



Department of Justice

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BRITISH BUSINESSMAN CHRISTOPHER TAPPIN PLEADS GUILTY TO AIDING AND ABETTING THE ILLEGAL EXPORT OF DEFENSE ARTICLES

In federal court in El Paso this morning, 66-year-old British businessman Christopher Tappin of Orpington, Kent, reversed his not-guilty plea and admitted to attempting to export to Iran a special component of the Hawk Air Defense Missile announced United States Attorney Robert Pitman and Acting Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Special Agent in Charge Dennis Ulrich, El Paso Division.

Appearing before Senior United States District Judge David Briones, Tappin pleaded guilty to one count of aiding and abetting the illegal export of defense articles. According to the plea agreement, which is pending approval by Judge Briones, Tappin faces 33 months in federal prison and a fine of \$11,357.14. By pleading guilty and admitting culpability in the scheme, Tappin waives his right to appeal his conviction or challenge the sentence handed down in this case.

In court today, Tappin admitted that from December 2005 to January 2007, he knowingly aided and abetted others, including his Cyprus-based business associate Robert Frederick Gibson, age 57, and 62-year-old Robert Caldwell of Portland, OR, in an illegal attempt to export Zinc/Silver Oxide Reserve Batteries to Iran. These particular batteries, a special component of the Hawk Air Defense Missile, are designated as a defense article on the U.S. Munitions List and require a license or written authorization from the U.S. State Department for export from the United States.

“Mr. Tappin stated under oath that he was guilty of aiding the attempted export to Iran of sensitive military equipment,” said United States Attorney Robert Pitman. “In so doing, the defendant put at risk the national security of the United States and its allies by trying sell to Iran the batteries that make the Hawk Missiles operational. In both his oral statements to the judge today and in his written plea agreement, Mr. Tappin admitted he knew of and was afforded constitutional and statutory rights, and, after knowing all of his rights, he admitted that he was pleading guilty because he was guilty, and for no other reason. In particular, it should be noted that this plea was made in open court, after Mr. Tappin, under questioning by the District Judge, stated under oath that his plea was voluntary.”

According to the factual basis filed in this case, which Tappin admitted was truthful and accurate, Tappin knowingly violated U.S. law by obtaining the specialized batteries under false pretenses. Tappin engaged in phone and email communications with an undercover federal agent to discuss payment and delivery arrangements. In October 2006, Tappin wired approximately \$25,000 from a London financial institution to a bank account in the United States as payment for five of the specialized batteries. Using false shipping documentation, Tappin arranged for the transfer of the batteries to the United Kingdom without an export license through his specifically designated freight forwarders in violation of export control regulations. During the investigation, Tappin even agreed to reimburse the undercover agent for \$5,000 in fines purportedly being assessed against him by U.S. Customs authorities after they had seized the shipment of batteries.

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Tappin, admittedly, also caused Caldwell to travel to San Antonio in January 2007 to take delivery of the batteries, ensure that they were shipped to him (Tappin) and to pay the undercover agent \$5,000 for the current fines. Tappin, in court, acknowledged that his anticipated profit from the transaction was \$11,357.14.

Sentencing for Tappin, who remains on bond, is scheduled for 11:00am on January 9, 2013. In 2007, Caldwell was sentenced to twenty months in federal prison; 57-year-old Robert Frederick Gibson was sentenced to 24 months in federal prison for their roles in the scheme.

U.S. Attorney Pitman also commended HSI for investigating this matter as well as the United States Marshals Service for their assistance during the extradition process.

Assistant United States Attorney Greg McDonald is prosecuting this case on behalf of the Government.

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