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Man Who Lured and Killed Homeless Veteran Milton Gordon Sentenced to 30 Years

Ryan Branch has been sentenced to 30 years in prison after pleading guilty to second-degree murder in the 2023 killing of Milton Gordon, a homeless veteran found shot to death on Company St. in Christiansted, a crime that shocked the St. Croix community.

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Mugshot of Ryan Branch. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT.

ST. CROIX — Ryan Branch has been sentenced to 30 years in prison for the killing of Milton Gordon, the homeless veteran whose brazen 2023 murder on Company Street in Christiansted shocked the Virgin Islands community.

The sentence follows a global plea agreement between Branch and government prosecutors in which he agreed to plead guilty to the lesser included offense of second-degree murder.

According to court records filed in the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, Branch pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, an offense punishable under by a term of imprisonment of not less than five years.

As part of the plea agreement, prosecutors recommended that Branch receive a 30-year term of active incarceration. The agreement also provided that any sentence imposed would run concurrently with the sentence in the murder case.

The agreement was entered into by the Government of the Virgin Islands through Attorney General Gordon Rhea and Assistant Attorney General Robert J. Pickett, along with Branch and his attorney, Territorial Public Defender Dwayne Henry.

According to the agreement, on or about April 2, 2023, in Christiansted, Branch and [Elijah Spencer](#) intentionally shot and killed Milton Gordon with malice aforethought.

The parties involved in the case also agreed that the plea agreement represented an appropriate resolution to the matter.

As part of the agreement, Branch waived several legal rights, including the right to appeal the entry of the plea, his conviction, and most aspects of the sentence imposed. He retains only the right to challenge the sentence if it exceeds the statutory maximum.

The plea agreement also requires Branch to give up the right to bring post-appeal or collateral challenges to his conviction or sentence, except on the issue of ineffective assistance of counsel if it was not known at the time the plea was entered. He specifically agreed not to file a motion attacking his conviction or sentence.

Should Branch attempt to vacate the plea, dismiss the charges, or reduce or set aside the conviction or sentence, prosecutors retain the authority to prosecute him on the counts involved, reinstate any charges dismissed or reduced under the agreement, and pursue additional charges that would otherwise have been barred by the plea arrangement.

By signing the agreement, Branch also waived objections, motions, and defenses that could challenge the government's decision to pursue such actions, including objections based on statutes of limitation or claims related to the Speedy Trial Clause of the Sixth Amendment.

The agreement further states that Branch waived all rights to request, demand, discover, or receive records related to the investigation or prosecution of the case from any department or agency of the Government of the Virgin Islands, including the Department of Justice and the V.I. Police Department. This waiver includes records that might otherwise be accessible under the territory's public records laws.

Background of the Case

The plea agreement and sentencing bring a measure of closure to a case that drew widespread attention across the territory.

Milton Gordon, also known as "Bobo," was [found dead during the early hours of April 2, 2023](#). At approximately 3:17 a.m., the 911 Emergency Call Center received ShotSpotter alerts indicating

gunfire on Company Street in Christiansted near the Divi Divi Fabric Store.

Responding officers discovered Gordon lying on the sidewalk with multiple gunshot wounds. Emergency Medical Services pronounced him dead at the scene.

Gordon, a veteran who was well known in the Christiansted area, was widely described by members of the community as harmless. His killing prompted strong reactions from residents and organizations that worked with individuals experiencing homelessness.

The Collective Collaboration, an organization that assists homeless individuals in the area, released a statement following his death saying, "It is the saddest day for TCCI FAMILY. He was relentless in his asking, but at no time did he steal or abuse anyone. All he did was ask. To murder him the way this individual or individuals did, mercy on them. We loved and care for him."

Investigators later determined that Gordon had been lured to a location on Company Street before he was shot and left on the sidewalk.

Elijah Spencer was arrested on May 2, 2023 during an early-morning operation known as "Operation No Respect," carried out by members of the VIPD Criminal Investigation and Special Operations Bureaus. Spencer was also charged with first-degree murder.

Ryan Branch, who was 19 years old at the time of his arrest, was taken into custody on February 10, 2024 at Henry E. Rohlsen Airport upon returning to St. Croix. Authorities subsequently charged him with first-degree murder and set bail at \$1 million, which he was unable to post.

He was then booked and transported to the John Bell Correctional Facility.

Investigators had also noted that on April 21, 2023, both Branch and Spencer were injured in a vehicle accident during the course of the investigation. Branch's injuries were severe enough that he required airlift evacuation for medical treatment.