



Department of Justice

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FORMER SILK ROAD TASK FORCE AGENT PLEADS GUILTY TO MONEY LAUNDERING AND OBSTRUCTION

Ex-Secret Service Agent Used Status to Pocket \$820,000 Worth of Bitcoin

WASHINGTON – A former U.S. Secret Service special agent pleaded guilty today to money laundering and obstruction of justice in connection with his theft of digital currency during the federal investigation of Silk Road, an online marketplace used to facilitate the purchase and sale of illegal drugs and other contraband.

Assistant Attorney General Leslie R. Caldwell of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Melinda Haag of the Northern District of California, Chief Richard Weber of the IRS-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), Special Agent in Charge David J. Johnson of the FBI’s San Francisco Division, Special Agent in Charge Michael P. Tompkins of the Justice Department’s Office of the Inspector General’s Washington, D.C. Field Office, and Special Agent in Charge Lori Hazenstab of the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of the Inspector General in Washington D.C. made the announcement.

Shaun W. Bridges, 32, of Laurel, Maryland, had been a special agent with the U.S. Secret Service for approximately six years in the Baltimore Field Office and was assigned to the Electronic Crimes Task Force. He pleaded guilty before the U.S. District Judge Richard Seeborg of the Northern District of California and a sentencing hearing is scheduled for Dec. 7, 2015.

“There is a bright line between enforcing the law and breaking it,” said Assistant Attorney General Caldwell. “Law enforcement officers who cross that line not only harm their immediate victims but also betray the public trust. This case shows we will act quickly to hold wrongdoers accountable, no matter who they are.”

“Mr. Bridges has now admitted that he brazenly stole \$820,000 worth of digital currency while working as a U.S. Secret Service special agent, a move that completely violated the public’s trust,” said U.S. Attorney Haag. “We depend on those in federal law enforcement having the highest integrity and unshakeable honor, and Mr. Bridges has demonstrated that he utterly lacks those qualities. We appreciate the hard work of our federal partners that went into bringing Mr. Bridges to justice.”

“Through a series of complex transactions, the defendant stole bitcoins worth hundreds of thousands of dollars,” said Chief Weber. “This case is an excellent example of the financial expertise of our special agents. Through the analysis of both the block chain and data from the Silk Road servers, we were able to trace the flow of funds, which eventually led to the defendant.”

Between 2012 and 2014, Bridges was assigned to the Baltimore Silk Road Task Force, a multi-agency group investigating illegal activity on Silk Road. Bridges’ responsibilities included, among other things, conducting forensic computer investigations in an effort to locate, identify and prosecute targets, including Ross Ulbricht, aka Dread Pirate Roberts, who ran Silk Road.

According to his plea agreement, Bridges admitted that in January 2013 he used an administrator account on the Silk Road website that belonged to another individual to fraudulently obtain access to that website, reset passwords of various accounts and to move bitcoin from those accounts into a bitcoin “wallet” that Bridges controlled. Bridges admitted that he moved and stole approximately 20,000 bitcoin, which at that time was worth approximately \$350,000.

Bridges admitted that he moved the stolen bitcoin into an account at Mt. Gox, an online digital currency exchange based in Japan. According to his admissions, he liquidated the bitcoin into \$820,000 of U.S. currency between March and May 2013, and had the funds transferred to personal investment accounts in the United States.

Bridges’ plea agreement also established that he obstructed the Baltimore federal grand jury’s investigations of Silk Road and Ulbricht in a number of ways, including by impeding the ability of the investigation to fully utilize a cooperator’s access to Silk Road. In addition, Bridges admitted that he made multiple false and misleading statements to investigators in connection with the San Francisco federal grand jury’s investigation into his own illegal acts, and that he encouraged another government employee to lie to investigators.

Bridges is one of two federal agents to plead guilty in connection with illegal activity during the investigation of Silk Road. Carl M. Force, 46, of Baltimore, was a special agent with the Drug Enforcement Administration and was also assigned to the Baltimore Silk Road Task Force. On July 1, 2015, Force pleaded guilty to a three-count information charging him with money laundering related to his theft of over \$700,000 in digital currency while acting as an undercover agent on the Task Force. Force is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Seeborg on Oct. 19, 2015.

The case was investigated by the FBI’s San Francisco Division, the IRS-CI’s San Francisco Division, the Justice Department’s Office of the Inspector General and the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of the Inspector General in Washington, D.C. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kathryn Haun and William Frentzen of the Northern District of California and Trial Attorney Richard B. Evans of the Criminal Division’s Public Integrity Section, with assistance from Assistant U.S. Attorney Arvon Pertee.