

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Man From Dominican Republic Sentenced to Nearly 12 Years in Connection With Haulover Bay Shootout

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ST. THOMAS — United States Attorney Delia L. Smith announced Thursday that Rammer Guerrero Morales, 31, of the Dominican Republic, was sentenced to 141 months of imprisonment by Chief Judge Robert A. Molloy.

In March 2022, Guerrero Morales pleaded guilty to possession and discharge of a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence and assaulting a federal officer.

According to court documents and evidence presented at co-defendant Samuel Pena Columna's trial, on September 25, 2019, Guerrero Morales was involved in a shootout with several U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air and Marine Interdiction

agents. On the evening of September 25, 2019, Guerrero Morales and three co-conspirators were driven by Pena Columna to Haulover Bay, a well-known drug smuggling area on the east end of St. John, with over \$1.1 million to conduct a 100-kilogram cocaine transaction with traffickers from Tortola, BVI.

After arriving at the trail in Haulover Bay, Guerrero Morales and co-defendant Joan Morales Nolasco headed down the trail. Guerrero Morales was armed with a handgun and Morales Nolasco was armed with the long gun. After confirming that the trail was clear, Guerrero Morales and Morales Nolasco had planned to signal for the other co-conspirators waiting in Pena Columna's vehicle to bring the \$1.1 in cash down the trail to complete the drug transaction while Pena Columna waited at the top of the trail in his vehicle.

Trial evidence further revealed that, on their way down to the trail, Guerrero Morales and Morales Nolasco encountered two CBP agents who immediately announced themselves as police. The agents were fired upon by Guerrero Morales and a shootout ensued leaving one agent with gunshot wounds to his shoulder and leg. The agents returned fire hitting Guerrero Morales in his leg which was later amputated due to the severity of his injury. During the shootout, Morales Nolasco fled the scene and ultimately made his way to the Dominican Republic.

He was later extradited back to the Territory for prosecution. Pena Columna and the two remaining co-conspirators also fled the scene. Pena Columna, a paid confidential source conducting his own drug trafficking organization, later told federal agents that he took the two men, along with the \$1.1 million dollars, near the Cruz Bay area where they escaped.

Pena Columna was convicted in September 2022, and his sentencing is scheduled for January 19, 2023. Morales Nolasco pleaded guilty in March 2022, and on December 6, 2022, he was sentenced to 101 months of incarceration for his role in the drug trafficking conspiracy.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security Investigations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations, Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, and the Virgin Islands Police Department investigated this case, and Assistant United States Attorneys Meredith Edwards and Kyle Payne prosecuted the case.

This effort was part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.