

Former Blackwater employees get probation for possession of stolen weapons

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Two former Blackwater employees were sentenced in U.S. District Court in New Bern this morning to three years of probation for possession of stolen firearms.

Chief U.S. District Judge Louise Wood Flanagan said the details in this case should be kept sealed.

Kenneth Wayne Cashwell of Virginia Beach, Va., and William Ellsworth "Max" Grumiaux of Clemmons cooperated with federal prosecutors. Officials say the men agreed to testify in other Blackwater cases.

Blackwater is a private security company in Moyock that employs about 1,000 contractors to protect diplomats and perform other jobs in Iraq. Cashwell and Grumiaux pleaded guilty in early 2007 in federal court in Greenville to possession of stolen firearms that had been shipped in interstate or foreign commerce and to conspiracy to aid in the sale of firearms.

However, the guilty pleas never addressed whether the men shipped any arms overseas. There was no mention in court about whether the weapons were shipped to or sold in Iraq.

In their plea bargains, which called for a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, the men agreed to testify in any future proceedings.

They were caught up in a federal investigation that was looking at whether Blackwater had shipped automatic weapons and military goods to Iraq without a license. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Raleigh is investigating the case with help from Pentagon and State Department auditors.

Prosecutors are also investigating whether Blackwater lacked permits for dozens of automatic weapons used at its training grounds in Moyock.

Blackwater has faced scrutiny following the Sept. 16 shooting deaths of 17 Iraqi civilians in Baghdad. The company has denied that its guards acted inappropriately.

Cashwell's lawyer, Steven C. Frucci, said in court today that his client stole firearms from the armory at Blackwater. "He sold them to law enforcement officers or members of the military. He did not steal them and take off the numbers and sell them on the street," Frucci said.

Cashwell also pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting in the sale of the firearms. He was also sentenced to three months of house arrest.

“He is a former member of the armed forces and former law enforcement officer. He has not worked since his arrest more than two years ago,” Frucci told Flanagan.

Cashwell told the court, “I broke the law and take full responsibility. I have ruined my reputation, lost employment and lost respect of the law enforcement community. I hope to make a useful contribution to society.”

Cashwell’s wife, who was sitting in court, said “Praise the Lord” when she learned that her husband was not being sentenced to prison.

Lawyer Lawrence H. Woodward Jr. described his client Grumiaux as an atypical defendant. “He served his country. He has teenage children. We have no shame in asking for the court’s mercy and a second chance,” Woodward said.

Grumiaux told the court that he was sorry for what he did. “This is a burden I will have to bear for the rest of my life,” he said.

Both men were fined \$1,000.