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Shrugs Off Critics

Gun Merchant Sells Weapons To One and All

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 24. Across the Potomac from the Nation's capital at the International Armaments Corp., which reputedly owns more small arms than the British Army, they pretend not to understand the controversy that envelops them from time to time.

After all, they say, arms sales are just as legal as automobile sales. And they don't feel any more responsibility—or say they don't—for a customer who misuses a gun than an auto dealer feels for bloodshed on the highways.

CRITICS UNSATISFIED

It is a facile disclaimer, and it doesn't satisfy critics who can't understand how a company like Interarmco, headed by a former Philadelphian, can be allowed to stay in business.

The critics seem to resent Interarmco's lawful multimillion-dollar business in surplus military weapons bought from all over the world.

From its warehouse in Alexandria, Va., Interarmco sells pistols, revolvers, rifles, machine guns, antitank guns, bazookas, cannon and anything else that the well-armed criminal, guerilla or "sportsman" could desire.

The critics also resent Interarmco's advertisements for its merchandise, often written in humorous language that riles some people who see a menace in arms trade.

LINKED TO BRINK'S CASE

Another controversy simmered when police in Syracuse, N. Y., disclosed that the thugs who looted a Brink's Co. office of \$400,000 had used a cannon from Interarmco to blow open the vault.

There is more to Interarmco than mail-order sales to nuts and criminals.

Samuel Cummings, the president, says domestic customers—including a few souvenir-hunters who display military artillery as garden statuary—account for half of Interarmco's sales.

That means the other half is in military sales to foreign governments and factions.

GETS U. S. APPROVAL

The significant thing about this is that Interarmco won't sell even a popgun to a foreign government without a tacit OK from the State Department.

Under existing laws, a mental patient on the loose in the U. S. apparently can buy a cannon from Interarmco or its competitors without having to account to anybody.

With State Department approval, the company has sold enough arms abroad to support several small wars.

The Russians have denounced Interarmco as an arm of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Regardless of the truth or falsity of that, both sides in the Cold War obviously must use a variety of means in their giant chess game of limited aiming of friends and non-friends to promote larger goals.

TRAVELS A GREAT DEAL

Cummings, from his residence in Monaco, keeps in close touch with arms movement in the non-Communist world.

He must do so in order to know where to buy and sell.

More than half of his time is spent in traveling around the world, visiting with ministers, generals and potentates.

From one army he buys a batch of surplus weapons and rearms the army with better equipment. Then he sends the latest batch to Europe or Alexandria, Egypt, for reconditioning before selling it to another army.

In the tradition of arms merchants, Cummings is an expatriate (Monaco has no income tax), is wealthy, lives lavishly and mysteriously.

WON'T DRINK, SMOKE

He also has a puritanical streak that doesn't let him drink, smoke or frequent the expensive restaurants and other hot spots on the Riviera.

Cummings, 39, is a former Philadelphian who attended here.

At a tender age he found an old machine gun on a junk pile. Fascinated, he began tinkering with it, and this led to a lifelong study of weapons.

When drafted, he astounded the Army with his knowledge of every weapon in the Nation's arsenal and soon was promoted to instructor. After his discharge he went to work for the CIA as a weapons expert.

He left the CIA after a couple of years to go to work for a private arms company but soon quit that to found his own company, in 1953.

Today he is the sole owner of Interarmco, which had a reported net book value of \$10 million three years ago and had at that time more than 100,000 weapons stacked up in its Alexandria warehouse.