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NEWS



Former Government Contracting Executive Sentenced To 48 Months In Prison For Unauthorized Computer Access

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. – Robert Edwin Steele, 38, of Alexandria, Va., was sentenced today to 48 months in prison for 14 counts of unauthorized access to a protected computer. Neil H. MacBride, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, and Valerie Parlave, Assistant Director in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Washington Field Office, made the announcement after United States District Judge Gerald Bruce Lee imposed the sentence.

“Cyber intrusions represent the greatest threat to corporate America in the 21st century,” said United States Attorney Neil H. MacBride. “This danger is omnipresent both from external hackers and criminal insiders. Today’s sentence should put all on notice that that the U.S. Attorney’s Office, along with our law enforcement partners, is committed to prosecuting these technically complex crimes and will seek punishment commensurate with the offense.”

Steele was found guilty by a jury in Alexandria on May 3, 2013. According to court documents and evidence at trial, Steele worked at multiple companies involved in government contracting. On December 15, 2010, Steele resigned from one government contracting firm, described in court documents as Company A, due to a dispute about his compensation with Company A and Company B, another government contracting firm that was in the process of acquiring Company A.

When Steele left Company A on December 15, 2010, he gave verbal and written assurances to officials of Company A that he would not access its systems after his departure, and even urged them to shut down his existing accounts. That same day, however, Steele began logging into Company A’s e-mail systems using a secret administrative account which he learned about during his work for Company A. Steele immediately began downloading hundreds of proprietary documents using this administrative account.

Shortly after resigning, Steele joined another government contractor, Company C, that directly competed with Companies A and B for government contracts. At Company C, Steele worked as “Director of Law Enforcement” and prepared bids for government contracts on law enforcement projects. In that position, Steele undercut Company A’s bid on a government contract by approximately \$100,000, while downloading Company A’s documents on the same contract. Although his attempt to win the bid failed, Steele continued to methodically sift through thousands of valuable documents stored on computers for Company A.

From December 15, 2010 until September 2, 2011, when agents for the Federal Bureau of Investigation seized the equipment that Steele had used to access the administrative account, Steele had accessed the computer systems of his former employer more than 79,000 times.

In addition to his 48-month term of imprisonment, Judge Lee also ordered Steele to serve two years of supervised release, imposed a fine of \$50,000, and required restitution \$335,977.68.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Washington Field Office. The Office of the Inspector General for the General Services Administration provided additional assistance.

Assistant United States Attorney Alexander T.H. Nguyen and Special Assistant United States Attorney Jonathan Keim prosecuted the case on behalf of the United States.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.justice.gov/usao/vae>. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov> or on <https://pcl.uscourts.gov>.

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