

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Second Suspect Sentenced to 30 Years For Brutal Murder of 73-Year-Old Church Deacon Who Died After Being Carjacked and Beaten in 2015

Crime / **Published On February 17, 2022 04:16 AM /**

Staff Consortium **February 17, 2022**



Deacon Augustus Bannis died before noon on Oct. 19, 2015 at the Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, surrounded by grieving family. By. FILE PHOTO

ST. CROIX — Enock J. Cole, age 23, who was charged by the V.I. Dept. of Justice alongside Avondale A. George Jr. for the brutal 2015 murder of 73-year-old Augustus Bannis in the vicinity of David Hamilton Jackson Park on St. Croix, on Wednesday received a 30-year prison sentence by V.I. Superior Court Presiding Judge Harold Willocks.

Cole, age 17 when the crime occurred, was also sentenced to 15 years for the charge of second-degree assault, which will be served concurrent with the 30-year sentence for the murder conviction.

George was sentenced by Judge Willocks in Feb. 2021 to [35 years imprisonment](#) for the crime.

The Consortium [covered this story extensively](#) over the years, including an event held by Mr. Bannis's church, where he served as a deacon before he was killed, that called on the suspects at the time to turn themselves in, and those with knowledge of the crime to share information.

George and Cole aided and abetted each other in the perpetration of the robbery, taking Mr. Bannis's vehicle against his will and brutally beating him in the process, said the V.I. Dept. of Justice.

Mr. Bannis, universally loved by those who knew him, died before noon on Oct. 19, 2015 at the Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, surrounded by grieving family. He was in a coma during his entire stay at the medical facility and was never able to recover. The D.O.J. said Mr. Bannis died as a result of "delayed complications of blunt head injury."

Timeline of Events

At 11:00 a.m. Monday, August 17, 2015, Mr. Bannis had taken the short five-minute drive from his Estate Upper Love home to the David Hamilton Jackson park in Grove Place to gather almonds, a favorite pastime of his. He left his cellphone and wallet at home.

Around 2:00 p.m. when Mr. Bannis had not returned home, his wife alerted relatives. At round 4:00 p.m., she informed the church secretary that her husband had not returned from Grove Place earlier in the day. Church members called the hospital to inquire if Mr. Bannis had been admitted. Hospital personnel did not release any information to the family and instructed them to call 911. Church members also searched the Grove Place neighborhood where Mr. had gone, but did not find any signs of the man or his car.

After Mr. Bannis's family members filed a police report late Monday night, August 17, 2015 police put out an all-points bulletin (APB) for the victim at around 9:30 p.m. Within minutes of the APB being issued, Pastor Benjamin received a call on his cellphone that Mr. Bannis had been carjacked and brought badly beaten to the Juan Luis Hospital earlier that day.

At the hospital on Monday night, family members were notified that Mr. Bannis was found at the park at around 12:00 p.m. severely beaten and was transported to the hospital by ambulance.

George and Cole were arrested in November, 2015. Cole is scheduled is to be sentenced at a later date. Two other accomplices have not been tried in court.

Grieving family members provide statements

At the sentencing, due to Covid-19 the victims did not present Victim Impact Statements. However, Mr. Chancellor, the assistant attorney general, read portions of prepared statements from family members including Mr. Bannis's wife and daughter, D.O.J. said.

"He was not only my husband but my other half, my best friend, my soul mate, my one and only true love, my children's father, my breadwinner and more. His life was centered on his family and he loved many, for he was a loving and caring man", said Maria Bannis, wife of the victim.

Jackie Zamore, Bannis's daughter, stated, "He was taken prematurely in the cruelest fashion; was beaten without any provocation and left for dead like an animal on the street."

Mr. Bannis was a former pastor of the First Baptist Church in Salisbury, Dominica for 18 years before relocating to St. Croix for 10 years. He served as a deacon at the Calvary Baptist Church on St. Croix where he taught Sunday School, bible school, mentored the young, and assisted the elderly, according to the D.O.J.