., listed as a musician, and Judson Hopia Jr., 50, of Fort Lauderdale, a self-employed businessman.

The men were arraigned before U.S. Magistrate William Goode in Lafayette and booked into the Lafayette Parish Jail. Bond has been set at about $1.5 million for each of the four suspects.

Officials later said the arrests were the result of a two-month investigation into a drug smuggling operation out of Larose, Louisiana. The barge was disguised as a sand-blasting barge, but officials said it was not carrying enough equipment or sandblasting sand to make the ruse work.

The tugboat and barge were brought into the Port of Iberia for docking and unloading. The hull of the 3,600-square-foot