



U. S. Department of Justice

News Release

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WARRANT OFFICER PLEADS GUILTY TO THEFT OF
GOVERNMENT PROPERTY

RALEIGH - United States Attorney Thomas G. Walker announced that in federal court today **KURT ALLEN BENNETT**, 41, of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, pled guilty before United States District Judge Terrence W. Boyle to conspiring to steal and convert property belonging to the United States Government, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371, and two counts of theft and conversion of government property, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 641.

U.S. Attorney Walker stated, "The theft of sensitive military equipment, such as the laser designator rangefinder in this case, puts our soldiers at even greater risk than they already are given the potential for such equipment to fall into the wrong hands. We owe a duty to our troops to protect them from this type of greed and criminal misconduct."

According to the Indictment filed on January 3, 2013, and information presented in open court, at the time of the offense,

BENNETT was an Apache helicopter pilot in the United States Army assigned to the 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, at Hunter Army Air Field in Savannah, Georgia. From October 18, 2008, through October 18, 2009, **BENNETT** was deployed with his unit to Contingency Operating Base (COB) Speicher in Iraq. During his deployment, **BENNETT** stole government property, concealed the stolen items in military connexes, and then shipped the stolen goods back to the United States along with the rest of his unit's property to Fort Drum, New York.

After **BENNETT** returned to the United State from Iraq, he traveled to Fort Drum and transported the connex and its contents of stolen items with his personal vehicle back to Georgia. The value of the stolen items during his Iraq deployment exceeded \$100,000.

In 2010, **BENNETT** was a Chief Warrant Officer 2 in the United States Department of the Army assigned to the 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, which is part of the 18th Airborne Corps, based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. From November 14, 2010 through July 30, 2011, **BENNETT** was deployed with the 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade to the United States Forward Operating Base - Spin Boldak and then later at Kandahar Air Field, both U.S. military bases located in Afghanistan. During his deployment to Afghanistan, **BENNETT** was the Brigade Tactical Operations Officer with designated duties

as Officer-in-Charge of a security detail known as the Enabler Security Team which secured movement of staff and service/construction workers throughout the 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade's area of responsibility.

Between December 2010 and July 28, 2011, **BENNETT**, along with WALKER (already entered his guilty plea) stole more than \$1,000,000 worth of government property, concealed the stolen items in military connex, and then shipped the stolen goods back to the United States through Air Force channels. Some of the items stolen included a lightweight laser designator rangefinder ("LLDR") valued at over \$290,000; a Polaris ATV valued at \$11,507; two plasma cutters valued at \$10,000, and one cargo trailer valued at \$8,944. An LLDR is used to locate and designate targets for laser-guided munitions.

"This guilty plea by a military officer today highlights the effectiveness of aggressive investigative efforts by the Defense Criminal Investigative Service and our law enforcement partners," stated Special Agent in Charge John F. Khin, Southeast Field Office, DCIS. "Chief Warrant Officer Kurt Bennett was held accountable for stealing over \$1 million worth of military property while deployed to Afghanistan with the US Army. His self-serving crimes breached his trust and honor as an Army officer, and discredited the U.S. military services, while undermining our warfighting efforts. The DCIS takes

seriously any corruption and fraud that waste precious resources needed for military operations, especially in these times of reduced Defense budgets."

Kurt Bennett abused his position of trust and betrayed his fellow service members, dishonoring the very principles he promised to uphold. The FBI will continue to aggressively investigate those who put their personal greed ahead of the safety of this country's serviceman and women," said John Strong, Special Agent in Charge of the Charlotte Division of the FBI.

BENNETT's co-conspirator was Sergeant First Class Robert Alan Walker. Walker's sentencing hearing is currently set for August, 2013.

At sentencing, **BENNETT** faces up to 5 years imprisonment for the conspiracy charge and up to 10 years for each of the theft charges.

The criminal investigation of this case was conducted by United States Defense Criminal Investigative Service; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the United States Department of Army - Criminal Investigation Command, and the Defense Logistics Agency. Assistant United States Attorney Banumathi Rangarajan is handling the prosecution on behalf of the Eastern District of North Carolina.

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