

NEWS

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Waterford Man Admits Robbing Nine Pharmacies of Drugs at Gunpoint

(More)

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CAMDEN – A Waterford man pleaded guilty today to robbing nine pharmacies in New Jersey and Philadelphia of controlled substances such as Oxycontin, Oxycodone, Endocet and Xanax, U.S. Attorneys Christopher J. Christie and Patrick L. Meehan announced.

Kurtis Brown, 42, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Robert B. Kugler to two separate Informations, one each from the Districts of New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania. Judge Kugler continued the defendant's detention and scheduled sentencing for Feb. 15.

The District of New Jersey's three-count Superseding Information charged Brown with the Oct. 17, 2006, robbery of Ames Drug Store in Collingswood; the Oct. 21, 2006, robbery of Covered Bridge Pharmacy in Cherry Hill; and with the use of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence.

The Eastern District of Pennsylvania's seven-count Information, which was transferred to the District of New Jersey for plea purposes, charged Brown with the Oct. 5 robbery of a Rite Aid Pharmacy in Philadelphia; the Oct. 7, robbery of a Rite Aid Pharmacy in Philadelphia; the Oct. 13 robbery of the Dake's Drug Store in Lower Merion; the Oct. 15 robbery of a Rite Aid Pharmacy in Philadelphia; the Oct. 15 robbery of another Rite Aid Pharmacy in Philadelphia; the Oct. 15 robbery of a Rite Aid Pharmacy in Norristown; and the Oct. 16 robbery of a Rite Aid Pharmacy in Philadelphia.

In the District of New Jersey, Brown and his co-defendants, Jamil Johnson, 27, of Philadelphia, and Shaaheen Muhammad, 24, a.k.a. "Abdul Aleem Muhammad," of Somerdale, were originally indicted on Jan. 9, 2007. The Indictment describes a scheme in which the defendants conspired with each other to rob pharmacies of controlled substances for the purpose of selling the drugs for profit.

At his plea hearing, Brown admitted he robbed all of the pharmacies at gunpoint. Concerning the last robbery which resulted in the defendants' arrest, Brown admitted that on Oct. 21, 2006, Johnson and Muhammad drove him in Johnson's vehicle to the Covered Bridge Pharmacy in Cherry Hill. When they arrived at the Covered Bridge Pharmacy, Brown went into the pharmacy armed with a semiautomatic handgun and robbed the pharmacy of controlled substances, which included Oxycontin and Xanax tablets, as well as bottles of liquid Prometh with Codeine, he admitted.

Brown admitted that in response to an attempt by police to stop their vehicle as they fled from the pharmacy, Johnson led police on a high-speed chase through Cherry Hill, Haddonfield, Haddon Township and Collingswood, where the chase ended after he hit a curb. The defendants were arrested shortly after the chase by responding police officers.

On Aug. 9, 2007, Muhammad pleaded guilty before Judge Kugler to a three-count Superseding Information, which charged him with two counts of robbery of pharmacies involving controlled substances and one count of aiding and abetting the use of a firearm during and in relation to a robbery. At that time, Judge Kugler continued Muhammad's detention and scheduled sentencing for Nov. 15.

On Oct. 18, 2007, Johnson pleaded guilty before Judge Kugler to two separate Informations, one each from the Districts of New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania, that charged him in connection with the robberies of 13 pharmacies. Judge Kugler continued the defendant's detention and scheduled sentencing for March, 13.

Each count of robbery of a pharmacy carries maximum statutory penalties of 25 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The one count of use of a firearm in the furtherance of a crime of violence carries a mandatory minimum prison term of 7 years and maximum penalty of life in prison and is to be served consecutive to any other sentence.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Kugler will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of DEA, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gerard P. McAleer, in Newark; the FBI's South Jersey Resident Agency, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge J.P. Weis, in Philadelphia; ATF's Camden Satellite Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Mark Potter, in Philadelphia, and the Police Departments of Cherry Hill, Pennsauken, Lindenwold, Collingswood and Philadelphia, with the investigation.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jason Richardson, of the District of New Jersey's Criminal Division in Camden, and Francis C. Barberi, of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

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Defense Attorney: Richard Coughlin, Esq. Federal Public Defender