



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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July 24, 2012

**SAN ANTONIO FIREARMS STRAW PURCHASING/TRAFFICKING RINGLEADER
SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON**

Defendant was the last of 21 to be sentenced to federal prison in connection with this investigation

United States Attorney Robert Pitman, Special Agent in Charge Melvin D. King, Jr., Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Houston Division and Special Agent in Charge Jerry Robinette, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement-Homeland Security Investigations in San Antonio announced that in Del Rio, 27-year-old Marino Castro, Jr. of San Antonio, was sentenced to 20 years in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release in connection with a firearms straw purchasing and trafficking scheme.

"This case illustrates the federal government's commitment to stem the tide of firearms being illegally smuggled into Mexico, where they are frequently employed in the violent drug trade. The message here is that if you smuggle firearms or assist smugglers in obtaining firearms illegally, you are not only morally responsible for how these firearms are being used to commit atrocious crimes in Mexico, but you will face severe consequences under the law," stated United States Attorney Robert Pitman.

On December 2, 2010, Castro pleaded guilty to one count of smuggling goods, namely firearms, from the United States and one count of felon in possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number. Castro's convicted felon status stems from a 2009 illegal alien transportation conviction in Del Rio where he received a 9-month federal prison sentence.

According to court records, the defendants, under the direction of ringleaders Castro and 33-year-old Edward Levar Davis of Eagle Pass, TX, conspired to illegally purchase firearms from San Antonio area firearms dealers. Once retrieved from straw purchasers, Castro and Davis admittedly arranged to transport the firearms to a staging location in Eagle Pass where they were to be smuggled into Mexico to members of the Los Zetas Drug Trafficking Organization. Between May 2010 and August 2010, authorities intercepted five different shipments attributed to this trafficking cell and seized over 200 firearms, including handguns, AK-47 and AR-15-style assault rifles and one .50 caliber Barrett sniper rifle.

"This significant sentence is very rewarding to the agents in HSI and ATF who invested so much effort to investigate this case, and ultimately bring Marino Castro to justice," said Jerry Robinette, special agent in charge for HSI in San Antonio. "This case further illustrates the close partnership between both agencies who significantly contributed to preventing hundreds of rifles and handguns from reaching violent criminal organizations and prosecuting those who were responsible."

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Castro is the last of 21 defendants convicted in this scheme to be sentenced to federal prison. Other prison sentences range from 12 months to 168 months.

“This last sentencing is a further example of what is accomplished when law enforcement agencies work in partnership. As a result of this partnership and ATF’s mission to prevent violent crime, criminals were denied the tools of their trade thus saving lives,” stated Special Agent in Charge Melvin D. King, Jr., Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Houston Field Division.

This case was investigated by agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HSI) with assistance from the Bexar County Sheriff’s Office. Assistant United States Attorneys Benjamin Seal and Mike Galdo prosecuted this case on behalf of the government.

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