

U.S. Is Probing A Millionaire's Gun Obsession

By Wiley Maloney

SAN FRANCISCO (UPI)—The Federal Government wants to know why William E. Thoresen III, scion of a midwestern fortune, collects guns — tons of guns — enough to outfit a small army.

The Government now has seized from the 30-year-old millionaire's possession more than 70 tons of sidearms, rifles, grenades, flame throwers and a .37 millimeter Swedish antitank gun. Agents are hunting for more.

[He was adjudged legally sane Wednesday to defend himself against Federal charges of possession of illegal weapons.]

The collection is not antique, although most of it dates to World War II. It includes bazookas, both German and American.

Those who have inspected these arms, now impounded by the Army at San Francisco's Presidio, say everything is in working order. There's ammunition to go with the guns.

Thoresen, tall, handsome, says nothing. But he smiles and is apparently willing to communicate.

"I am not a gun dealer," Thoresen began to reply to reporters recently. "I would love to tell you the whole story."

"Either you shut up," said his lawyer, J. W. Ehrlich, "or get yourself another attorney."

Nothing But Smiles

Thoresen shut up. Nothing but smiles have come from him since. The same is true of his wife, Louise. She caught the brunt of the raid on the couple's home on April 21. Thoresen wasn't home.

The home is a \$180,000 mansion in the San Francisco classic manner on Pacific Heights. The police found the inside almost bare, except for 40 tons of weapons. Mrs. Thoresen was there; so was her

Her husband was still unavailable.

The Federal, City and State authorities dug in. A few blocks away, in a garage, they found the antitank gun. Squirreled away in warehouses and storage places in Oakland and Berkeley, the investigators uncovered more tons of guns and ammunition.

The Thoresens also are wanted in New York for illegal possession of weapons. They were charged in New York specifically with possession of an unregistered Reising submachinegun and an A. R. automatic weapon on which taxes were not paid.

Mrs. Thoresen and her husband, in absentia, were arraigned before U.S. Commissioner Richard Goldsmith. Bail for Thoresen and his wife was set at \$55,000.

Lawyer Ehrlich said of Thoresen: "You could call him a gun freak . . . a good American citizen . . . a strange man. I knew he collected guns but I'll be damned if he ever talked about cannon."

Thoresen surrendered on April 27 and was freed on \$55,000 bail which his wife withdrew from the bank the day before.

"There is no evidence he bought these arms and shells to shoot anybody," Ehrlich said. "The man's idea was to open a business here as a dealer in guns."

But Thoresen denied he wanted to be a gun dealer.

CIA Is Ruled Out

Speculation was spurred by the fact that, after one raider had found a "carton full of currency" in one seizure, he remarked, "I wonder if we've torpedoed the CIA again."

The possible Central Intelligence Agency angle was raised again when it was noted that many of the weapons stored by Thoresen in the Coast Drayage Co. warehouse in Berkeley had been sold originally by International Armaments Co., (Interarmco) of Alexandria, Va.

This firm is headed by Sam Cummings, 39, a former CIA agent who says he "sells guns to anybody," no questions asked.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jer-

five-year-old son, Mike, who wore a pair of holstered toy western-style pistols.

Thoresen was out of the city. Mrs. Thoresen was arrested on a charge of illegal possession of weapons. The guns were carried away in vans.

This raid was sparked by information coming to the San Francisco police last December.

The raid, on a Friday, yielded rifles, submachineguns, hand grenades, a small cannon and flame throwers. Mrs. Thoresen put up bail and had to appear in Municipal Court the following Monday.

rold M. Lader assured the court there was no CIA connection. "We have checked this out," he said, "and are convinced there is no connection between Thoresen and the CIA or any other security agency."

Thoresen is reputed to have inherited about \$70 million from his grandfather. His father, William Thoresen II, of Chicago, is president of Great Western Steel Co.

Meanwhile, the gun collecting continues despite legal troubles. Mrs. Thoresen was arrested again on May 1 when she picked up a shipment of arms at the Railway Express Agency. It was the second arrest in 10 days. She was charged with possession of a submachine gun.