

NEWS

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Trenton Gang Member Admits Using Mentally Ill Man's
Identity Information to Steal and Deposit Disability Checks

(More)

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NEWARK – A so-called “five-star general” in the Gangsta Killa Bloods set of the Bloods street gang pleaded guilty today to aggravated identity theft and stealing government money, admitting he stole the identity of a paranoid schizophrenic military veteran in order to steal the victim’s disability benefits payments from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

Jeffrey Van Queen, 41, of Trenton, pleaded guilty to a two-count Indictment on the day his trial was scheduled to begin. The Indictment charged him with theft of public money and aggravated identity theft, according to Assistant U.S. Attorneys Scott B. McBride and Robert G. Marasco. Following the guilty plea, U.S. District Judge William J. Martini set sentencing for July 15.

With respect to Count One of the Indictment, theft of public money, the defendant faces a maximum statutory penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. Count Two, aggravated identity theft, provides a mandatory two-year term of imprisonment, which must run consecutively to his sentence for Count One. In addition, Judge Martini must order that Queen make restitution to the victims.

The total loss to the Veterans Administration and the victim was more than \$30,000.

“Even from among gang members, this is some of the more contemptible conduct I’ve seen,” said Marra. “What does one say about a person who steals disability benefits from a mentally ill Army veteran?”

During the plea hearing, Queen admitted to taking the victim, a 55-year-old Army veteran suffering from paranoid schizophrenia who received monthly disability benefits payments from the VA, into his home and charging him rent. According to Queen, the victim was arrested in the summer of 2006 and remained incarcerated for a full year, leaving his personal belongings, including his driver’s license, social security card, and birth certificate, at Queen’s house.

Queen admitted that, in October 2006, he used the victim’s name, date of birth, and social security number to open an on-line account in the victim’s name at Washington Mutual. After opening this account, Queen then pretended to be the victim and instructed the VA to redirect the victim’s disability benefits checks from the Credit Union account to the new WAMU account. The victim’s benefits checks were then direct-deposited into the WAMU account for the months of November and December of 2006, and for January, February, and March of 2007. Queen admitted taking this money and spending it.

According to Queen, when he discovered that the victim’s March 2007 disability payment had been redirected to the victim’s brother’s house in Trenton, he forged the victim’s signature on a VA form that certified that the check had been stolen, which ultimately

caused the VA to cancel the check that was sent to the victim's brother's house. The VA reissued a check to Queen at one of his residences in Trenton, and Queen admitted depositing it into his fraudulent WAMU account and spending it.

Queen then admitted that he relocated to North Carolina in March 2007 and again used the victim's name, date of birth and social security number to open an account in the victim's name at an on-line banking service called Galileo Processing. After opening this fraudulent Galileo account, Queen conceded, he pretended to be the victim and instructed the VA to redirect the victim's disability benefits checks from Queen's illicit WAMU account to the new Galileo account. According to Queen, he then received the victim's disability checks for the months of May and June 2007 and spent the money.

The final stretch of the scheme, according to Queen, occurred prior to June 29, 2007, when he contacted the VA pretending to be the victim and instructed the VA to send the victim's disability checks to Queen's mother's residence in Trenton. When he received the check, Queen admitted, he forged the victim's signature on the back of it and gave it to his mother to cash. Queen further admitted that, even after the victim was released from prison, Queen continued to contact the VA pretending to be the victim in order to change the mailing address on the account each time the victim or others changed it to an address the victim had selected.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Martini will consult the advisory United States 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.

Marra credited Special Agents of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent In Charge Jeffrey Hughes in Newark for the investigation leading to the Indictment and subsequent guilty plea.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Scott B. McBride of the Acting U.S. Attorney's Government Fraud Unit and Robert G. Marasco of the Violent Crimes Unit.

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Defense Counsel: Alexander W. Booth, Esq., Union City