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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Alabama

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Former Marine Receives 33 Months for Embezzling Over \$500,000 From Marine Corps and Over \$20,000 From Toys for Tots

United States Attorney Richard W. Moore of the Southern District of Alabama announces today that Senior United States District Judge Callie V.S. Granade sentenced former United States Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Christopher Aragon, 32, a resident of Mobile, Alabama, to 33 months imprisonment for conspiring with his wife, co-defendant Teneshia Aragon, and co-defendant Dana Davis to commit wire fraud. As part of the sentence, the judge also ordered that Christopher Aragon undergo three years of supervised release after finishing his term of imprisonment, pay a \$100 mandatory special assessment, receive mental health treatment, undergo credit restrictions, pay restitution totaling \$534,044.08 to the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Reserve, and pay restitution totaling \$20,044.70 to the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation. Moreover, the judge ordered that a residence traceable to criminal proceeds be subject to forfeiture to the United States for disposition in accordance with the law.

According to documents filed with the court as part of his guilty plea, Christopher Aragon's offense conduct consisted of two conspiracies to defraud. First, between October 2014 and August 2016, Mr. Aragon, a former Staff Sergeant and Unit Supply Chief for 3d Force Reconnaissance Company (3d Force Recon) in the Marine Corps in Mobile, Alabama, conspired with Teneshia Aragon and Dana Davis, owner and sole proprietor of the Runway Café, a restaurant in Mobile, Alabama, to achieve personal financial gain by defrauding the Marine Corps. Christopher Aragon made unauthorized, fraudulent charges to a unit travel card assigned to 3d Force Recon. The card was a government credit card used to pay for food and lodging expenses for reservists performing drill functions with 3d Force Recon. Christopher Aragon was the authorizing official for the unit travel card and approved fraudulent charges from Runway Café. He prepared false documents, such as invoices and personnel rosters, and submitted them to the Marine Corps, which later conducted an audit and noticed excessive discrepancies in food expenditures. For example, the Marine Corps noticed that (1) many Runway Café invoices did not match official 3d Force Recon activities and, therefore, did not support a legitimate need for food services, (2) Runway Café's invoices were for more meals than could be consumed by the number of Marines assigned to 3d Force Recon, (3) the personnel rosters, which contained the names of 3d Force Recon Marines who supposedly consumed the meals, were fabricated, and (4) Runway Café's invoices contained unauthorized service fees. The criminal conspiracy caused a financial loss to the Marine Corps of around \$554,044.08. Since Runway Café issued a \$20,000 refund to the Marine Corps during the conspiracy, the Marine Corps is owed \$534,044.08.

Second, between December 2013 and December 2014, Christopher and Teneshia Aragon conspired to achieve personal financial gain by defrauding the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation, a tax exempt, not-for-profit public charity that serves as the fundraising and support organization for the Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program. Christopher Aragon served as 3d Force Recon's Toys for Tots program coordinator and possessed a credit card issued linked to funds in 3d Force Recon's local Toys for Tots account. With the card, he could buy toys and pay for expenses associated with the Toys for Tots Foundation. Unbeknownst to the foundation, Christopher Aragon used the credit card to make unauthorized payments to himself. As part of the conspiracy with his wife, Christopher Aragon prepared fraudulent documents, such as invoices, and submitted them to the Toys for Tots Foundation, which ultimately lost around \$23,044.70 due to the criminal conduct. The Aragons later credited \$3,000 back to the foundation, leaving a balance of \$20,044.70.

On March 29, 2018, a federal grand jury for the Southern District of Alabama charged Dana Davis with one count of conspiracy for seeking to defraud the Marine Corps, and the Aragons with two counts of conspiracy for seeking to defraud the Marine Corps and the Toys for Tots Foundation. In May 2018, all three defendants pleaded guilty before Senior Judge Granade to conspiring to defraud the Marine Corps. On August 20, 2018, Dana Davis was sentenced to six months imprisonment and ordered to make full restitution to the Marine Corps. On September 10, 2018, Teneshia Aragon was sentenced to five years of probation with the first six months in home confinement, and ordered to make full restitution to the Marine Corps and the Toys for Tots Foundation.

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service and Defense Criminal Investigative Service investigated the case. Assistant United States Attorney Sinan Kalayoglu prosecuted the case.

Component(s):

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