

CBP officer admits bribes

Cartons of cigarettes secured lax inspections on Exmar LPG carrier

Rajesh Joshi - Thursday 7 January 2010

A BRIBE amounting to no more than a couple of cartons of cigarettes to do “lax inspections” on an Exmar-controlled liquefied petroleum gas carrier has left a US Customs and Border Protection officer in Texas facing up to two years in jail.

John Bales, US Attorney for the Eastern District of Texas in Beaumont, said on Tuesday that CBP officer Tyrus Kidd pleaded guilty to public corruption before US Judge Marcia Crone, having admitted to “demanding and accepting an illegal gratuity” from the master of the LPG carrier *Chaconia* on August 23 last year.

A sentencing date following a superseding indictment brought against Mr Kidd has yet to be set. If convicted, Mr Kidd may face up to two years in federal prison, Mr Bales’ office said.

Mr Kidd’s case has aroused special concern in the region, because he has been known for going out of his way to accommodate seafarers. A stand-out case was when a Chinese crew member was severely burnt at sea, but through Mr Kidd’s efforts was able to go ashore to Port Arthur for treatment despite having no visa. Local seafarer welfare organisations in the Port Arthur-Beaumont area have previously conferred special recognition on the convicted officer for such gestures.

The *Chaconia* case has now shown Mr Kidd in a different light.

The original indictment handed down by a federal grand jury in October last year brought four charges against Mr Kidd: two counts of bribery of a public official, one count of accepting an illegal gratuity, and one count of making a false statement.

These related to demanding on three occasions that the masters of two ships give him cartons of cigarettes in return for conducting improper inspections of the vessels docked in Port Arthur or Beaumont. Mr Kidd was arrested in October by CBP Internal Affairs special agents.

The first two occasions occurred on April 30 and May 20, and involved Montanari’s 2000-built, 113,419 dwt, Italy-flag crude oil tanker *Valbruna* .

The last of these cases was on August 23, when he is said to have demanded two cartons of cigarettes from the master of Exmar’s 1990-built, 29,271 dwt, Belgium-flagged LPG carrier *Chaconia* , which called in Port Arthur.

Mr Kidd was alleged to have lied to CBP agents the next day by telling them that the master parted with the cigarettes voluntarily, and that he left the ship without them.

Mr Kidd could have faced up to 15 years of jail on all three counts. Local reports suggested that they amounted to nine cigarette cartons in all. The US Attorney's statement on Tuesday identified only the *Chaconia* case as the one to cause Mr Kidd's downfall. US Coast Guard boardings and inspections on the *Chaconia* as tracked through the USCG's Port State Control website show a clean record for the August port call.

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Captain charged

A Polish captain who tucked into several cans of beer to “keep himself awake” before his vessel ran aground has been fined £3,300 (\$5,252) at a UK court.

Stanislaw Sowinski, who was in command of the 1,500-dwt Fingal (built 1984) when it crashed into the rocks off the north-east tip of Jura on 15 December, also necked up to four more cans after the crash to ease his nerves, Scottish media reports.



Breath tests in the wake of the incident showed he was more than three times over the legal drink driving limit in the UK.

Sowinski admitted to being drunk in charge of a ship. He also pled guilty to failing to keep a proper lookout or a safe course, the Daily Record reports.

Speaking outside Oban Sheriff Court, his lawyer Edward Thornton explained the captain did not usually drink while at work.

Thornton added: "He felt tired, so he started drinking to keep awake.

"Between getting off the rocks and making their way to Oban, he consumed three or four further cans of beer.

"He was rather upset at what he regarded as a blemish on his excellent career."

Sowinski, who the newspaper says has been fired by ship's owner, told reporters: "I am thoroughly ashamed."

The Fingal was heading from Fort William to Troon when it hit the rocks near the Corryvreckan tidal "whirlpool". The weather was calm when the crash occurred.

By [Andy Pierce](#) in London

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