



**U.S. Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Western District of Texas**

**Robert Pitman, U.S. Attorney**

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Daryl Fields, Public Information Officer  
(210) 384-7440

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**ALIEN SMUGGLING RINGLEADER SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON**

*2004 vehicle accident near Pecos involved the smuggling operation and resulted in five fatalities*

**United States Attorney Robert Pitman** announced that in Pecos, 43-year-old Armando Garcia-Lopez, former resident of Tornillo, Texas, was sentenced earlier this week to 200 months in federal prison in connection with an undocumented alien smuggling operation which resulted in five deaths.

In January, a jury convicted Garcia-Lopez of one count of conspiracy to transport aliens resulting in death; three counts of illegal transportation of aliens resulting in death; three counts of aiding and abetting the illegal transportation of aliens; and six counts of aiding and abetting the harboring and concealing of an alien.

On April 5, 2004, Floydada, Texas, resident Melinda O'Brien died as a result of a head-on collision involving her semi-tractor trailer rig and another semi-tractor trailer rig. The accident occurred in the early morning hours on Highway 285 approximately 17 miles south of Pecos, Texas.

Testimony during the January trial revealed that at the time of the accident, O'Brien was traveling Northbound in the Southbound lane while transporting six undocumented aliens inside her semi-tractor trailer cab. In addition to O'Brien, three of the undocumented aliens died at the scene of the crash. A fifth individual, Paul Wesley Wilkins of Kermit, Texas, also died as a result of the initial accident when he subsequently crashed his vehicle into O'Brien's overturned trailer which could not be seen due to the weather conditions.

Evidence presented to the jury established that Garcia-Lopez recruited stash house operators and directed drivers to transport undocumented aliens. Testimony also revealed that the undocumented alien passengers in O'Brien's vehicle were directly part of Garcia-Lopez's smuggling operation. Following the accident, in April 2004, Garcia-Lopez fled to Mexico. Seven years later, he was arrested by federal authorities in Alpine, Texas.

In addition to the prison term handed down on Monday afternoon, Chief United States District Judge Fred Biery ordered that Garcia-Lopez pay \$11,000 restitution to the Wilkins family and be placed under supervised release for a period of five years after completing his prison term.

This investigation was conducted by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement-Homeland Security Investigations agents in Fort Stockton, Alpine and El Paso with the assistance of the United States Marshals Service. Assistant United States Attorney James J. Miller, Jr., prosecuted this case on behalf of the Government.

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