

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Three D.R. Men Charged With Trafficking Over 1,000 Kilograms Of Cocaine Following High-Speed Chase On Seas

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CBP Air and Marine Operations

ST. THOMAS -- Edwin Vargas, 31, Dany Perez-Brito, 44, and Lenin Cornelio-Perez, 32, all of the Dominican Republic, were charged with conspiracy to possess and possession of a controlled substance on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, U.S. Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced.

The three men made their initial appearance before U.S. Magistrate Judge Ruth Miller on Saturday. After preliminary and detention hearings on Monday, Judge Miller ordered all three men detained.

The complaint alleges that Vargas, Perez-Brito, and Cornelio-Perez were aboard a go-fast boat detected by United States Coast Guard (USCG) aircraft personnel about 65 nautical miles north of San Juan, Puerto Rico, navigating on a southerly course. The vessel did not display any indicia of nationality. Following detection by the USCG, the go-fast boat changed course, and two USCG cutters were diverted to intercept it. The vessel led authorities on a ten-hour high-speed chase in international waters between Puerto Rico and St. Thomas. Approximately 96 nautical miles north of St. Thomas, the go-fast boat's engines malfunctioned, leaving the vessel dead in the water. USCG authorities proceeded to board the vessel at 2:18 a.m. on December 11th and discovered 52 bales, approximately 1,132 kilograms, of a white powdery substance that field tested positive for cocaine.

This case is being investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the USCG, Customs and Border Protection, Air and Marine Operations (CBP AMO), and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Meredith J. Edwards.'

United States Attorney Shappert reminds the public that an indictment is merely a formal charging document and is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless found guilty.