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Guilty Plea Entered in Military Fraud Case

Ex-Sergeant Who Admits Accepting Bribes Is 3rd Caught in Credit Card Probe

By BROOKE A. MASTERS
Washington Post Staff Writer

A former Army master sergeant who worked in the office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff pleaded guilty yesterday in U.S. District Court in Alexandria to money laundering and accepting $200,000 in bribes for his central role in a $400,000 procurement fraud scheme, according to prosecutors and court documents.

Bobby Gilchrist, 37, is the sixth person and third Army noncommissioned officer to be snared in a probe of falsified charges on government credit cards.

While serving as a support services supply sergeant for the Joint Chiefs, Gilchrist conspired with three office products vendors to submit fake bills for services and goods that were never provided, according to a criminal information file at the court. The District resident split the money the vendors received from the government.

The U.S. attorney's office estimates that the scheme lasted from August 1998 to June 2000 and cost the government $400,000. The investigation is continuing.

Gilchrist's attorney, Pleasant Broadnax, did not return a phone call seeking comment. Gilchrist faces maximum sentences of 15 years for bribery and 20 years for money laundering. He is scheduled to be sentenced May 18.

According to court documents, Gilchrist asked for and received bribes from employees at two office product companies, Pronto Products and Speedy Supply. He used his government credit card to make purchases from the companies and recruited other employees to do the same. In exchange, he received kickbacks on the purchases.

Gilchrist also arranged with the two companies and Robin Noland, the owner of a third company, to make false purchases and submit phony invoices to the government, according to court documents. In yesterday's plea, Gilchrist acknowledged that on Dec. 30, 1998, he received $7,000 in cash from Noland in exchange for using his government card to pay for $10,000 in fake purchases from her company, Direct Office Products.

Noland pleaded guilty last fall to conspiracy to defraud the United States and was sentenced to two years of probation and ordered to pay $72,500 in restitution.

To conceal some of the bribery money, an official from Pronto Products would write checks on the company's bank account to a third party, who was not identified in court documents, and Gilchrist would then drive the third party to the bank to cash the check. Gilchrist kept some of the money and used the rest to pay off other government employees, according to court documents.

The two other Army noncommissioned officers convicted in the scheme are Jerome Phillips, 46, of Delaware, who was sentenced in January to one year and a day in prison, and Johnny Bailey, 37, of Woodbridge, who pleaded guilty in October and is scheduled to be sentenced in March.