

U.S. Soldiers Plead Guilty to Drug Smuggling from Colombia Aboard Military Plane



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byevagolinger

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U.S. SOLDIERS PLEAD GUILTY TO ATTEMPTING TO SMUGGLE \$1 MILLION WORTH OF COCAINE FROM COLOMBIA ABOARD MILITARY PLANE

Two American special forces soldiers have pled guilty to conspiring to transport \$1 million worth of cocaine from Colombia to the United States aboard a military transport plane.

Former Master Sergeant Daniel Gould, 36, and Sergeant 1st Class Henry Royer, 35, who were both Army Green Berets, were caught when they attempted to transport 90 pounds of cocaine via a military aircraft last year, *Army Times* reported this weekend. According to the report, the soldiers had already successfully trafficked a large quantity of the illicit drug from the South American country in the past, selling it to a distributor in Florida.

Gould and Royer had previously transported 22 pounds of cocaine from the Colombian city of Cali to northwest Florida. They reportedly used a hollowed-out

punching bag to conceal the drugs, which were transported to the U.S. In a bid to reinvest the money they made from the sale and make a larger profit, the two men attempted to traffic a larger quantity when they were caught.

“Suspicion was aroused at the United States Embassy when packages were X-rayed, revealing cocaine within gutted out punching bags,” a release from the Justice Department stated, according to the military newspaper.

The drug-trafficking soldiers now face up to 10 years in prison and will be sentenced on March 12.

Cocaine production remains a pervasive problem in Colombia despite decades of the government and the international community attempting to curb the trade. A report released in September showed that the illicit industry is booming and continues to grow. In 2017, approximately 423,000 acres of land—an increase of 17 percent from the previous year—were used to grow coca (the plant whose leaf is the main ingredient of the drug). The report estimated that this would allow for the production of about 1,520 tons of cocaine, or an increase of 31 percent from 2016.

In October, the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), a global coalition of 170 nongovernmental organizations working on drug policy issues, released a separate report pointing out that the global “war on drugs” had been a “spectacular” failure, leading to thousands of murders, public health crises and human rights abuses. International efforts to fight drug trafficking actually resulted in a 145 percent increase in drug-related deaths over the past decade, according to the IDPC.

Colombia’s President Iván Duque Márquez, who took office last summer, has vowed that his government would implement a new strategy to address the illicit drug problem in his nation. The South American leader met with his U.S. counterpart, President Donald Trump, in September to promote a new drug policy document that was signed by 129 countries.

(Original reporting from Newsweek)

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