

Johnny Sombbrero sticks to his guns

Aging biker fights charges after more than 100 firearms seized by police

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Toronto Sun

Johnny Sombbrero wears two hats.

But the 76-year-old biker said Toronto Police only saw the leader of the Black Diamond Riders, not the avid gun collector, when they raided his North York apartment last year and seized his arsenal of firearms. "My dad gave me my first gun when I was seven years old, a .22, and the police have it right now," Sombbrero testified Friday.

With his long, grey, thin-

ning hair slicked back, starkly contrasting with his dark brown beard, the senior slowly made his way to the stand in his silver-tipped boots to defend himself against careless storage of firearms charges.

Sombbrero, whose real name is Henry Barnes, founded the BDR in 1951. He recalled in detail how he formed the motorcycle club with 13 other bikers, all of whom are gone now.

"We were young, tough men," Sombbrero recalled. "The war had just ended" and "in those days there

were lots of gang fights."

BDR members are now in their retirement years, but they were once among the city's most notorious bike gangs.

Sombbrero's memories were just as vivid recalling the day in January 2010 when dozens of officers stormed his 10th-floor apartment where he kept numerous weapons lockers filled with firearms.

A cop called him around 11:20 a.m. saying his car was being broken into. While he thought it was odd, he threw on some clothes and headed out.

"(But) I opened the door

and — bam," Sombbrero said, gesturing with his age-spotted, swollen hands, adorned with silver rings.

"This great big fella ... came through the door first," he recalled. "He came crashing through the door and grabbed me by the neck."

Sombbrero, who had just undergone a triple bypass, said he fell backward and Michael Press, a civilian member of the Toronto Police Service, landed on his chest, breaking his ribs.

He spent much of the next five hours at gunpoint while officers "tore" his home

"apart," Sombbrero said.

Police laid 18 counts of careless storage and seized more than 100 machine guns, rifles, handguns and other weapons.

"This is a guy with no criminal record and all his guns were properly registered and stored in lockers," defence lawyer David Costa said outside court.

The prosecution focused on the "security" of the lockers and the locks used.

The trial continues Tuesday.

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Henry Barnes, aka Johnny Sombbrero, centre in a red cardigan sweater, and his lawyer David Costa — to his right in a brown blazer — are accompanied by Sombbrero's friends and former bikers yesterday outside court where Sombbrero had gone to fight a raft of charges related to his massive firearms collection.