

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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*For Immediate Release*

## **U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION OFFICER CONVICTED OF CORRUPTION**

**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - December 20, 2013**

A veteran U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer was convicted by a federal jury today of allowing tons of marijuana and loads of people to be smuggled through his inspection lanes.

After a two week trial before U.S. District Judge Marilyn Huff, the jury deliberated for five days and found 50-year-old Lorne “Hammer” Jones guilty of conspiracy to engage in bribery, drug smuggling and alien smuggling and attempted importation of marijuana. Sentencing was set for March 24, 2014 at 9 a.m.

According to testimony at trial, Jones was on the take for a decade beginning in 2000, first waving cars and vanloads of aliens and drugs through his lane at the San Ysidro port of entry, and eventually graduating to tractor-trailers jammed with marijuana at the commercial port at Otay Mesa.

“Lorne Jones allowed greed to destroy everything his badge represents,” said U.S. Attorney Laura Duffy. “This verdict ensures that he will held accountable with his actions.”

“Today’s conviction is important to all of the other hardworking CBP employees and officers who perform their duties with honor and distinction, working tirelessly every day to keep our country safe,” said Pete Flores, CBP Director of Field Operations in San Diego. “We do not tolerate corruption within our ranks; the actions uncovered during this investigation tarnish the badge he was privileged to wear.”

FBI Special Agent in Charge (SAC) Daphne Hearn commented, “When a law enforcement official violates his oath to protect and serve the citizens of this nation, it undermines the public's trust. When that happens, the FBI and our law enforcement partners at the Border Corruption Task Force are determined to restore the public's confidence and trust by rooting out corruption at all levels of government.” The public can report alleged instances of corruption to the FBI hotline at 858-320-1800.

“I am pleased by today's verdict,” said Dennis M. McGunagle, Special Agent in Charge of Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General. “The DHS OIG is committed to working with our law enforcement partners to identify and aggressively investigate allegations of corruption to protect our borders and the integrity of DHS personnel, programs, and operations.”

Jones, an inspector since 1994, worked at both the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa border crossings and had been a canine officer since the 1990s. He was indicted by a federal grand jury and arrested at work in 2010, charged with conspiracy to commit bribery and smuggle drugs and immigrants, as well as bribery and attempted marijuana importation. Jones was acquitted of bribery.

A dozen witnesses testified that Jones was on the take, including Michael Taylor, a former colleague and friend of Jones’ who was also corrupt; Jones’ ex-wife, who recruited him to be a smuggler; a friend and financial adviser who testified that the two had discussed ways to hide ill-gotten gains, and that he had personally used Jones to help smuggle his girlfriend across the border twice; the smuggled girlfriend; and some of Jones’ co-conspirators.

And, prosecutors presented evidence from a database that tracks information about people crossing the border – such as license plate numbers, names of those who were inspected and when, and by whom. During trial, prosecutors said the data proved that Jones was allowing known load vehicles and drivers for drug trafficking organizations to pass though his lanes for years, without being inspected.

According to testimony, Jones volunteered to work overtime shifts as a primary inspector so he could wave through vans jammed with aliens and drugs, and trucks full of marijuana. But things did not go smoothly on two occasions.

According to trial testimony, Jones had a beeper code system to tell smugglers which one of the 24 inspection lanes Jones was working when they approached the border crossing. But the system failed in

2002 when Jones was randomly and unexpectedly reassigned to another position, and a load driver was forced to abandon his van full of drugs in the inspection line.

In the second failure a few months later, a van stuffed to the ceiling with four tons of marijuana was detected by a roving officer and his dog. The van was in Jones' lane, just car lengths away from Jones' booth as he furiously waved other drivers through the lane. The driver and passenger ran from the van, and all the inspectors hurried to help – except Jones.

“Where was Hammer?” prosecutor W. Mark Conover said during his closing argument. “Sitting in his booth, paralyzed with fear. His load was caught.”

That narcotics seizure remains the largest ever at San Ysidro.

One of the government's key witnesses was Taylor, the former inspector and friend of Jones who had been indicted in 2004, convicted of corruption-related charges and had served 48 months in prison. He has since graduated from Columbia University with honors and is now an archeologist with no legal incentive to lie, prosecutors told the jury. Taylor testified that he and Jones were both smuggling aliens and drugs in the early 2000s.

According to trial testimony, security was tightened at the ports of entry around 2007, making it more difficult for Jones to singlehandedly allow loads of drugs and people through. That meant more losses of large loads of marijuana.

**DEFENDANT**

**Criminal Case No. 10cr4141**

Lorne Leslie Jones aka “Hammer”

Age: 50

Chula Vista, CA

**SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Conspiracy to Commit Crimes Against the United States in violation of 18 U.S.C. 371

Attempted Importation of Marijuana in violation of 21 U.S.C. 841

**AGENCIES**

Federal Bureau of Investigation, Border Corruption Task Force  
Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General  
Customs and Border Protection, Office of Field Operations