

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Former DPNR Officer Gerald Mercer Found Guilty Of Cocaine Smuggling Conspiracy At Cyril E. King Airport; Faces No Less Than 10 Years To Life Imprisonment

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ST. CROIX -- Former Department of Planning and Natural Resources Officer Gerald Mercer, 43, was found guilty by a jury in federal court on Thursday, May 31, 2018, before District Judge Curtis Gomez of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute not less than 50 and not more than 150 kilograms of cocaine, United States Attorney Gretchen Shappert announced today.

According to trial testimony provided by a former security officer at the Office of the Governor, Mercer was the mastermind of a large-scale drug trafficking organization that operated in the Virgin Islands from 2011 through 2016. In 2011, Mercer recruited the security officer and convinced him to use his law enforcement credentials to bypass security screening at Cyril E. King Airport in order to smuggle kilogram quantities of cocaine from St. Thomas to Miami and Fort Lauderdale. Once the cocaine arrived in Florida, Mercer directed the security officer to deliver his cocaine to a co-conspirator for distribution in the continental United States at \$33,000 per kilogram.

Trial testimony also indicated that in 2014, the security officer and Florida coconspirator cut Mercer out of the organization, due to Mercer's nonpayment of a \$70,000 debt. Thereafter, members of the conspiracy continued the cocaine smuggling operation using the system Mercer had originally devised in 2011. After being shut out of the drug smuggling organization, Mercer persistently tried to regain membership, but his coconspirators refused. Trial testimony established that Mercer ultimately decided to expose the organization's smuggling activities to law enforcement.

According to trial testimony, the smuggling operation was interdicted by federal law enforcement on September 3, 2016, after Mercer contacted a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agent and reported that one of his former colleagues was traveling through the St. Thomas airport on that day with a quantity of cocaine. Witnesses at trial stated that Mercer instructed the CBP agent not to reveal that he (Mercer) was the source of intelligence information which lead to the apprehension of Mercer's former colleague, the drug courier. At trial, the U.S. Attorney's Office presented cell phone records to corroborate that Mercer's call to the CBP agent was made within minutes of the drug courier's arrest at the airport with cocaine. CBP agents seized 22 kilograms of cocaine from the courier's carryon suitcase, and evidence presented at trial showed that the last person the courier saw, prior to his apprehension, was in fact Mercer.

Other members of the conspiracy have already entered guilty pleas in this case. As a result of his conviction, Mercer faces imprisonment of not less than 10 years and not more than life, and a fine of up to \$10,000,000. He was detained pending sentencing. Other members of the conspiracy have already entered guilty pleas in this case. As a result of his conviction, Mercer faces imprisonment of not less than 10 years and not more than life, and a fine of up to \$10,000,000. He was detained pending sentencing.

This case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations, Federal Bureau of Investigations and Drug Enforcement Administration and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Delia Smith and Meredith Edwards.