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Border agent charged with entrant-smuggling, forgery

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SAN DIEGO - A Border Patrol agent was charged Friday with smuggling illegal immigrants and forging a birth certificate to get hired.

Oscar Antonio Ortiz, a Mexican citizen who was born in Tijuana, allegedly secured his job with the Border Patrol in 2001 by using a fake birth certificate that said he was born in Chicago.

Authorities say the number on his birth certificate corresponds to that of another person who was born one month before him.

Ortiz, 28, pleaded not guilty to charges of migrant smuggling and making a false citizenship claim. U.S. Magistrate Judge Anthony Battaglia scheduled a hearing Wednesday to consider bail.

"There is no place in the Border Patrol for behavior that tarnishes and discredits the badge that we proudly wear," said Border Patrol Chief David Aguilar.

Ortiz, who worked at the agency's El Cajon station east of San Diego, was arrested Thursday and has been placed on administrative leave. Agency officials declined to elaborate on the charges or his employment history, and Ortiz's attorney, Stephen White, declined to discuss the case.

Wire intercepts show Ortiz spoke on "many occasions" with another unidentified agent about smuggling people into the United States through a mountainous area that he patrolled near Tecate, according to the complaint. Tecate is about 35 miles east of San Diego.

The other agent allegedly told a family member May 20 that he and Ortiz were smuggling groups of several dozen people and getting paid up to \$2,000 per person.

T.J. Bonner, who heads a union of Border Patrol agents, said, "It's a two-minute phone call to verify whether the number (on the birth certificate) matches the name. Any rookie trained in immigration law could have figured that out."

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