

Five Star Happy Campers

17 August 2009

While unpacking the Fuso after its arrival from South America we found a few pounds of white powder.

We were not amused.

As opposed to when we opened the camper at the Houston docks and found this:



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And this:



While we were not exactly amused at this site, we didn't really mind all that much that the camper had been torn apart looking for contraband.

After all, we were the ones who had notified the FBI, Homeland Security, Customs, and the DEA that our truck was inbound and asked them to search it thoroughly for contraband.

And that was after paying to have the rig searched and inspected with dogs twice prior to its departure from South America.

Does that make any sense?

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No?

Then let me step back in time a little bit.

Back in late May, I shipped these three boxes of valuables and records I'd pulled off the Fuso to the United States.



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I was able to pack those three boxes with high-value stuff and personal effects from the Fuso due to the efforts of these three guys:



They are part of the team from [redacted], a private firm that does, ummm, interesting work related to, ummm, [redacted] in Latin America.

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The reason I like those three guys so much is that they enabled me to see this:



Which may not look like much of a photo except the last time I saw that odometer, I was looking at it in another country and about 1,500 miles away.

Those three guys had just moved that odometer from a parking lot controlled by narcotics traffickers to a safe and secret location.

Is any of this making any sense yet?

No?

OK, I'll go a little further back in time.

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On 30 March 2009 we met the representative of an American shipping company in Guayaquil, Ecuador and processed the documents to ship our Fuso back to the U.S.



The American turned out to be an impostor, using a false name. But in the broader sense, he wasn't really an impostor, since he was, in actuality, the American shipping company.

Does this all make sense now?

No?

Would a step-by-step explanation work better?

Hackney Fuso Case Summary

Perpetrator: [redacted]
DOB [redacted]
SSN [redacted]
FBI #: [redacted]
CCRE: [redacted]
[redacted] state criminal #: [redacted]
Known aliases: [redacted]
Probable aliases: [redacted]

Victims: Douglas & Stephanie Hackney
Contact: dhackney@egltd.com [redacted]

Vehicle: 2007 Mitsubishi Fuso FG 140
VIN: [redacted]
License Plate: [redacted]

Overview:

- We spent 2008 and early 2009 touring South America in a truck we built in the U.S. for that purpose.
- We shipped the truck from Houston, Texas, USA, to Valparaiso, Chile for the tour in December 2007. The truck arrived in Valparaiso, Chile in January 2008.
- On our South America tour we visited Chile, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia.
- We broke the frame on our truck while crossing the Andes in Ecuador in February 2009. We repaired the frame in Riobamba, Ecuador.
- After the repair, we carefully drove the truck to the nearest seaport, Guayaquil, Ecuador, in order to ship the truck back to the U.S. to replace the frame.
- We used www.freightnet.com to request quotes from freight forwarders for the shipment from Guayaquil, Ecuador to Long Beach, California, USA. More than a dozen freight forwarder companies responded to the request for quote.
- Our truck is too big to fit in a standard shipping container. Consequently, we require Roll On/ Roll Off (RoRo) or flat rack service for shipping the truck by ocean freight.
- There is no RoRo service available between Guayaquil, Ecuador and Long Beach, California, USA.
- We selected U.S. based [redacted], for the shipment because they "guaranteed" they had a flat rack required for the shipment in Guayaquil, Ecuador. No other shipper could guarantee the arrival and availability of a flat rack before our Ecuador temporary import documents for the truck expired.
- We contracted [redacted], to ship our truck from Guayaquil, Ecuador to Long Beach, California, USA via flat rack ocean shipment.
- We wire transferred \$[redacted] from our [redacted] bank account in [redacted], to [redacted] Bank in [redacted], account [redacted]. This account is controlled by [redacted] under the name of [redacted]. The funds were paid for shipping, fees and shipping insurance.
- We were told by [redacted] that Front Cargo was the local shipping agent in Ecuador for our shipment.
- We were told by [redacted] that our truck was scheduled to ship from Guayaquil, Ecuador on the Maersk Victoria, voyage #0928, on 6 April, 2009.
- We transferred the truck title and keys, along with the shipping documents to [redacted], using the alias [redacted], as part of the shipping transaction in Guayaquil, Ecuador on 30 March, 2009. This transaction was witnessed by two Ecuadorian citizens.
- [redacted], using the alias [redacted], took our truck under false pretenses in Guayaquil, Ecuador and subsequently transported the truck to Cartagena, Colombia.
- We subsequently learned that the managers of the Front Cargo offices in Guayaquil and Quito, Ecuador had no knowledge of our truck's shipment or [redacted].

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- We subsequently learned that Maersk had no record of a booking for our truck's shipment on the Maersk Victoria, voyage #0928.
- We subsequently learned that [redacted] is not a legitimate company.
- We subsequently learned that [redacted] is a convicted criminal with an extensive record of cocaine smuggling, aircraft theft, vehicle theft, vehicle document counterfeiting, grand larceny, forgery and fraud.
- [redacted] used the name [redacted], a false identity, for the shipping transaction in Guayaquil, Ecuador.
- [redacted] served jail and prison time in the [redacted], [redacted], and U.S. federal prison systems.
- [redacted] is currently on probation for a felony in [redacted], case [redacted].
- On [redacted] 2009 the [redacted] offices for the FBI, DEA, ICE, US Attorney General and the [redacted] State Attorney were notified of the potential for [redacted] to use our truck to transport contraband into the U.S.
- On [redacted] 2009 a private investigation firm, [redacted], was retained to investigate [redacted], [redacted] and explore recovery of our truck and its contents.
- On [redacted] 2009 a private investigation firm, [redacted], was retained to recover our truck and its contents in Cartagena, Colombia and deliver same to a legitimate shipping agent for shipment to the United States.
- On [redacted] 2009, a team from [redacted], an asset protection and recovery service, recovered our truck and delivered it to a safe location.
- During and subsequent to the truck recovery it was learned that [redacted] used my name, Douglas Hackney, and the name [redacted] as aliases while in Cartagena, Colombia.
- Current whereabouts of [redacted] are unknown.
- It is the opinion of law enforcement professionals who have reviewed this case that [redacted]'s intent was to use our truck for shipment of contraband from Colombia to the United States.

Note: Portions of this summary were omitted and redacted due to ongoing investigations.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: How did you end up with [redacted] shipping company?

A: They were the only company that responded to our freightnet.com request for proposals that "guaranteed" they had a flat rack in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Q: Why did you need a flat rack?

A: Our truck is too big to fit into a container and there is no Roll On / Roll Off (RoRo) vehicle shipping service in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Q: Didn't this guy seem fishy to you?

A: Yes, to both of us, but we ignored our guts because we were pressed for time.

Q: Why was time an issue?

A: The Fuso's Ecuador temporary import documents were running out. We only had a couple of weeks before we needed to have the truck out of the country.

Q: Why didn't you drive the truck to Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina or Brazil to ship it back to the United States?

A: We broke the frame crossing the Andes and welded the frame together in a temporary repair. We counted ourselves lucky for getting the truck the approximately 150 miles / 241 kilometers from the town where we repaired it to the nearest port, Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Q: Why didn't you tell me about this?

A: We were advised by a high ranking representative of the U.S. Government to not discuss the situation.

Q: Who is this guy?

A: We can't tell you at this time, but I can tell you that his criminal record is extensive.

Q: Who was he working for?

A: We can't tell you at this time.

Q: What was he doing? What were his plans?

A: He has a criminal record that includes cocaine smuggling from South America. The law enforcement professionals who have reviewed the case think he was going to use our truck to smuggle cocaine into the United States. Since the truck's documents were in our name, if the DEA or another agency discovered the drugs, he could deny any involvement and we would have been held responsible. It would have been a "cowboy" operation, outside the normal smuggling channels, which fits his historical method of operation (M.O.).

Q: What will happen to this guy?

A: All we can say is that there are ongoing investigations.

Q: Were you scared?

A: Yes. Especially when we fled Ecuador and returned to the United States. We could not contact our families or friends and were forced to hide out, moving constantly from hotel to hotel, basically barricaded in hotel rooms, to keep our families and friends from becoming victims. We had to stay isolated and not make contact with or stay with any of our family or friends in case whoever was behind the smuggling operation came after us in retaliation for disrupting it.

Q: What's next for you two?

A: Short term, we still need to fix the frame on the Fuso. Otherwise, we are adjusting to our new reality. We don't know what is next yet.

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Q: What was the white powder you found on the truck?

A: Five Star Happy Camper deodorizing powder for our gray and black tanks. We forgot we had a container of it in the basement storage compartment. While quickly packing the truck for what we thought would be a brief 10 day absence from our home while it rode a ship to Los Angeles, we threw away the supply of Five Star Happy Camper deodorizing powder we kept in the bathroom. We didn't want that white powder to set off a drug search frenzy when the truck went through inspection during what we anticipated to be a normal, typical, straightforward shipping experience. We were so relaxed while we packed the truck. After all, we were using an American shipping company. What could possibly go wrong?



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Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney, victims of Expedition Interruptus, were on a two to three year global overland expedition before their only home, their expedition vehicle, was, ummm, misappropriated for use by others.

You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel>