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Retired Army Major Pleads Guilty in Bribery Scheme Involving Department of Defense Contracts in Kuwait

WASHINGTON — A retired major in the U.S. Army pleaded guilty today to charges of bribery and making a false statement arising out of his activities as both a contracting specialist and a contracting officer at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, from 2005 through 2007, Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich of the Criminal Division and Acting Assistant Attorney General Deborah A. Garza of the Antitrust Division announced.

Christopher H. Murray, 41, a resident of Cataula, Ga., pleaded guilty today before U.S. District Judge Clay D. Land in U.S. District Court in Columbus, Ga., to a five-count information charging him with four counts of bribery and one count of making a false statement.

According to the information, in 2005 and 2006, Murray served as a contracting specialist in the small purchases branch of the contracting office at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, where he was responsible for soliciting bids for military contracts, evaluating the sufficiency of those bids, and then recommending the award of contracts to particular contractors. In this capacity, Murray admitted he received approximately \$225,000 in bribes from DOD contractors in exchange for recommending the award of contracts for various goods and services.

According to the information, Murray admitted that when he returned to Kuwait in fall 2006 as a contracting officer, he received an additional \$20,000 in bribes from a Department of Defense (DOD) contractor in exchange for the award of a construction contract. When confronted with evidence of his criminal conduct, Murray admitted he made false statements to federal agents investigating this matter.

Murray faces up to 15 years in prison on each bribery count, as well as a criminal fine of \$250,000 or three times the monetary equivalent of the thing of value for each count. Murray also faces up to five years in prison on the false statement charge as well as a fine of \$250,000. The maximum fines may be increased to twice the gain derived from the crime or twice the loss suffered by the victims of the crime, if either amount is greater than the statutory maximum fine.

"Murray abused his position of trust by awarding contracts to those willing to pay him bribes," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich. "There are no more important purchases made by the federal government than those of goods and services used by our men and women in uniform. Procurement officers who sacrifice their positions of trust for the sake of personal enrichment can expect to be prosecuted."

"The Antitrust Division will continue to vigorously prosecute those who commit bribery and other offenses, which deprive the U.S. military and, ultimately, U.S. taxpayers, of a competitive market," said Deborah A. Garza, Acting Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Department's Antitrust Division.

"SIGIR vigorously continues to pursue investigations into allegations of fraud in Iraq," said Stuart Bowen, Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. "Maj. Murray grossly abused his position of trust, committing multiple acts of fraud for which he will now pay a just price. This successful investigation was part of ongoing cooperative efforts being carried out by SIGIR and our law enforcement partners."

Brig. Gen. Rodney Johnson of the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command said this guilty plea is just another example of how seriously his criminal investigators and the U.S. Army take these criminal acts of greed and how determined he and his special agents are to bring these people to justice. "People who do business with the U.S. military should know by now that if they violate the public's trust and commit criminal acts, they will be caught by a team of highly-trained professionals looking for this type of criminality. We will not stand for it," said Johnson.

"The American public expects military officers to behave in an aboveboard manner," said James R. Ives, Special Agent in Charge of the Defense Criminal Investigative Service's Mid-Atlantic Field Office. "The vast majority of officers are disciplined, law abiding professionals who serve with honor. Duty, accountability, responsibility and integrity inspire their attitudes and actions. Officers who fail to live up to these standards erode public support for the military and undermine confidence in government. The Defense Criminal Investigative Service remains committed to working with the Department of Justice to ensure officials who betray the public trust are held firmly accountable."

Today's charges represent the Department's commitment to protecting U.S. taxpayers from procurement fraud through its creation of the National Procurement Fraud Task Force. The National Procurement Fraud Initiative, announced in October 2006, is designed to promote the early detection, prosecution, and prevention of procurement fraud associated with the increase in contracting activity for national security and other government programs.

The case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Richard B. Evans of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section, which is headed by Chief William M. Welch II, and Trial Attorneys Mark W. Pletcher, Emily W. Allen and Finnuala Kelleher of the Antitrust Division's National Criminal Enforcement Section, which is headed by Chief Lisa Phelan.

The case is being investigated by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction; the Army Criminal Investigation Command, Defense Criminal Investigative Service; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the FBI; and the Internal Revenue Service.

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