

EVENTS

Narcos with wings: When hashish arrives in Cádiz from heaven

- The Civil Guard dismantles a network that introduced tons of hashish from Morocco to Cádiz and Seville thanks to a fleet of light aircraft and helicopters
- The gang came to pay 50,000 euros per trip to pilots from Sinaloa with experience in flights with drugs



One of the seized caches next to the plane in which he was traveling.

PEDRO M. ESPINOSA
October 24, 2021 - 06: 00h



4

In 2000 the Civil Guard intercepted a helicopter transporting hashish from Morocco to the Sierra de Cádiz. We could say that this event meant something like **the maiden voyage of a new way of circumventing police surveillance** on the natural border that is the Strait of Gibraltar. Since then, the high-flying narcos have not stopped growing. The drug trafficking clans settled in the south of the peninsula take this practice so seriously that they are even hiring young pilots linked to the **Sinaloa Cartel** to take charge of the classic **Cessnas planes** that have historically brought cocaine from Mexico to the United States. . In exchange for risking their lives almost 10,000 kilometers from their homes they receive about **50,000 euros for a six-hour trip** , the time it takes between taking off from one of the clandestine airfields in Cádiz or Seville and returning loaded with half a ton of hashish. For this they also have mechanics who disassemble the rear seats of the devices in order to fit more bundles of Moroccan manna. "Although we do not rule out that some of these trips have also passed cocaine," says a source from the Civil Guard to this newspaper.

The millionaire profits that the hashish business produces means that these organizations **do not hesitate to buy second-hand planes and helicopters** and put them at the controls of experienced pilots in low flights and with poor visibility. However, these incursions also increase the risks of accidents. Precisely one of them helped the Civil Guard begin to pull the thread that has allowed the dismantling of a network that distributed hashish through a fleet of aircraft and detain 42 of its members.

The operation, called Limoneros, began in September 2019, when the Civil Guard learned **of a helicopter plane crash in Morocco**. The pilot of the wrecked plane had been staying in Seville, so an investigation was started to learn the facts. The agents verified that the members of the network took numerous security measures, such as renting vehicles under the names of third parties so that they could not implicate them. During the investigation, it was learned that the group was looking for second-hand aircraft and spare parts, that it had a group of flight mechanics on its payroll.



An OCON Sur agent from Guardia Civil inspecting a plane.

In November 2019, the civil guards in charge of the investigation thwarted a cache of **420 kilos of hashish on a plane from Morocco**, and detained its two crew members. One of them was Raúl, a Sinaolense who, after landing in an area near Utrera with his plane loaded up to the chocolate bars, thought that the job had already been done; until he saw **OCON agents** waiting for him with a big smile on their mouths.

The network had pilots from Spain although they also brought them from Central American countries, especially from Mexico. Novice pilots who were trained in Spain. For these teaching tasks, the organization had a two-seater plane in which they would train future caches.

During the **two years that the investigation has lasted** , it has been known that the members of the network have suffered at least two plane accidents of some importance. The first of the accidents was that of the Mexican pilot for whom the investigation was initiated. The other occurred on September 9 of this year, when a pilot of Spanish nationality died on a night flight in Morocco.

THE HELICOPTER ACCIDENT IN MOROCCO IN 2019 STARTED THE INVESTIGATIONS

Counting on the casualties, the organization has had a fleet made up of seven aircraft, two helicopters and five light aircraft. For this, in addition to the pilot school and the group of mechanics, they had places to hide the aircraft, as well as clandestine tracks, some of them camouflaged as tracks to train the greyhounds distributed in different enclaves of the provinces of Cádiz and Seville .

According to sources from the Civil Guard, during the investigation it was learned that the organization also had a branch that introduced hashish by sea.

In fact, last June four people were arrested and 750 kilos of hashish were seized, as well as a vehicle used for loading it into a cache off the coast of Huelva.

The investigators, after the authorization of the **Court of First Instance and Instruction number 4 of Sanlúcar la Mayor (Seville)**,²⁴ searches were carried out in Murcia, Toledo, Cáceres, Cádiz, Huelva and Seville, where another 120 kilos of hashish were seized. In Cartaya (Huelva) the leader of the group was found in a luxury home, and in Seville the operative chief was located. In addition, of the four aircraft that have been seized, numerous effects related to aeronautics have been found, including flight manuals, as well as spare parts for the aircraft. Likewise, three firearms have been seized, a marijuana plantation in the Sevillian town of Los Palacios, 78,000 euros in cash and abundant documentation. The operation has been developed by agents belonging to OCON-SUR.

COMMENT / VIEW COMMENTS