

Disbarred Miami lawyer charged with selling guns stolen from Iraq's Hussein family

By Scott Hiaasen
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Federal prosecutors in New Jersey have charged a disbarred Miami-area lawyer and three other people with hatching a scheme to sell a cache of stolen guns that once belonged to the family of the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

Prosecutors say David Ryan, 48, a one-time personal injury lawyer from Pinecrest, obtained at least seven guns that had been smuggled out of Iraq and then tried to sell them, with the help of others, through a New Jersey sporting goods store. Officials with Iraq's embassy in Washington confirmed that the guns had been taken from Iraq, and that they are considered property of the Iraqi government, court records show.

Two of the pistols in the arsenal are stamped with the initials "Q.S.," believed to be the initials of Qusay Saddam Hussein al-Tikriti, the second son of Saddam Hussein and the one-time heir to Hussein's seat. Qusay Hussein was killed by U.S. soldiers in a raid in Mosul, Iraq, in July 2003.

Also among the weapons: A Chinese-made pistol with the flag of Yemen on the grip, two German pistols with gold inlay and two Cosmi 12-gauge shotguns.

Ryan and three other men were arrested Dec. 19 on charges of conspiracy to transport stolen firearms and conspiracy to sell stolen property. Ryan also was charged with unlawfully mailing firearms. He was released on \$250,000 bail.

Ryan's lawyer, Miami attorney Edward O'Donnell IV, said Ryan believed the guns had been obtained legally, and he believed his attempts to sell the guns were legitimate. O'Donnell said Ryan showed the guns to a licensed firearms dealer in Miami, and he shipped them to New Jersey through a licensed dealer.

"The people he got them from are not criminals," O'Donnell said. O'Donnell would not say how Ryan obtained the guns, and the arrest report does not provide details about Ryan's acquisition of the weapons.

Investigators with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms said Ryan first contacted a Pittsburgh man, Karlo Sauer, last spring seeking an appraisal of the guns and e-mailing Sauer photographs of the weapons, which were stored somewhere in Florida, court records show. Sauer then contacted two New Jersey men, Howard Blumenthal and Carlos Quirola, who in turn tried to find buyers for the weapons last summer.

ATF agents then learned of the scheme and used undercover informants to try to set up a deal to buy the guns for \$160,000, court records show.

Ryan then shipped six of the guns by mail from Miami to the sporting goods store in Ridgefield., N.J., and flew to New York on July 17 to try to close the deal, investigators said. Ryan later told one of the informants that he was "100 percent, absolutely, completely and totally positive that these guns are from Iraq," and Ryan said they had been appraised at more than \$1 million, according to the arrest report.

According to the arrest report, Blumenthal and Quirola both acknowledged to ATF agents that they knew the guns had been stolen or taken out of Iraq without proper approval.

When ATF agents interviewed Ryan on Aug. 7, he gave them a seventh gun from the same weapons cache, which he retrieved from Security Arms International gun store, 13981 S. Dixie Hwy. in Palmetto Bay, according to the arrest report.

Ryan worked as an attorney for 13 years until 2010, when he was disbarred by the Florida Supreme Court after auditors found that he had misused money he held in a trust account for his clients, records show. Ryan also filed for bankruptcy protection in 2010, but his petition was dismissed after he failed to submit follow-up paperwork, court records show.