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Sochi Court Jails American Who Brought Rifle Into Russia on His Yacht

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Russian police video of the man identified as Charles Wayne Zimmerman. **@opskuban / Telegram**

A judge in the southern Krasnodar region has sentenced an American to five years in prison for illegally transporting weapons after a rifle and ammunition were found aboard his yacht when it docked in the southern port city of Sochi last year.

"A U.S. citizen was found guilty of illegally transporting and moving firearms," Sochi's Central District Court said in a statement released on Monday, identifying the man as Charles Wayne Zimmerman.

The court said Zimmerman, who had sailed across the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean before arriving in Russia in June 2025, pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to five years in prison.

It was not immediately clear when he was sentenced. Zimmerman's arrest and subsequent trial had not been reported in the Russian media before Monday's sentencing announcement.

Court authorities cited Zimmerman as saying he had decided to sail to Sochi after meeting a Russian woman online. He apparently did not know that it was illegal to store weapons on his yacht when docking in Russia.

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A video released by Sochi's Central District Court showed the moment of Zimmerman's arrest last year. The video shows a black hunting rifle in a case and two boxes of Remington rifle-caliber rounds, some of which appear rusty.

In September 2024, the U.S. Coast Guard East issued a missing person alert for a man identified as Charles Zimmerman, 57, who departed on a sailing trip from Fort Macon, North Carolina, to New Zealand.

"Zimmerman was last heard from on July 23. He had informed a family member that he would be departing in his sailing vessel en route to the Mediterranean Sea," the Coast Guard said on Facebook that year.

He was sailing on a 10-meter (35-foot) green and white-hulled vessel, named the Trude Zena, it added.

AFP contributed reporting.

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