

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Two Men Sentenced to 33 and 37 Months in Federal Prison After Being Stopped With 1,355 pounds of Marijuana on Vessel

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ST. THOMAS — United States Attorney, Gretchen C.F. Shappert for the District of the Virgin Islands announced Friday that Cristian Valencia-Mendoza of Colombia, was sentenced after being found guilty by a jury of conspiracy to possess and possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.

According to court filings, the defendant was on board a go-fast style vessel that was intercepted by a United States Coast Guard (USCG) cutter while on routine patrol. The

USCG first sighted the go-fast vessel on October 18, 2019, at approximately 45 nautical miles north of Malpelo Island, Columbia. The vessel did not have any display indicating its nationality. The USCG boarded the vessel and successfully seized 21 bales of marijuana, which weighed approximately 1,355 pounds, and arrested the two individuals on board.

Valencia-Mendoza later confessed to being hired to assist the boat captain in delivering the drugs. A federal jury returned guilty verdicts on January 22, 2020.

United States District Court Judge Robert A. Molloy sentenced Mendoza to 33 months imprisonment followed by two years of supervised release.

The captain of the vessel, Centeno A. Hansel-Andres, of the Dominican Republic, previously pled guilty and was sentenced to 37 months in prison.

This case was investigated by the United States Coast Guard and the Drug Enforcement Administration.