

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 15, 2009

Ex-Baggage Screener Gets 37 Months for Stealing Cameras, Electronics and More from Flights out of Newark

– CNN and HBO Cameramen Among his Victims –

(More)

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TRENTON – A former baggage screener for the Transportation Security Administration at Newark Liberty International Airport was sentenced today to 37 months in prison for stealing cameras, electronics and other items from checked baggage, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., announced.

U.S. District Judge Peter G. Sheridan also ordered Pythias Brown, 47, of Maplewood, to pay restitution of \$8,285 and to surrender to the federal Bureau of Prisons by Sept. 1 to begin serving his prison sentence. The judge rejected Brown's request for an extended surrender date for him to celebrate his first wedding anniversary.

Brown pleaded guilty on March 19 to one count of theft from a commercial interstate carrier. He admitted that between September 2007 and October 2008, he stole video cameras and equipment, jewelry, laptop computers, GPS systems, cell phones, electronic games and more. In his plea agreement, Brown acknowledged that the value of goods stolen was between \$200,000 and \$400,000 (much of the items were seized in his apartment and are being returned to owners who can be identified).

According to a criminal Complaint filed at the time of Brown's arrest on Oct. 8, 2008, his victims included cameramen from CNN and HBO who reported their expensive camera equipment stolen in August and September 2008 after checking baggage with Continental for flights out of Newark.

The CNN employee noticed the stolen equipment for sale on eBay on an account that authorities determined belonged to Brown. Using their own eBay account, Special Agents with the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General placed the winning bid on the items and arranged to receive them from Brown. Though he refused to allow the buyers to pick the items up in person, Brown was caught on a surveillance camera at a UPS kiosk in Newark mailing the items to the undercover agents, according to the criminal Complaint.

Similarly, an HBO cameraman reported that a camera and three lenses were missing after he checked baggage with Continental in Newark for a flight to London. That equipment too turned up on eBay. The camera and lenses had a stated value of \$47,900.

On Oct. 1, 2008, DHS-OIG agents executed a court-approved search warrant at Brown's residence and recovered, among other things, 66 cameras, 31 laptops, 20 cell phones, 17 sets of electronic games, 13 pieces of jewelry, 12 GPS systems, 11 MP3 players, eight camera lenses, six video cameras and two DVD players.

Brown admitted that he stole the CNN and HBO camera equipment, sold stolen items on eBay and stored loot at his home in Maplewood until he could sell it on eBay.

Marra credited Special Agents of the DHS-OIG New York Field Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gregory Null, with the investigation leading to the guilty plea.

The case was handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Bradley Harsch of the U.S. Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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Defense Counsel: K. Anthony Thomas, Esq., Public Defender's Office, Newark