

## Deep Fake Operative Sentenced to Seven Years in Prison

Written by Nick Sanders

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Garrison Kenneth Courtney, 44, of Tampa, Florida, falsely claimed to be a covert officer of the CIA involved in a highly-classified program or “task force” involving various components of the U.S. Intelligence Community (including the CIA) and the Department of Defense. In reality, Courtney had never been employed by the CIA, and the task force that he described did not exist. In reality, Courtney was a former Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) public affairs officer.

According to the U.S. Attorney, “Courtney invented the elaborate lie to cheat his victims out of over \$4.4 million.” And he was on the way to cheating the U.S. Government out of perhaps another \$3.7 billion (with a “B”) when he was stopped.

Let’s quote the DoJ [press release](#) :

To accomplish the fraud, Courtney approached numerous private companies with some variation of this false story, and claimed that the companies needed to hire and pay him to create what Courtney described as ‘commercial cover,’ i.e., to mask his supposed affiliation with the CIA. Courtney also fraudulently claimed that the companies would be reimbursed in the future for these salary payments, sometimes by the award of lucrative contracts from the United States government in connection with the supposedly classified program.

Courtney went to extraordinary lengths to perpetuate the illusion that he was a deep-cover operative. Among other things, he falsely claimed that his identity and large portions of his

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conduct were classified; directed victims and witnesses to sign fake nondisclosure agreements that purported to be from the U.S. government and that forbade anyone involved from speaking openly about the supposedly classified program; told victims and witnesses that they were under surveillance by hostile foreign intelligence services; made a show of searching people for electronic devices as part of his supposed counterintelligence methods; demanded that his victims meet in sensitive compartmented information facilities to create the illusion that they were participating in a classified intelligence operation; and repeatedly threatened anyone who questioned his legitimacy with revocation of their security clearance and criminal prosecution if they 'leaked' or continued to look into the supposedly classified information. Courtney further created fake letters, purporting to have been issued by the Attorney General of the United States, which claimed to grant blanket immunity to those who participated in the supposedly classified program.

Oh, but there is more:

Courtney also convinced several real governmental officials that he was participating in this 'task force,' explained that they had been selected to participate in the program, and then used those officials as unwitting props falsely to burnish his legitimacy. For example, he directed his victims to speak with these public officials to verify his claims, and separately instructed the government officials as to exactly what to say. Courtney thereby created the false appearance to the victims that the government officials had independently validated his story, when in fact the officials merely were echoing the false information fed to them by Courtney. At times, Courtney also convinced those officials to meet with victims inside secure government facilities, thereby furthering the false appearance of authenticity.

Oh, but there is still more to the story:

Through the scheme, Courtney also fraudulently gained a position working as a private contractor for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Information Technology Acquisition and Assessment Center (NITAAC), a branch of the NIH that provides acquisition support services to federal agencies. Once he had installed himself at NITAAC, Courtney gained access to sensitive, nonpublic information about the procurements of other federal agencies being supported by NITAAC. Courtney thereafter used that information to attempt to corrupt the procurement process by steering the award of contracts to companies where he was then also on the payroll, and used the false pretext of national security concerns to warp the process by preventing full and open competition. When law enforcement disrupted his scheme, Courtney actively was seeking to corrupt over \$3.7 billion in federal procurements.

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But we're not done yet:

Courtney also sought to use the actual and apparent power of the government to execute and protect his scheme, and to attempt to defeat law enforcement's investigation. Among other things, Courtney caused a public official to attempt to prevent a private company from responding to a grand jury subpoena; caused a civilian attorney with the Air Force to contact one of the prosecutors on the case in an attempt to read that prosecutor in to the bogus program, thereby freezing the investigation; caused a public official to threaten FBI agents investigating this case with themselves being prosecuted if they did not drop the investigation; falsely told victims who had questioned his legitimacy that they were about to be arrested by the FBI for supposedly leaking classified information; used unwitting public officials to feed the names of innocent witnesses to the FBI, in the hopes that the FBI would seek to prosecute those innocent persons for supposedly leaking classified information, thereby diverting attention from himself; and sought to have real public officials issue and sign a 'classification guide' for the bogus program, a document that would have set forth the rules and standards by which information acquired as a part of a governmental program is classified.

You gotta admire the man's brazenness, right?

Still, he was caught and now, in the words of the U.S. Attorney, "Courtney – along with his five aliases – will now spend the next seven years in federal prison for his deceitful and felonious criminal conduct."

I was going to do a "what can we learn from this?" conclusion, but I gave up. Courtney preyed on the innocence and patriotism of gullible strangers—both in private industry and with the U.S. Government. He fooled lawyers and FBI agents. He fooled government procurement folks. He fooled just about everybody he came into contact with.

But he was caught and now must pay the price.