

The Virgin Islands Consortium

French National Pleads Guilty to 38 Counts Of Alien Smuggling

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ST. THOMAS -- Alain Rene Leichtnam, 71, a French national, pleaded guilty today in District Court here to 38 counts of an indictment charging him with [encouraging and inducing aliens to enter the United States in violation of law](#), United States Attorney Ronald W. Sharpe announced this afternoon.

According to the plea agreement, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Air and Marine (OAM) and the United States Coast Guard (USCG) intercepted a sailing vessel Mazurka heading towards Coral Bay on the East End of St. John, Virgin Islands in the early morning hours of April 29, 2015. CBP agents observed Leichtnam operating the vessel and identified 38 Cuban nationals and one national of St. Lucia onboard.

Leichtnam admitted that he transported the Cuban nationals to the United States for financial gain knowing that the conduct was unlawful.

Leichtnam was remanded to the custody of the United States Marshals Service pending sentencing, which is scheduled for December 4, 2015.

"Those responsible for encouraging and inducing immigrants to enter the United States illegally are placing personal profit ahead of public safety and the lives of the immigrants," Sharpe said. "This conviction should warn those involved in this dangerous and illegal activity that it comes with a high price."

Angel M. Melendez, special agent in charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, said the agency will continue its diligent work to quell the smuggling of aliens onto U.S. soil.

"ICE continues to be committed to putting an end to the practice of profiting from the illegal transportation of aliens across our borders and throughout our country. We will continue to vigorously enforce the federal laws which punish the many manifestations of the complex problem of smuggling, trafficking and harboring illegal aliens," Melendez said.

"Tragically, many have lost their lives while attempting this illegal and treacherous trip. Human smugglers have a callous disregard for the value of human life and are only concerned about making a profit. ICE will continue to aggressively work with our U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) partners to identify and arrest those involved in this illicit and dangerous activity," he concluded.

The case was investigated by ICE with the assistance of CBP and the USCG. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Kim L. Chisholm.

Feature Image: U.S. Coast Guard vessel near Fort Christianvaern, St. Croix