

NEWS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

San Diego, California

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For Immediate Release

MARINE POLICE COMMANDER SENTENCED TO PRISON IN MIRAMAR BRIBERY SCHEME

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – January 30, 2014

This morning in federal court in San Diego, former Marine watch commander Luis Gilbert Menchaca was sentenced to prison for his role in a fraud and bribery scheme at Marine Corp Air Station (MCAS) Miramar. As part of the scheme, Menchaca – while serving as a watch commander for the military police at Miramar – paid thousands of dollars in bribes to another Marine in order to obtain tens of thousands of dollars in fraudulent lodging reimbursements. U.S. District Judge Dana M. Sabraw sentenced Menchaca to two years in prison followed by three years of supervised release, and ordered him to pay restitution to the Marine Corps in the amount of \$37,632.

On July 16, 2013, Menchaca was found guilty by a federal jury of one count of conspiracy to commit bribery and three counts of making false claims. The trial evidence demonstrated that Menchaca

first joined the Marine Corps in 1998, and after an initial four-year term in which he attained the rank of Sergeant, was discharged and entered the Marine Corps Reserve. From time to time thereafter, Menchaca received orders placing him on active duty. In connection with his mobilization orders, Menchaca became eligible to receive certain travel payments, including lodging reimbursement and a per diem allowance, for the entire duration of his active duty service. These travel payments were in addition to the compensation and basic housing allowance (“BAH”) that he, like other Marines, received.

In May 2007, after being placed on active duty at Miramar, Menchaca entered into a conspiracy with another Miramar Marine, Manuel Ramos-Padilla. Ramos worked in an administrative office at Miramar that processed travel claims for reservists like Menchaca. In connection with the scheme, Menchaca and Ramos agreed to submit falsely completed forms – called “travel vouchers” – that claimed reimbursement for thousands of dollars in lodging expenses that Menchaca had not incurred or paid. In addition to submitting these false travel vouchers, the conspirators submitted a fake rental receipt, for a nonexistent address on Mission Village Drive in San Diego.

Menchaca and Ramos repeated the scheme month after month, for a period of ten months. In total, Menchaca submitted approximately \$38,000 in false lodging claims. The proceeds of the scheme were deposited directly into Menchaca’s bank account every month. In exchange for his role processing the false travel vouchers, Menchaca paid Ramos up to \$1,000 per month in cash. On occasion, Menchaca also paid bribes to Ramos in the form of personal checks.

While on active duty with the Marine Corps, Menchaca spent over four years in the military police. During the time period of the fraud, Menchaca served as a watch commander within the military police. In that role, he supervised patrol supervisors, who in turn supervised lower-ranking military police officers. Menchaca had responsibilities for overseeing the enforcement of federal laws, including the Uniform Code of Military Justice; as well as for enforcing the California Vehicle Code and Miramar regulations.

United States Attorney Duffy stated, “Investigating and prosecuting bribery is one of our top

priorities. With our nation's military budget already strained, public corruption draining needed U. S. Marine Corps resources will not be tolerated.”

Menchaca's co-defendant, Manuel Ramos-Padilla, previously pled guilty to conspiring to commit bribery and make false claims. On November 8, 2013, Ramos was sentenced by Judge Sabraw to 24 months in prison.

"The Special Agent in Charge of the NCIS Field Office at Camp Pendleton, Charles Warmuth, says "Misusing trust for personal gain is not a "victimless" crime; it siphons money that could otherwise be used to maintain the readiness of the nation's war fighters and NCIS is committed to bringing to justice those who commit such fraud."

DEFENDANT

Case Number: 12cr5099-DMS

Luis Gilbert Menchaca

CO-DEFENDANT

Manuel Ramos-Padilla

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy to commit bribery and false claims, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371 - Maximum penalties: 5 years in prison, \$250,000 fine, term of supervised release of three years, restitution, forfeiture, and \$100 special assessment.

Three counts of false claims, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 287 - Maximum penalties (per count): Five years in prison, \$250,000 fine, term of supervised release of three years, restitution, and \$100 special assessment.

INVESTIGATING AGENCY

Naval Criminal Investigative Service