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Eight Men Captured During Jet Ski Transfer of 26 Kilos of Cocaine From St. Thomas to Puerto Rico

Crime / **Published On December 14, 2021 04:11 PM /**

Staff Consortium **December 14, 2021**

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Law enforcement officer standing guard over seized packages of drugs. By. GETTY IMAGES

ST. THOMAS — U.S. Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced today that eight men were arrested December 11 in St. Thomas for smuggling 26 kilograms of cocaine.

On December 11, Wilfredo Vazquez Lopez, Jonathan Fernandez Montesino, Esteban Borrrome Diaz, Smarling Villilo De Los Santo, Emmanuel Rodriguez Rodriguez, Jose Martes Gozalez, Guillermo Morales and Ben Carrasquillosanto, had their initial appearances before U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge George Cannon, Jr. on criminal charges related to conspiring to possess with intent to distribute cocaine.

According to court documents, on December 11 at approximately 9:00 a.m., Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air and Marine Operations (AMO) air patrol detected four jet skis traveling from Culebra, PR towards St. Thomas. CBP-AMO air patrol surveilled the jet skis, each operated by a sole occupant, as they approached the west side of St. Thomas. Air patrol watched as the skis made way to the beach at Mermaid's Chair where they were met by four individuals in a red Jeep Wrangler. CBP-AMO officers saw duffle bags being loaded on to the skis, and the skis quickly leaving towards Culebra, PR. CBP-AMO law enforcement vessels pursued the four jet skis towards Culebra, PR.

One driver drove his ski on to a Culebra, PR beach and fled on foot. He escaped capture. A duffle bag was recovered near the abandoned ski. Inside the duffle bag, officers recovered 26 packages which contained a substance that field-tested positive for the presence of cocaine. A third suspect was able to evade capture by splitting off in a different direction from the other skis. Two other operators, Gozalez and Carrasquillosanto, were apprehended. Gozales, a former Puerto Rican Police officer, was followed by CBP-AMO air patrol. His position was relayed to CBP-AMO officers on the water who detained Gozalez while still on a ski. Carrasquillosanto was seen by Puerto Rican Police Forces loading a black and purple jet ski onto a trailer at a nearby marina. He was shown a picture taken by CBP-AMO air patrol which depicted the operator of the purple and black jet ski wearing the same clothes as Carrasquillosanto. Carrasquillosanto admitted to being one of the operators of a ski that was seen at Mermaid's Chair in St. Thomas.

DEA, CBP, and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) agents stopped the red Jeep Wrangler that loaded the duffle bags on to the jet skis as it was leaving Botany Bay Preserve. Esteban Rafael Borrome Diaz (the driver), Wilfredo Ricardo Vazquez Lopez, Jonathan Fernandez Montesino, Smarling Villilo De Los Santo, Emmanuel Rodriguez Rodriguez, and Guillermo Morales were all detained. A Glock pistol was seen in plain view inside the rear pocket of the driver's seat where Vazquez Lopez was seated. Another Glock pistol without a serial number was located in the center console.

On Monday, all eight defendants appeared before Judge Cannon via videoconference for their initial appearances.

All eight men are charged with conspiring to possess with intent to distribute a controlled substance under 21 U.S.C §§ 841(b)(1)(B) and 846.

If convicted, the defendants face up to life in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

CBP-AMO and HSI are investigating the case, and the United States Attorney's Office for the District of the Virgin Islands is prosecuting the case.

A criminal complaint is merely an allegation and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.