

# *Colombian Rebel Sentenced to 27 Years Over U.S. Hostage Case*

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Washington, October 25 (RHC-NNN) -- A former commander of Colombia's leftist FARC rebels was sentenced to 27 years in prison on Friday for his role in the 2003 kidnapping of three U.S. citizens held captive for five years, the U.S. Justice Department said.

Alexander Beltran Herrera, 38, pleaded guilty in March to three counts of hostage-taking relating to the abduction of Marc Gonsalves, Thomas Howes and Keith Stansell.

The three men were taken prisoner by FARC fighters after their aircraft crashed deep in the Colombian jungle.

Gonsalves, Howes and Stansell ended up being held for 1,967 days before they were finally freed during a daring 2008 rescue by Colombian forces.

A U.S. Justice Department statement said Beltran Herrera had been responsible for moving the hostages and keeping them imprisoned, using choke harnesses, chains, padlocks and wires to restrain the men.

Founded in 1964, the FARC today has about 8,000 fighters and is the largest of the guerrilla groups waging Latin America's longest-running armed conflict.

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