

Chinese National Attempted to Run Gate at Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base in California

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A watch commander with the Provost Marshal's Office, Headquarters Battalion, Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center, calls in license plate information during a traffic stop at MCAGCC, Twentynine Palms, California, Oct. 23, 2023. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Breanna Eason)

A Chinese national attempted to drive onto [Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms](#) in California last week after military police informed him that he was not authorized to do so, [Marine Corps](#) officials told Military.com.

The suspect briefly made it past gate guards on Wednesday, but was immediately apprehended by military police, Marine spokesperson Maj.

Joshua Pena told Military.com.

"At approximately 12:45 p.m. on March 27, 2024, an individual attempted to access Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California, without valid identification," Pena said.

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"Despite being prompted to exit at the Condor Gate by installation security, the individual proceeded onto the installation without authorization. Military law enforcement were immediately notified and detained the individual," according to Pena. "They then notified and transferred custody to Customs and Border Patrol (CBP)."

The Condor Gate entrance is adjacent to a military family housing complex and within sight of an elementary school.

In a March 29 post on the social media platform X, Chief Patrol Agent Gregory Bovino with Customs and Border Patrol confirmed the suspect was in the U.S. illegally. No further information regarding the man was provided.

There have been rising concerns in the last few years surrounding an apparent influx of Chinese intelligence efforts made around military installations and involving service members.

In September, [a report by The Wall Street Journal showed that more than 100 Chinese nationals had posed as tourists](#) in recent years in order to gain critical access to bases and other sensitive sites, citing U.S. officials who described the trend as espionage-related.

These incidents included Chinese nationals who attempted to forcibly gain access to [Fort Wainwright](#), Alaska, in 2020, saying they had reservations at the base hotel, and a group who illegally entered a naval

air station in Key West, Florida, to take photos.

Other instances appear to be more innocuous, with Chinese nationals attempting to gain access to bases stating their phone's map applications took them to fast food restaurants nearby.

But in addition to efforts directed at gaining access to military installations, a number of service members have been tangled up in espionage-related incidents involving foreign nationals as well.

In February, a [Navy](#) chief assigned to the USS Higgins was [charged with espionage](#) after allegedly leaking sensitive information regarding national defense to a Chinese intelligence officer.

According to the charge sheet, Chief Petty Officer Bryce Steven Pedicini, on multiple occasions between November 2022 and May 2023, allegedly transmitted the classified material while serving in Hampton Roads, Virginia, and in [Yokosuka](#), Japan, where the USS Higgins is based.

Pedicini marked [the third sailor in a year to face espionage-related charges](#).

There was no evidence of espionage in the incident at the Twentynine Palms gate, but an investigation remains ongoing. "His purpose and intent behind his actions are still being investigated," Bovino said.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection told Military.com in an email that the agency does not comment on specific cases. However, an official with the agency told Military.com that the suspect was taken to a nearby station for processing following his custody transfer from military law enforcement.

"The fact is we are enforcing the law, and regardless of nationality, there are consequences for those who fail to use lawful pathways," the official said. "Individuals encountered at the border are screened and vetted,

and those without a legal basis to stay are removed."

The incursion occurred less than two months after the death of 10-year-old Ryker Frost, a Marine Corps family member who was killed Feb. 16 in a vehicle collision at Twentynine Palms.

According to Katie Cherkasky, the attorney representing Gunnery Sgt. Max Frost and his wife Arielle in filing a potential Federal Torts Act claim, the accident occurred during military police officers' pursuit of an unauthorized entry at the base's main gate.

Cherkasky said Monday the family remains concerned that no new safety measures have been instituted at the gate following the accident, which also injured the Frosts' two other sons.

"There's a lot of issues with the way that this ultimately happened that made it foreseeable that this would be an issue that people would be able to run through the gate," Cherkasky said.

The earlier vehicle collision remains under investigation.

-- Patricia Kime contributed to this report.

-- Rachel Nostrant is a Marine Corps veteran and freelance journalist, with work published in Reuters, New York Magazine, Military Times and more.

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