

For Immediate Release
October 21, 2011

**KENTUCKY MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO FEDERAL
MARIJUANA TRAFFICKING CHARGES**

*Defendant Crashed Landed Aircraft with 424.8 Pounds of
Marijuana onto Ranch outside of Tucumcari, N.M.*

ALBUQUERQUE – On October 19, 2011, **Sean Joseph Peterson**, 36, pled guilty in Albuquerque federal court to a two-count indictment charging him with (1) possession of 100 kilograms and more of marijuana with intent to distribute, and (2) conspiracy, under a plea agreement with the U.S. Attorney's Office. At sentencing, Peterson faces a prison sentence of not less than 5 years and not more than 40 years. Peterson has been in federal custody since his arrest on June 2, 2010, and remains detained pending sentencing, which is scheduled for January 20, 2012.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Peterson, a resident of Louisville, Kentucky, and his co-defendant **Kevin Michael Nolf**, 34, a resident of Phoenix, Az., were charged with violating the federal narcotics laws after Peterson crashed a small personal aircraft carrying 424.8 pounds of marijuana onto a small ranch outside of Tucumcari, N.M. after running out of fuel on the evening of April 26, 2010.

According to a criminal complaint filed on May 10, 2010, the rancher who owned the ranch where the aircraft landed observed Peterson and Nolf unloading large duffle bags from the aircraft. When Peterson and Nolf saw the rancher approaching, they reloaded the bags back into the aircraft, and asked the rancher for a ride to a Tucumcari motel. After dropping Peterson and Nolf off at a motel, the rancher alerted local law enforcement authorities who found Peterson at a Tucumcari hotel. Peterson denied any involvement with the downed aircraft and was released.

Court records reflect that, after Peterson was released, local law enforcement officials

obtained a search warrant on the aircraft. During execution of the search warrant, they recovered more than 424 pounds of marijuana.

During his plea hearing, Peterson admitted that, on April 26, 2010, he piloted an aircraft that contained approximately 424.8 pounds of marijuana, and knowingly transported the marijuana from Phoenix, Az. Peterson further admitted that he conspired with Nolf to possess the marijuana with intent to distribute it. According to his plea agreement, Peterson attempted to land the aircraft in Santa Rosa, N.M. to refuel, but fled when police officers arrived at the scene. When the aircraft ran out of fuel, Peterson landed the plane in a field near Tucumcari.

Nolf was arrested in Arizona on January 4, 2011 and has been in federal custody since that time. Nolf entered a guilty plea to both counts of the indictment on July 13, 2011, and remains detained pending his sentencing hearing, which is scheduled for December 13, 2011.

This case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations, New Mexico State Police and Quay County Sheriff's and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Nicholas Jon Ganjei.

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