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JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, March 11, 2011

**Two Contractors Convicted of Involuntary Manslaughter
for Death of Afghan National in Kabul, Afghanistan**

WASHINGTON – A federal jury in Norfolk, Va., today convicted Justin Cannon, 27, of Corpus Christi, Texas, and Christopher Drotleff, 29, of Virginia Beach, Va., of involuntary manslaughter while working as contractors for the U.S. Department of Defense in Afghanistan.

Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Neil H. MacBride of the Eastern District of Virginia and James W. McJunkin, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office, made the announcement today following the jury's verdict.

Cannon and Drotleff were acquitted of other charges, including second-degree murder, assault resulting in serious bodily injury, and firearms offenses.

Cannon and Drotleff were charged under the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act (MEJA) through a superseding indictment on Aug. 5, 2010. According to court documents, Cannon and Drotleff were charged with shooting and killing two Afghanistan nationals and seriously wounding a third while on an unauthorized convoy in Kabul, Afghanistan, on May 5, 2009.

Cannon and Drotleff were Department of Defense contractors employed by a subsidiary of Xe (formerly known as Blackwater Worldwide). According to evidence presented at trial, Cannon and Drotleff left their military base without authorization to join a convoy transporting local interpreters. Evidence at trial established that, after a traffic accident involving one of the vehicles in the convoy, Cannon and Drotleff fired multiple shots into the back of a civilian car that had attempted to pass the accident scene. The passenger of the car was fatally shot and the driver was seriously injured. An individual who happened to be walking his dog in the area was also killed in the shooting. Today, the jury found the defendants guilty of involuntary manslaughter for the death of Romal Mohammad Naiem, the front-seat passenger. They were acquitted of responsibility for the death of the person walking his dog and the injuries to the driver.

According to court records, as contractors, Cannon and Drotleff provided training to the Afghan National Army for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in the use and maintenance of weapons and weapons systems.

At sentencing, scheduled for June 14, 2011, Cannon and Drotleff face a maximum penalty of eight years in prison.

Today's conviction is the result of a retrial. Cannon and Drotleff were originally tried before a jury in September 2010, which ended in a hung jury and mistrial.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Randy C. Stoker and Alan M. Salsbury from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia - Norfolk Division as well as Trial Attorney Robert McGovern of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section. The case is being investigated by the FBI.

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Criminal Division

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