

Smugglers' sentenced to 12 years in jail

Story by Luis Diaz, D7 Public Affairs

MIAMI -- Sending migrant smugglers a scathing message; Federal Judge Michael Moore sentenced three Cuban parolees to 12-year prison sentences each Jan. 31, for their role in smuggling 31 Cubans, and causing the death of a migrant in a failed smuggling attempt July 8, 2006.

Calling them "mercenaries" Moore handed Rolando Gonzalez-Delgado and Henrich Castillo-Diaz their sentences after the duo plead guilty to 68 counts of alien smuggling resulting in the death of a young woman, and after the conviction of Amil Gonzalez-Rodriguez in a trial in federal court in Key West, Fla.

These convictions were the result of the investigative efforts of the Coast Guard Investigative Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Customs and Border Protection agents. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Scott Ray, Jeffrey Tsai and Coast Guard Lt. Jeffrey Raich, temporarily attached to the U.S. Attorney's Office.


The three men were aboard a go-fast departed the Key West area July 8, and headed to Cuba to pickup an unknown number of people with the intent of bringing them to the U.S.

The sleek 36-foot vessel, equipped with three outboard motors, was detected by the Coast Guard Cutter *Decisive*, 39 miles south of Key West. The crew of the 210-foot, Mississippi-based cutter launched their small boat and notified Sector Key West which also launched a vessel to intercept. During the pursuit, the suspected smugglers used their boat to attempt to ram the Coast Guard vessel more than five times. After the operator refused to stop his vessel, a specially trained and qualified Coast Guardsman then fired two rounds from a shotgun into one of the engines of the fleeing vessel.

The grossly over-loaded go-fast eventually stopped four miles south of Boca Chica, Fla. "This was a horrific voyage for these migrants and has resulted in a tragedy," said Capt. Phil Heyl, former commander of Coast Guard Sector Key West.

When Coast Guard personnel boarded the vessel they immediately identified three migrants in need of medical attention. The flight surgeon was on scene shortly after sunrise and recommended one woman with severe bruises to her face and apparent head injuries, be transferred to awaiting EMS personnel in Key West.

En route Key West the woman lost consciousness and was pronounced dead by local EMS. "There was no way for these people to brace themselves against the impact of the boat slamming into the seas," Heyl said. These ruthless smugglers recklessly placed these

A photograph showing a person in a white jumpsuit being escorted by a USCG officer. The person in white is wearing handcuffs and has their hands behind their back. The officer is wearing a dark uniform and is holding the person's arm. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

people in harm's way by operating at high rates of speed in seas of up to four feet," he added.

In a Miami federal courtroom filled with numerous spectators, Moore said, "smugglers are going to pay a higher price for smuggling. No slap on the wrist," as he read the numerous counts against each defendant.

USCG