

Three Plead Guilty to Smuggling More Than \$1 Million into St. Thomas

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ST. THOMAS — United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert for the District of the Virgin Islands announced that Ashen Tirado-Tapia, Jahniel Fuertes-Robles, and Abdiel Rivera Medina pleaded guilty yesterday to attempting to smuggle over \$1 million into St. Thomas by boat.

According to court documents filed in the case, on September 17, 2019, at approximately 1:26 a.m., the defendants, Ashen Tirado-Tapia, Jahniel Fuertes Robles, and Abdiel Rivera Medina, were on board a 25' center console vessel travelling with no navigation lights near the western portion of St. Thomas. A Customs Border Patrol Air and Marine (AMO) coastal interceptor vessel (CIV) from St. Thomas responded in an attempt to contact the vessel. When AMO activated blue lights and sirens to initiate a stop, the boat and its occupants increased their speed, forcing the agents to fire several warning shots, and eventually disabling rounds, into the motor.

During the pursuit, agents observed Fuertes-Robles and Rivera-Medina throwing a black duffel bag and GPS overboard. After AMO stopped the vehicle, agents boarded and detained all three individuals. Agents identified defendant Ashen Tirado-Tapia as the boat's captain. AMO agents returned to where they had seen the defendants throwing something overboard and recovered a GPS unit and the black duffel bag in the water. The duffel bag contained one million one hundred and twenty eight thousand nine hundred and forty dollars (\$1,128,940.00) in U.S. Currency.

This case is being investigated by the Department of Homeland Security. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Juan Albino. The defendants will be sentenced at a later date.

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