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EXTRADITED SOFTWARE PIRACY RINGLEADER PLEADS GUILTY

WASHINGTON – The leader of one of the oldest and most renowned Internet software piracy groups has pleaded guilty to criminal copyright infringement charges, in one of the first ever extraditions for an intellectual property offense, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Chuck Rosenberg for the Eastern District of Virginia announced today.

Hew Raymond Griffiths, 44, a British national living in Bateau Bay, Australia, was extradited from Australia in February 2007 to face criminal charges in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va. He pleaded guilty today before U.S. District Judge Claude M. Hilton to one count of conspiracy to commit criminal copyright infringement and one count of criminal copyright infringement. If convicted on both counts, Griffiths could receive a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a \$500,000 fine. Prior to his arrival in the United States, he had spent nearly three years incarcerated at a detention center in Australia while fighting his extradition in Australian court. Judge Hilton set a sentencing date for June 22, 2007 at 9:00 a.m.

Griffiths was the leader of an organized criminal group known as DrinkOrDie, which had a reputation as one of the oldest security-conscious piracy groups on the Internet. DrinkOrDie was founded in Russia in 1993 and expanded internationally throughout the 1990s. The group was dismantled by the Justice Department and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement as part of Operation Buccaneer in December 2001, with more than 70 raids conducted in the U.S. and five foreign countries, including the United Kingdom, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Australia. To date, Operation Buccaneer has resulted in more than 30 felony convictions in the United States and 11 convictions of foreign nationals overseas. Prior to its dismantling, DrinkOrDie was estimated to have caused the illegal reproduction and distribution of more than \$50 million worth of pirated software, movies, games and music.

Griffiths, known by the screen nickname “Bandido,” was a longtime leader of DrinkOrDie and an elder in the highest echelons of the underground Internet piracy community, also known as the warez scene. He held leadership roles in several other well-known warez groups, including Razor1911 and RiSC. In an interview published in December 1999 by an online news source, he boasted that he ran all of DrinkOrDie’s day-to-day operations and controlled access to more than 20 of the top warez servers worldwide. In fact, Griffiths claimed to reporters that he would never be caught.

Griffiths admitted that he oversaw all the illegal operations of DrinkOrDie, which specialized in cracking software and distributing the cracked versions over the Internet. Once cracked, these software versions could be copied and used without limitation. Members stockpiled the illegal software on huge Internet computer storage sites that were filled with tens of thousands of individual software, game, movie and music titles worth millions of dollars. The group used encryption and an array of other sophisticated technological security measures to hide their activities from law enforcement.

This case was investigated by the Washington field office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in conjunction with the Customs Cybercenter in Fairfax, Va.

This case is being prosecuted by Deputy Chief Michael DuBose and trial attorney Jay Prabhu of the Criminal Division's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Wiechering of the Eastern District of Virginia.

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