The Virgin Islands Consortium

Man From Tortola Sentenced to Over 5 Years in Major Cocaine Trafficking Case Off St. Croix Coast

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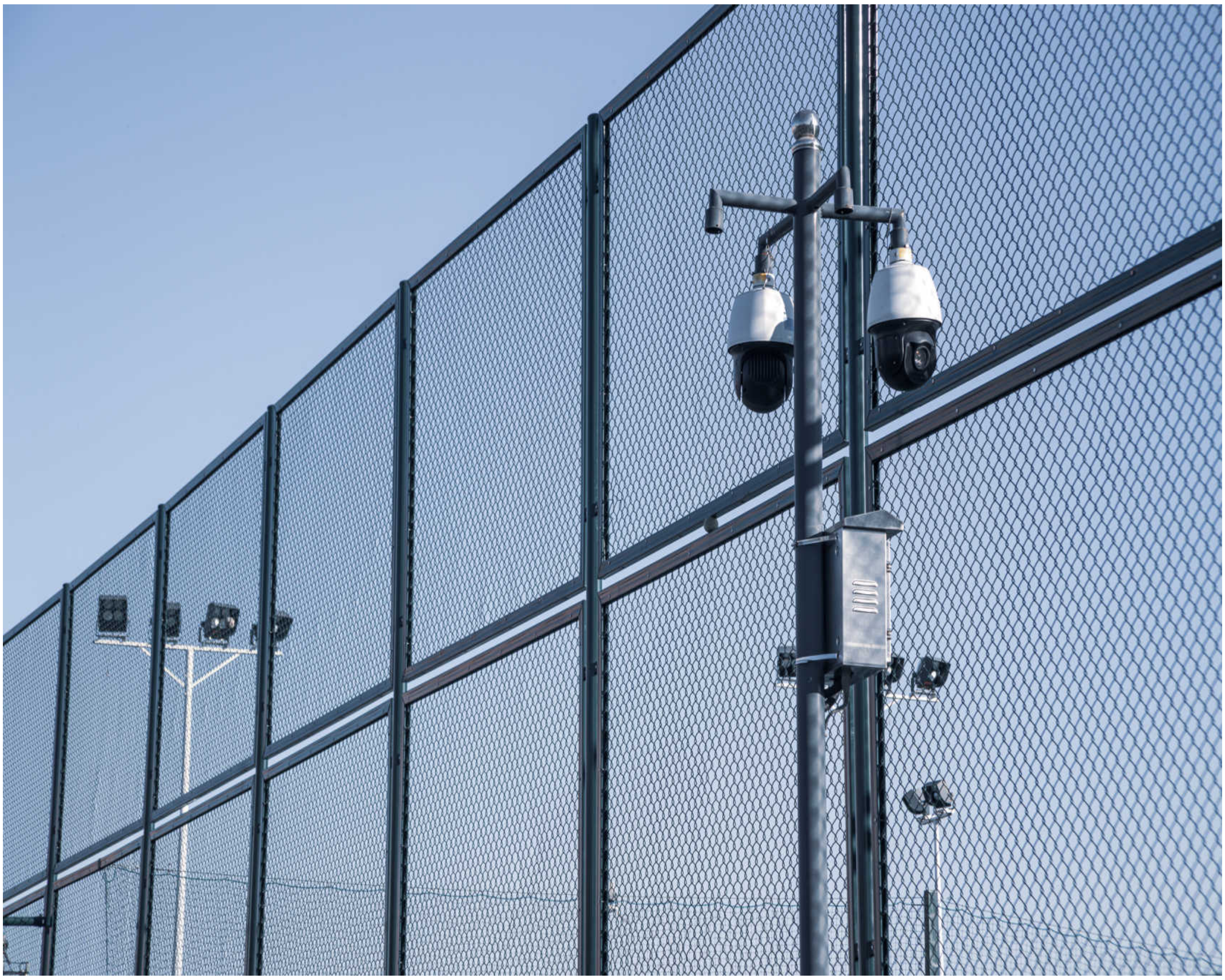

ST. CROIX — United States Attorney Delia L. Smith on Tuesday announced that Sean John, a 35-year-old man from Tortola, British Virgin Islands, has been sentenced to 70 months in prison.

District Court Judge Wilma A. Lewis handed down the sentence following John's conviction on charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine while aboard a vessel subject to US jurisdiction. John will also face two years of supervised release and must pay a special assessment of $100.00.

Court documents reveal that on January 9, 2022, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air and Marine agents detected a vessel with bales of suspected cocaine in plain sight on its deck. The vessel was traveling northeast of St. Croix, heading towards the British Virgin Islands. Further investigation led agents to a 32-foot Manta low-profile vessel with twin 300 HP outboard engines, approximately 19 nautical miles northeast of St. Croix in international waters. The area is known for drug trafficking.

The vessel, found dead in the water, displayed no nationality, flag, or registration, making it subject to US jurisdiction. Agents discovered 21 bales wrapped in plastic and encased in rope onboard the vessel. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) laboratory analysis later confirmed that the bales contained approximately 567 kilograms of cocaine hydrochloride. Along with Sean John, three other defendants - Shannon John, Emmanuel Tolentino-Lebron, and Augusto RodriguezMolina - were found onboard the vessel and have pleaded guilty to the cocaine conspiracy charge.

The United States Coast Guard, Homeland Security Investigation, Customs and Border Protection, and Drug Enforcement Administration investigated the case, with Assistant United States Attorney Melissa P. Ortiz prosecuting it. This prosecution is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation, which targets high-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States.