

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of New Jersey

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Two Hudson County Men Charged with Using Drones to Smuggle Contraband into Fort Dix Federal Prison

TRENTON, N.J. – Two Hudson County, New Jersey, men were charged today with conspiring to use drones to smuggle contraband, including marijuana, steroids, syringes, cell phones and cell phone equipment, into the federal correctional facility at Fort Dix, U.S. Attorney Craig Carpenito announced.

Nicolo Denichilo, 38, of Jersey City, New Jersey, and Adrian Goolcharran, a/k/a “Adrian Ajoda,” a/k/a “Adrian Ahoda,” 35, of Union City, New Jersey, were each charged by complaint with one count of conspiring to smuggle contraband and to defraud the United States and one count of smuggling contraband into the federal prison at Fort Dix. Denichilo was arrested March 12, 2020, after federal law enforcement agents learned of a scheduled drone drop at Fort Dix. He had his initial appearance this afternoon before U.S. Magistrate Judge Tonianne Bongiovanni in Trenton federal court and was released on \$100,000 unsecured bond. Goolcharran remains at large.

According to the documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

Special agents of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Inspector General (DOJ-OIG) obtained evidence of at least seven drone deliveries since July 2018 containing contraband meant for inmates at Fort Dix. Goolcharran used cell phones to coordinate the drops with others, including text messaging aerial shots of locations at Fort Dix to better position the drops and to discuss weather conditions. On the same day as a drone drop in April 2019, local police in the area conducted a vehicle stop on Denichilo and Goolcharran less than five miles from Fort Dix. On March 7, 2020, an individual fitting Goolcharran's description and another individual were captured by a surveillance camera carrying and flying a drone from a launch spot located in the woods outside of Fort Dix. Law enforcement also obtained evidence of Goolcharran bringing multiple drones to a store for repairs, including a broken drone shortly after the March 7, 2020, drone flight.

On March 12, 2020, law enforcement agents, acting on information obtained by Fort Dix officials, approached Denichilo and another individual at a launch site near Fort Dix, minutes after Fort Dix officials had observed a drone flying over a housing unit at the prison. Both men fled, and Denichilo was apprehended hiding in a ditch near the launch site. Fort Dix officials also found an inmate in the area of the drone drop inside the prison in possession of 34 cell phones, nine chargers, 51 SIM cards and other telephone equipment. Agents also seized an SUV near the launch site outside of the prison that contained the drone in the backseat.

Contraband that has been seized by authorities pursuant to the intercepted drone drops into Fort Dix includes marijuana, steroids, more than 160 cell phones, 150 SIM cards, 74 cell phone batteries and chargers, 35 syringes and two metal saw blades. Denichilo's fingerprint was obtained from a plastic bag recovered from one of the drone drops at Fort Dix. Goolcharran's DNA was recovered from electrical tape found on the drone used in a July 2018 drop.

The conspiracy count carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and maximum fine of \$250,000 and the contraband smuggling count carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison and \$100,000 fine.

U.S. Attorney Carpenito credited agents of DOJ-OIG, New Jersey area office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Guido Modano, and its Cyber Investigations Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Keith A. Bonanno; the U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Detachment 307, under the direction of Superintendent Jonathan Jackson; and the U.S. Department of Transportation – Office of Inspector General, Northeast Region, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Douglas Shoemaker, with the investigation leading to the charges.

He also thanked Federal Bureau of Prisons personnel at Fort Dix, under the direction of Warden David Ortiz; special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gregory W. Ehrie; special agents of the U.S. Attorney's Office, under the direction of Supervisory Special Agent Thomas J. Mahoney; and officers with the Pemberton Borough Police Department, under the direction of Chief Edward Hunter; the Pemberton Township Police Department, under the direction of Chief David Jantas; and Chesterfield Township Police Department, under the direction of Chief Kyle Wilson, for their assistance.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Cari Fais and Jeffrey Manis of the Office's Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

The charges and allegations contained in the complaints are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.