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St. Thomas Man Sentenced to 25 Years in \$2.1 Million Cocaine Trafficking Case

Russell Robinson led police on a high-speed chase across St. Thomas before being apprehended; jury rejects his claim of coercion in the 210-kilogram cocaine operation

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ST. THOMAS — United States Attorney Delia L. Smith announced today that Russell Robinson, 58, of St. Thomas, was sentenced by Chief District Judge Robert A. Molloy to 25 years incarceration followed by 10 years of supervised release after a federal jury found him guilty of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine and possession with intent to distribute cocaine.

In 2003, Robinson was charged with conspiracy to import and possess cocaine and money laundering. In 2007, Robinson was sentenced to 160 months of incarceration.

According to court documents, on November 29, 2021, at approximately 10:15 p.m., Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations agents detected a vessel traveling from St. John towards Vessup Beach, St. Thomas without navigational lights. After the vessel arrived at Vessup Beach, aviation agents observed the individuals onboard the vessel offloading large packages to three individuals at Vessup Beach. The large packages were then loaded into a gray Toyota Tundra truck operated by Robinson which departed Vessup Beach.

Aviation agents provided continuous location coordinates for Robinson's truck to Drug Enforcement Administration agents on the ground. As Robinson approached the Waterfront area of St. Thomas, agents attempted a traffic stop, but Robinson refused to stop. A high-speed chase then ensued with Robinson traveling from downtown Charlotte Amalie through Savan and Solberg and ultimately Hull Bay where he came to a stop. Agents set up a perimeter at the entrance of the Hull Bay roadway while aviation agents maintained surveillance of the truck.

Robinson and his passenger, Trevor Stephen, exited the vehicle and threw the large packages from the truck into the nearby bushes. Federal agents later recovered seven duffle bags which contained 210 kilograms of cocaine with an estimated street value of \$2.1 million dollars.

In June 2023, a mistrial was declared as to Robinson after Stephen alleged that Robinson brandished a firearm, threatened his life, and forced him to load the duffle bags of cocaine into Robinson's truck. The Court severed the case into two separate trials and proceeded with the Stephen's jury trial. The jury rejected Stephen's duress claim and found him guilty of possession with intent to distribute cocaine. Stephen was sentenced to 37 months of incarceration after the court determined that his role in the drug transaction was minor as compared to Robinson.

Robinson's jury trial commenced in March 2024, where he testified that he was also forced by a gunman to participate in the drug transaction. Robinson further testified that the gunman exited his vehicle shortly after the cocaine was loaded into his truck, but well before he fled from law enforcement and collided with one of their vehicles during the high-speed chase. The jury rejected Robinson's testimony and returned guilty verdicts on the cocaine conspiracy and cocaine possession charges.

"Robinson's conviction and sentence expose the challenges law enforcement agents face in enforcing drug trafficking laws. After Robinson refused to stop his vehicle, agents pursued him and Stephen in a high-speed chase from the east to west of St. Thomas and through several residential areas before they were finally apprehended. Their dedicated service is a testament to their commitment to keeping our community safe", U.S. Attorney Smith said.

"The sentence imposed marks a significant victory in our ongoing battle against the illicit drug trade", stated, DEA Caribbean Division SAC Denise Foster. "The unity and collaboration among our law enforcement partners were instrumental in bringing these individuals to justice. The brave actions of our task force officers, who put their lives on the line, exemplify the unwavering commitment of the DEA Caribbean Division and our partner agencies," Foster said.

This case was investigated by Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations, Drug Enforcement Administration and Homeland Security Investigations and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Kyle Payne and Natasha Baker.

This prosecution is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths

of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.

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