

The Virgin Islands Consortium

North Carolina Man Pleads Guilty To 2014 killing Of Roommate

Crime / **Published On August 10, 2018 01:56 PM /**

Staff **August 10, 2018**



ST. THOMAS -- A North Carolina man entered a guilty plea to second-degree murder in the death of his roommate almost four years ago, the V.I. Department of Justice announced Friday.

[Jason Coulter, 34](#), faced charges of first-degree murder, second-degree murder, two counts of using a dangerous weapon during the commission of a murder, first-degree assault, two counts of using a dangerous weapon during the commission of a first-degree assault, third-degree assault, two counts of using a dangerous weapon during the commission of a third-degree assault and attempt to destroy evidence in connection with the November 2014 death of his roommate, William Ray Bennett. Bennett, from

Tennessee, worked as a traveling lab technician and at the time of his death, he was an employee of Schneider Hospital.

On Thursday, Coulter stood before V.I. Superior Court Judge Kathleen Mackay and admitted that he bludgeoned and then stabbed Bennett to death. Under the plea agreement, Attorney General Claude Earl Walker will recommend that Coulter be sentenced to 22 years in prison.

“The defendant essentially slaughtered a human being who opened his home. He made the choice on that day to take this wonderful man’s life,” AG Walker said. “We have been in constant contact with the victim’s family throughout this ordeal and recently, some of them flew down here from the states. I know that this guilty plea gives the family partial closure on one part of this collective nightmare and also provides certainty that the defendant will spend a considerable portion of his life in prison.”

Prosecutors had alleged that Coulter clubbed and repeatedly stabbed Bennett to death inside the Sapphire Village apartment they both shared. The incident occurred sometime between Nov. 28 and 29, 2014. Coulter then left the island shortly after and was extradited to the territory almost a year later to face the charges.

According to an affidavit filed by Det. Dwight Griffith in support of the arrest warrant, one of Bennett’s co-workers requested a welfare check on the 60-year-old man, which was prompted after she received two “out sick” calls on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 from Bennett’s roommate, Coulter. Bennett was not heard from since.

A group from the hospital’s security arrived at Bennett’s residence on Dec. 2 and knocked on the door, but there was no answer, according to Griffith’s affidavit. They then contacted the property manager, who let them into the apartment. Once inside, they noticed the scent of Clorox bleach, according to Griffith’s affidavit. While walking around and inspecting the apartment, they saw sitting in a corner a sheet wrapped around a large object with trash bags heaped on top of it. One officer who touched the bag saw what appeared to be blood, according to Griffith.

Police were called to the scene after Bennett’s body was discovered stuffed inside the garbage bags. At the scene, forensic detectives sprayed the apartment with luminal, which showed the presence of blood on the back wall behind the living room couch, on the living room couch and on a conch shell, according to Griffith’s affidavit. Investigators also spoke to several persons who knew both Bennett and Coulter. Based on witnesses’ statements and other evidence collected at the scene, there was probable cause to arrest Coulter, who had left the island on Dec. 2, according to Griffith’s affidavit.

Having secured an arrest warrant, the Orange County Sheriff’s Office in Florida arrested Coulter on July 5, 2015, in connection with the crime. Then, on Nov. 12, 2015, agents from the V.I. Police Department traveled to Orlando, Florida, to return Coulter to the Territory. Coulter refused to waive extradition and voluntarily returned to the Virgin Islands, where he was formally arrested and charged, according to court documents.

Judge Mackay tentatively scheduled Coulter’s sentencing for Nov. 30. Since his arrest, Coulter remains in jail unable to post his \$750,000 bail.