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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of Iowa

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Mexico Man Sentenced in Federal Court in Iowa for Flying a Plane Without a Pilot's License

Flew a plane that was not air-worthy and had to make an emergency landing in Waterloo, Iowa

A man who attempted to pilot an airplane from Wisconsin to New Mexico without a pilot's license was sentenced today in federal court. Keith Alexander Thomas, age 44, from Portales, New Mexico, received the sentence after an April 15, 2021 guilty plea to one count of operating as an airman without an airman certificate.

Information disclosed at sentencing showed that in June 2018, Thomas and another man flew from New Mexico to Wisconsin so that the other man could purchase a Cessna airplane. Thomas, who did not have a pilot's license, agreed to serve as the pilot of the Cessna and attempt to fly it back to New Mexico. The Cessna was not air-worthy and sustained engine failure as it flew over Iowa. Thomas was required to make an emergency landing in Waterloo, Iowa, but also failed to establish radio communication with the aviation company whose airstrip he landed on. The Cessna not only suffered engine failure, the plane was also out of inspection compliance and the landing gear was not operational. No one was hurt during the emergency landing.

Thomas was sentenced in Cedar Rapids by United States District Court Judge C.J. Williams. Thomas was sentenced to two years' probation and fined \$5,000.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Anthony Morfitt and investigated by the U.S. Department of Transportation – Office of the Inspector General.

Court file information at <https://ecf.iand.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/login.pl>.

The case file number is 21-CR-2003.

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