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TWO HUDSON COUNTY MEN ADMIT ROLES IN SCHEME TO USE DRONES TO SMUGGLE CONTRABAND INTO FORT DIX FEDERAL PRISON

NEWARK, N.J. – Two Hudson County, New Jersey, men admitted their roles in a conspiracy to use drones to smuggle contraband, including cell phones and tobacco, into the federal correctional facility at Fort Dix, U.S. Attorney Philip R. Sellinger announced.

Nicolo Denichilo, 40, and Adrian Goolcharran, aka “Adrian Ahoda,” aka “Adrian Ajoda,” aka “Adrian Ajodha,” 37, both of Jersey City, New Jersey, pleaded guilty by videoconference before U.S. District Judge Susan D. Wigenton to one count each of conspiracy to defraud the United States Bureau of Prisons.

Two other men, Jason Arteaga-Loayza, and Johansel Moronta, have previously pleaded guilty to participating in the scheme to use drones to smuggle contraband into Fort Dix prison. Arteaga-Loayza pled guilty to his role in the scheme as well as to one count of possession of heroin and fentanyl with the intent to distribute. In September 2021, Judge Wigenton sentenced Arteaga-Loayza to 43 months’ imprisonment. On January 10, 2022, Moronta pled guilty before U.S. District Judge Madeline Cox Arleo to his participation in the scheme as well as to violating the conditions of his supervised release stemming from an earlier federal conviction and is pending sentencing on those charges.

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

Denichilo and Goolcharran participated in multiple drone deliveries of contraband into Fort Dix between November 2018 and March 2020. Arteaga-Loayza and Moronta, while they were federal prisoners at Fort Dix, arranged for Goolcharran, with Denichilo’s assistance, to fly drones over Fort Dix and drop packages of contraband into the prison, where it was sold to inmates for a profit. The packages included cell phones, cell phone accessories, tobacco, weight loss supplements, eyeglasses, and various other items. Arteaga-Loayza, with Moronta’s assistance

inside of the prison, took inmate requests for specific items of contraband and oversaw the collection of payments.

Denichilo, Goolcharran and their conspirators took various steps to prevent BOP officials from detecting and intercepting the contraband. They planned drone drops during the late evening hours or overnight when it was dark outside, and the drones were less likely to be seen. Goolcharran, the drone pilot, with Denichilo's assistance, flew the drones from concealed positions in the woods surrounding the prison. The lights on the drones were covered with tape to make it more difficult for prison officials to spot the drones against the dark evening sky. Arteaga-Loayza and Moronta also used cell phones, including contraband phones concealed within the prison, to coordinate the drone drops from Denichilo and Goolcharran.

Denichilo and Goolcharran each face a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000. Sentencing for Denichilo is scheduled for June 6, 2022, and for Goolcharran, June 9, 2022.

U.S. Attorney Sellinger credited agents of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, 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 Acting Special Agent in Charge Joseph Harris, with the investigation leading to today's guilty pleas.

He also thanked Federal Bureau of Prisons personnel at Fort Dix, under the direction of Warden Lamine N'Diaye; special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge George M. Crouch Jr. in Newark; special agents of the U.S. Attorney's Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Thomas J. Mahoney; officers of the Pemberton Borough Police Department, under the direction of Chief Edward Hunter; Pemberton Township Police Department, under the direction of Chief Jason Watters; and Chesterfield Township Police Department, under the direction of Chief Kyle Wilson, for their assistance.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark J. McCarren of the Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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