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Puerto Rico Man Convicted in 65-Kilo Cocaine Boat Chase Near St. Thomas, Faces 10 Years to Life

A federal jury found Jean Carlos Torres Cruz guilty after prosecutors said he threw duffel bags from a fleeing vessel near Savanah Island. Agents recovered 65 packages containing about 65 kilograms of cocaine; Cruz now faces 10 years to life in prison.

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ST. THOMAS — A federal jury has convicted Jean Carlos Torres Cruz of Puerto Rico on drug-trafficking charges stemming from a nighttime boat chase west of St. Thomas during which authorities said he threw duffel bags containing approximately 65 kilograms of cocaine into the sea.

Torres Cruz was found guilty following a two-day trial of conspiracy and possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance, U.S. Attorney Adam F. Sleeper announced Wednesday. The charges carry a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison and a maximum of life.

The conviction traces back to the early morning hours of July 21, 2025, when U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations detected a vessel traveling without navigation lights from Culebra, Puerto Rico, toward St. Thomas at approximately 3 a.m., according to court documents and testimony presented during the trial.

Air and Marine Operations personnel on St. Thomas launched a vessel to investigate. Agents subsequently located the unlit boat in waters west of Savannah Island, this time traveling in the direction of Culebra.

Federal prosecutors said the vessel fled when agents attempted to intercept it. During the pursuit, Torres Cruz, who was a passenger, threw bags overboard. The chase ended after Air and Marine Operations agents fired warning flares in front of the fleeing vessel, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Once the boat stopped, authorities arrested Torres Cruz and another man before returning to the area where the bags had been discarded. Agents recovered two duffel bags containing a total of 65 packages.

A Drug Enforcement Administration laboratory analyst subsequently confirmed that the packages contained approximately 65 kilograms of cocaine.

The case was first reported by the Consortium in July 2025, when court records identified the other man aboard the vessel as captain Carlos Cruz Resto. At the time, both men were charged with possession with intent to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine. Torres Cruz was released to home detention under a \$50,000 unsecured bond with electronic location monitoring, while Cruz Resto remained in federal custody pending further proceedings.

The cases ultimately took different paths. A federal court order entered April 30 shows that Cruz Resto pleaded guilty to possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance. Chief District Judge Robert A. Molloy accepted the plea and adjudged him guilty after adopting a magistrate judge's recommendation.

Torres Cruz instead proceeded to trial, where jurors heard testimony concerning the maritime pursuit, the bags thrown from the boat and the subsequent laboratory testing of the recovered drugs. His conviction now leaves sentencing as the next stage of his case.

Under the federal statutes involved, Torres Cruz faces no less than 120 months in prison and could receive as much as a life sentence. Molloy will schedule a sentencing hearing, where the court will determine the punishment to be imposed.

The investigation was conducted jointly by U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations and the Drug Enforcement Administration. Assistant U.S. Attorney Erik Tate and Criminal Chief Kyle Payne prosecuted the case.