

Pendleton man cleared of charge that he lied to FBI while working in Iraq

Kirk Brown, Anderson Independent Mail

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(Photo: Stockbyte)

A federal judge this week dismissed a charge that an Upstate man lied to the FBI while working for a private security company in Iraq.

Senior U.S. District Judge Henry Herlong ruled Tuesday that federal prosecutors waited too long to pursue their case against Charley Hill, court records show. Herlong's decision was based on a motion from Hill's lawyers citing a five-year statute of limitations.

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According to a February indictment, the FBI began an investigation in 2010 into whether Hill and others associated with his employer in Iraq were defrauding the U.S. government. The probe sought to determine if they were overstating the costs of acquiring licenses and permits and pocketing some of the extra money. The company that Hill was working for is not identified in the indictment.

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Hill falsely told FBI agents during an interview in Baghdad that "he never sent money from Iraq to the United States except for \$13,000 that an Iraqi translator sent to pay off student loans for Hill's daughter," the indictment states.

According to the indictment, Hill actually mailed at least \$185,000 from Iraq to "his then-girlfriend, his son, his daughter, among others" in the U.S. starting in 2009.

Although court records indicate that the U.S. Department of Justice claimed to have voluminous evidence that included audio recordings, Hill's legal team "had every intention of defending the case vigorously and proving his innocence at trial," said one of his lawyers, Atlanta attorney Drew Findling.

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The Justice Department attorney who led the prosecution of Hill did not respond Thursday to messages seeking comment.

Hill, who lives near Pendleton, said being indicted was "stressful."

"I am just glad that all of this process is over," he said Thursday.

Hill, 54, said he served in the Navy from 1995 to 2004 and then worked for the private company in Iraq until 2010. He declined to identify the company.

After returning to South Carolina in 2010, he graduated from Clemson University in 2013 with a bachelor's degree in business management, he said. He said he is still affiliated with the Clemson Student Veterans Association.

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