



***United States Attorney
Southern District of New York***

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**CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
YUSILL SCRIBNER,
REBEKAH CARMICHAEL,
JANICE OH
(212) 637-2600**

**HIJACKER OF PAN AMERICAN FLIGHT 281
PLEADS GUILTY IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that LUIS ARMANDO PEÑA SOLTREN, 67, pleaded guilty today to participating in the November 24, 1968, hijacking of Puerto Rico-bound Pan American flight 281 to Havana, Cuba. After almost 41 years as a fugitive, PEÑA SOLTREN, a U.S. citizen, voluntarily returned to the United States in October 2009 and surrendered to federal authorities.

According to the Complaint and Indictment previously filed in Manhattan federal court:

On November 24, 1968, PEÑA SOLTREN, along with co-conspirators JOSE RAFAEL RIOS CRUZ and MIGUEL CASTRO, boarded Pan American flight 281 bound for San Juan, Puerto Rico. After the airplane took flight, the defendants, wielding pistols and knives, forced their way into the cabin of the airplane and ordered the crew to land in Havana, Cuba. CRUZ, 68, was apprehended in 1975 and CASTRO, 79, was apprehended in 1976. Both ultimately pleaded guilty to threatening the lives of flight crew members. CRUZ and CASTRO were sentenced to 15 years in prison and 12 years in prison, respectively, for their roles in the Pan American flight 281 hijacking.

ALEJANDRO FIGUEROA, who was charged as a co-conspirator in the case, was acquitted in 1969 after a bench-trial before United States District Judge EDWARD WEINFELD.

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PEÑA SOLTREN pleaded guilty today to the following charges: (1) conspiracy to commit air piracy, to interfere with flight crew members, and to kidnap; (2) interfering with flight
SOLTREN faces a maximum potential penalty of life in prison. The sentencing before United States District Judge ALVIN K. HELLERSTEIN is scheduled for June 29, 2010.

This case was the result of the coordinated efforts of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, the FBI, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs. Mr. BHARARA thanked them for their outstanding work.

"Luis Armando Peña Soltren admitted in a federal court in Manhattan to participating in the violent hijacking of Pan American flight 281 more than 41 years ago. This guilty plea affirms that the pursuit of justice is tempered neither by distance nor the passage of time. This case is another example of our commitment to work with our partners at the FBI, the Department of Justice Office's of International Affairs, and the Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, to bring criminals to justice wherever they may hide out and for however long," said United States Attorney PREET BHARARA.

Assistant United States Attorney RYAN P. POSCABLO is in charge of the prosecution.

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