



Department of Defense
Office of the Inspector General

Information Release

INFORMATION RELEASE

November 8, 2004

Soldier Sentenced For Theft Of Body Armor

The Office of Inspector General (OIG), Department of Defense (DoD), announced today that on October 27, 2004, Curba Merrill, an E-4 Specialist, U.S. Army assigned to Fort Carson, CO, was sentenced to 42 months confinement; reduced in rank to E-1; ordered to forfeit all pay and allowances; and ordered to be discharged with a bad-conduct discharge from the U.S. Army. Merrill was sentenced after pleading guilty to criminal violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Article 121, larceny of military property; and to violations of the UCMJ, Article 108, the sale of military property.

Merrill, as part of his guilty plea, admitted to stealing and selling over one 130 items of military equipment. Included in the items stolen by Merrill were 10 military outer tactical vests (OTVs) and two sets of small arms protective inserts (SAPIs).

Agents from the OIG DoD's Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) and the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command conducted this investigation as part of the national covert operation "High Bidder." Operation "High Bidder" was initiated by the DCIS in July 2003. This operation has identified individuals who have attempted to sell military issued OTVs and/or SAPIs

The OTV is a ballistic vest consisting of a Kevlar weave; SAPIs are lightweight ceramic plates that can be placed in the pockets of the vests to provide additional protection to the chest and back area. When used in conjunction with the OTV, the SAPI is designed to protect the user from multiple impacts from high-velocity, high-impact ammunition. The OTV and SAPI are currently used by U.S. military personnel in military operations throughout the world and have proven in combat to save lives.

OTVs and SAPIs made exclusively for the U.S. Government are not for sale to the general public. Once the items have lost their shelf life or have been returned by military personnel, they are demilitarized by total destruction through shredding and/or shearing, to prevent the item from being restored to usable condition. They are stolen Government property if possessed or sold outside the military or law enforcement agencies.

For further information, contact J. Byron Hogan, Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC), DCIS Southwest Field Office, Arlington, TX, at (817) 543-4350.

To report suspected fraud, waste and abuse within DOD programs, contact the Defense Hotline toll-free at (800) 424-9098, email: hotline@dodig.osd.mil/, or visit them on the World Wide Web at <http://www.dodig.osd.mil/hotline/>.

- OIG -