

SFChronicle

Vesco

Senate Hearing in Guns Case

Washington

A Los Angeles stockbroker invoked the Fifth Amendment and refused to testify before Congress yesterday about his alleged role in smuggling guns to fugitive financier Robert Vesco.

Thomas P. Richardson, a close friend of Vesco, purchased 14 firearms which reportedly were smuggled out of the United States aboard the stockbroker's private jet and flown to Costa Rica, said investigators on the staff of the Senate permanent subcommittee on investigations.

Documents unearthed by the investigators showed that Richardson purchased 14 weapons immediately prior to the April 19 flight. A cargo handler testified that one of the cartons loaded aboard the plane was labeled ".22-caliber survival rifle."

Richardson's attorney, James E. Sharp, told the subcommittee that his client was invoking the Fifth Amendment because he was under threat of indictment by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles.

The pilots of Richardson's aircraft said they saw one firearm when a carton came open while being loaded aboard the aircraft.

Subcommittee staff members also said they were investigating a related incident in which a large number of machine guns reportedly were smuggled out of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.,

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Friend Won't Testify



Senate staff probers displayed guns allegedly smuggled to Costa Rica



UPI Telephoto

LUZETTE VIDAL
Mystery witness



THOMAS RICHARDSON
L. A. stockbroker

aboard Richardson's jet.

Vesco has labeled previous news accounts of the alleged gunrunning as "ridiculous and absurd."

Another witness, identified as Luzette Vidal, also took the Fifth Amendment in response to questions about whether she had "ever been in the company of" either Vesco or Norman LeBlanc, a business associate of Vesco's. Staff members would not discuss their reasons for calling Miss Vidal as a witness.

Jackson called the gunrunning charges one of "a series of disturbing circumstances, in all of which Robert Vesco's name has surfaced." He referred to earlier charges by an undercov-

er government informant that federal narcotics agents dropped "a huge drug case" after Vesco's name was mentioned as the financial backer of a heroin smuggling scheme.

Vesco is under indictment on charges stemming from an illegal \$200,000 contribution to former President Nixon's re-election campaign in an alleged attempt to influence an investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission. That investigation resulted in charges that Vesco and 41 other defendants spirited away \$224 million from the mutual fund complex originally created by Bernard Cornfeld.

Associated Press