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Undercover Sting Unveils Cocaine Trafficking Plot Between Tortola and St. Thomas

Unsealed case details undercover operation leading to the arrest of Santos Jiminez-Caraballo

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ST. THOMAS — A recently unsealed case in the District Court of the Virgin Islands reveals a man on trial for participating in a conspiracy to traffic cocaine from Tortola in the British Virgin Islands into St. Thomas.

According to the affidavit from law enforcement that accompanied the criminal complaint, in November 2021 an undercover agent began having telephone conversations with two people, posing as a drug trafficker “interested in purchasing multi-kilograms of cocaine.” One of the individuals, “Santiago”, lived in Tortola, told the undercover agent that he would coordinate the deal with his friend, who lived on St. Thomas.?

Over a series of telephone calls and WhatsApp messages, the scheme took shape. Authorities allege that Santiago, Rata and the undercover agent agreed to the purchase of 10 kilograms of cocaine for \$125,000, which represented a slight discount off the going rate of \$13,000 per kilogram on St. Thomas.

The deal was scheduled to go down on December 2. A second undercover agent met with Santiago and another unnamed man twice on that date, but both times Santiago told the agent that he did not feel comfortable completing the deal at those locations. Instead, he drove to a house close to the meet locations, and climbed into a black Jeep Laredo Sport. Once inside the vehicle, Santiago reportedly video called the first undercover agent and showed a black bag with kilograms of cocaine inside. After the call, Santiago, who was under surveillance the entire time, was observed leaving the black Jeep without the bag.?

The Jeep then left the area, followed by surveillance units. Law enforcement officials then conducted a traffic stop. Initially, the driver – identified as Santos Jiminez-Caraballo – tried to grab the bag as he exited the vehicle, but ultimately authorities say he gave up and fled on foot as law enforcement agents approached. Officials recovered the bag from the back seat of the Jeep. It contained 10 bricks of suspected cocaine, weighing 12.1 kilograms in total. The vehicle also yielded a Dominican Republic ID card with Mr. Jiminez-Caraballo's name on it, as well as an iPhone registered to an individual of the same name.?

By September 2022, Jiminez-Caraballo was tracked down to an address in St. John, with the black Jeep observed to be parked outside the same residence. A warrant was issued for his arrest on September 27 of that year, but it was not until May 22 that the suspect was finally arrested.

After appearing in court the next day, Jiminez-Caraballo was granted bail in the form of a \$25,000 unsecured bond, and a third-party custodian was assigned. Location monitoring technology was also ordered by U.S. Magistrate Ruth Miller, and his arraignment was scheduled for July 2.