



**Department of Justice
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FEDERAL AIR MARSHALS CONVICTED OF BRIBERY AND DRUG POSSESSION

HOUSTON, TX – Federal Air Marshals Shawn Ray Nguyen, 38, and Burlie L. Sholar, III., 32, have been convicted of using and agreeing to use their positions as Federal Air Marshals to bypass airport security and smuggle cocaine and narcotics proceeds aboard U.S. airline flights for a price, according to United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle.

Nguyen and Sholar each pleaded guilty and now stand convicted of conspiring to possess with intent to distribute 15 kilograms of cocaine and bribery of a public official. Sentencing has been set July 10, 2006. The conspiracy convictions carry a maximum statutory punishment of no less than 10 years up to life imprisonment and a \$4 million fine. The bribery conviction carries a maximum statutory punishment of 15 years, a fine three times the amount of the bribe, and each man may be disqualified from holding any office of honor, trust, or profit under the United States.

At this morning's re-arraignment hearing before United States District Judge Kenneth M. Hoyt, Nguyen and Sholar admitted that beginning in late December 2005 through February 9, 2006, while employed as public officials of the Federal Air Marshal Service, they agreed to smuggle 15 kilograms of cocaine past the secure entrance at Bush Intercontinental Airport, and then transport the cocaine via a commercial airline to Las Vegas, Nevada, in exchange for \$5,000 per kilogram.

The charges filed against Nguyen and Sholar were the result of an internal investigation initiated by agents of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General in late 2005, which evolved into a joint investigation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The investigation culminated in the arrest of both men on February 9, 2006, by investigating agents with the assistance of the Harris County Sheriff's Office.

During the course of the investigation, agents documented a January 28, 2006, meeting between Nguyen and a cooperating witness (CW) at a local restaurant where they discussed the transportation of 15 kilograms of cocaine from Houston, Texas, to Las Vegas, Nevada. It was agreed that Nguyen and another Federal Air Marshal, later identified as Sholar, would use their official positions to accomplish the task.

Beginning on February 3, 2006, pursuant to a court order, investigative agents began intercepting Nguyen's cellular telephone conversations, including a series of conversations beginning on February 6, 2006, which led to meetings and conversations planning the

smuggling and transport of the cocaine.

On February 6, 2006, Nguyen called and scheduled a meeting with the CW for that evening at his residence located on the 16600 block of Gentle Stone Drive in Houston. Thereafter, Nguyen called Sholar telling him he was meeting "his boy," a reference to the CW. At approximately 8:00 p.m., the CW met with Nguyen at his residence as planned. At this meeting, it was agreed that Nguyen and his associate, Sholar, would transport 15 kilograms of cocaine from Houston, Texas, to Las Vegas, Nevada, for \$5,000 per kilogram on February 9. The CW agreed to deliver the cocaine and \$15,000 for expenses to Nguyen prior to the trip.

On February 9, 2006, at approximately 9:14 a.m., Sholar called Nguyen to tell him he had booked a room at the Emerald Suites, a hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. Approximately an hour later, Sholar again called Nguyen to say he had booked the 7:05 p.m. flight to Las Vegas, Nevada. Shortly after these calls, the CW delivered approximately 15 kilograms of cocaine and \$15,000 in marked U.S. currency to Nguyen at his residence.

Within minutes of the delivery of the cocaine, Nguyen telephoned Sholar. In this conversation they discussed the airplane and hotel reservations for their trip to Las Vegas, Nevada, and Nguyen asked Sholar to arrive at his residence early so they could inspect the "stuff." Sholar told Nguyen he would be there at 4:00 p.m. On February 9, 2006, at approximately 3:37 p.m., investigating agents saw Sholar arrive at Nguyen's residence driving a red Ford F-150 pick-up.

Nguyen and Sholar were arrested at approximately 4:35 p.m. as they both left Nguyen's residence in Sholar's red Ford F-150. Sholar was found in possession of \$5,000 of the marked U.S. currency previously provided to Nguyen by the CW. A firearm was also found in the truck. The 15 kilograms of cocaine, a total of \$9,342 of the marked U.S. currency delivered by the CW, and three firearms were found in Nguyen's residence.

Both Nguyen and Sholar were hired as Federal Air Marshals in late 2002 and were so employed on February 9, 2006, the date of their arrest. Both men have been in federal custody without bond since their arrest and will remain in federal custody pending their sentencing.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys James Alston and Mark McIntyre.

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