George Thayer

*ARMS DEALER SAM*

How surplus weapons, international suppliers, and an eager clientele turned an ambitious American boy into a full-grown millionaire.

Samuel Cummings, one of Interarms', and Austria all the ordnance it needed to equip its border police. He bought 100,000 surplus arms and seventy million rounds of ammunition from Finland; this purchase was so large that it took three years to ship to the United States. He almost bought from Chile the last surviving warship from the Battle of Jutland, but a Japanese group outdid him at the last moment. He helped rearm West Germany by selling it MG-42 machine guns that the Dutch had captured from the Wehrmacht. In one transaction, he bought 600,000 Lee-Enfield rifles, some of them for as little as 28 cents apiece and subsequently sold many of them in the United States for as much as $24.95.

In 1955 he supplied arms to the Costa Rican government of José Figueres. He also sold arms to Nicaragua, which was at the time supporting a group of Costa Rican rebels opposed to the Figueres regime. The following year he bought 2,000 small arms that had been captured by the Israelis from the Egyptians in the Suez campaign. The weapons were predominantly Russian in origin, purchased by the Egyptians from the Czechs, who previously had acquired them from the Soviets. Most of these arms, Cummings told me, "now hang over the fireplaces in American homes."

He sold Trujillo twenty-six Vampire jets that had seen service in the Swedish Air Force, and a few years later he sold Venezuela seventy-four F-86 Sabrejets that were Luftwaffe castoffs. For many years he was a major supplier of arms to Batista. Later, he sold Castro a batch of AR-10 rifles—as he did 75,000 Sten guns to Finland, 500,000 FN rifles to Argentina, 2,000 Springfield rifles with extra-long chrome-plated bayonets to Liberia, 60,000 Lee-Enfields to Pakistan's border patrol, and a quantity of the same make of rifle to Kenya to fight the Mau Mau. He has even supplied arms to Portugal, which is not generally thought of in connection with mercenaries.