

The United States Attorney's Office

Southern District of Florida

Press Release

TWO MIAMI -BASED AIRCRAFT PARTS SUPPLIERS PLEAD GUILTY IN PROCUREMENT FRAUD SCHEME

April 12, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Four Others Previously Convicted for Their Roles in Counterfeit Airplane Parts Scheme

Jeffrey H. Sloman, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, Marlies T. Gonzalez, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General ("DOT-OIG"), Miami Field Office, Amie R. Tanchak, Resident Agent in Charge, Defense Criminal Investigative Service ("DCIS"), Laura DeJong, Commander, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Detachment 802 ("AFOSI"), John V. Gillies, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), Anthony V. Mangione, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), Office of Investigations, and Carol Kisthardt, Special Agent in Charge, Southeast Field Office, Naval Criminal Investigative Service ("NCIS"), announced the April 7, 2010 guilty plea of defendants **Mariella Bianchi**, 51, and **Juan Beltran**, 28, both of Davie, for their participation in a massive procurement fraud scheme designed to defraud the U.S. Air Force and Navy, and the commercial aviation sector. The defendants pled guilty to conspiracy to commit airplane parts fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 38(a). They are scheduled to be sentenced on July 7, 2010 before U.S. District Court Judge Marcia Cooke. At sentencing, the defendants each face a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

These convictions are part of Operation Wingspan, a two-year investigation into the manufacture and sale of counterfeit military and commercial airplane parts. To date, the loss in Operation Wingspan is estimated at more than \$5 million. In addition, this Operation has resulted in the seizure of more than \$150,000 and the revocation by the Federal Aviation Authority ("FAA") of at least 2 FAA Repair Station Certificates.

Defendant Mariella Bianchi was the owner of The Airborne Group, a military and commercial aircraft parts supply company in Miami. Juan Beltran was the Director of Military Sales at the Airborne Group. Bianchi and Beltran bid and were awarded contracts to supply the U.S. Air Force with various aircraft parts, including the KC-135 or E-3 military aircraft. Once they were awarded a contract for the aircraft parts, defendants Bianchi and Beltran contacted unauthorized local manufacturers, including Julio Zerene of Zerene Aerospace, to manufacture the parts, in violation of the specific contract specifications that required either new surplus parts or parts that had been manufactured by Boeing or other approved sources. Once the parts had been illegally manufactured, defendants Bianchi and Beltran would complete false Certificates of Conformance, also known as a "Parts or Material Certification Form" or "ATA 106" forms, and other paperwork, including packing slips and invoices, all falsely representing either the condition or manufacturer of the parts. Defendants Bianchi and Beltran then forwarded the completed fraudulent paperwork and the counterfeit parts to the U.S. Air Force for use in military aircraft.

Also charged and convicted in connection with this conspiracy were defendants **Julio Zerene**, 49, **John Falco**, 56, **Jorge Cascante**, 54, and **Willie McCain**, 53, all of Miami. On October 2, 2009 and February 9, 2010, defendants Zerene and Falcon, respectively, were sentenced to 37 months in prison. Cascante is scheduled to be sentenced on June 16, 2010, before U.S. District Court Judge Adalberto Jordan; McCain is scheduled to be sentenced on May 20, 2010, before Senior U.S. District Court Judge Daniel Hurley. The defendants face a maximum statutory sentence of 10 years in prison.

According to the indictment and evidence presented in court, Julio Zerene owned Zerene Aerospace Industries, in Miami. Zerene illegally manufactured aviation aircraft skins, wings, and control surfaces for various aircrafts including the U.S. military version of the Boeing 707/320 commercial airframe (KC-135), the U.S. Air Force's E-3 Sentry and U.S. Air Force's Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)

airplanes, by using improper materials, uncalibrated machinery, and without the proper technical schematics and drawings. Zerene sold these parts to various airplane parts brokers, including defendant John Falco, owner of Falcon Aviation, and defendants Mariella Bianchi and Juan Beltran, of The Airborne Group. These defendants would, in turn, sell and ship these counterfeit aircraft parts to the U.S. Air Force and to others in the commercial aviation industry, creating false documents to misrepresent the origin and authenticity of the counterfeit parts.

Defendant Jorge Cascante, the owner and operator of CAS Honeycomb, an FAA- certificated Repair Station, was convicted for his role as an intermediary between illegal airplane parts manufacturers, like Julio Zerene, and local brokers, including Falcon Aviation Group and The Airborne Group. Cascante also completed paperwork that falsely certified the authenticity of the counterfeit parts. Willie McCain, owner of McCain Research Labs, also an FAA- certificated Repair Station, was convicted for his role in providing FAA-8130's that falsely certified the airworthiness of the counterfeit parts, which were neither within his rating nor on his capabilities list.

Mr. Sloman commended the investigative efforts of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of the Inspector General, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, the FBI, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and ICE's Office of Investigations. As well, Mr. Sloman thanked the Federal Aviation Administration for their valuable assistance during the course of the investigation. This case was handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Marc Anton.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls>. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at <http://www.flsd.uscourts.gov> or on <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov>.

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