

NEWS

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Somerdale Man Admits Robbing Pharmacies of Drugs

(More)

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CAMDEN – A Somerdale man pleaded guilty today to committing multiple pharmacy robberies in which he and his two co-defendants took controlled substances such as Oxycontin, Oxycodone, Endocet and Xanax, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Shaaheen Muhammad, 24, a.k.a. “Abdul Aleem Muhammad,” pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Robert B. Kugler to a three-count Superseding Information, which charges 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. Judge Kugler continued the defendant’s detention and scheduled sentencing for Nov. 15.

Muhammad and his co-defendants, Kurtis Brown, 42, of Waterford, and Jamil Johnson, 27, of Philadelphia, were originally indicted on Jan. 9, 2007. The three-count Information 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, Muhammad admitted that on Oct. 17, 2006, he and Johnson drove Brown, in Muhammad’s Chevy Tahoe, to an Ames Drug Store in Collingswood. When they arrived at the drug store, Brown went into the drug store armed with a semiautomatic handgun and robbed the pharmacy of controlled substances, Muhammad admitted.

Muhammad stated that on Oct. 21, 2006, he received a phone call from Brown who asked for a ride. After the phone call, Muhammad and Johnson drove Brown in Johnson’s vehicle to the Covered Bridge Pharmacy in Cherry Hill, Muhammad admitted. During the ride to the pharmacy, Johnson said words to the effect “payday, we’re going to hit the jackpot today,” according to Muhammad.

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, Muhammad admitted. According to Muhammad, the controlled substances included Oxycontin and Xanax tablets, as well as bottles of liquid Prometh with Codeine.

Muhammad admitted that police attempted to stop their vehicle as they fled from the pharmacy. Johnson, who was driving, then led police on a high speed chase through Cherry Hill, Haddonfield, Haddon Township and Collingswood, where the chase ended after the getaway vehicle hit a curb. The defendants were arrested shortly after the chase by responding police officers. Muhammad admitted that he possessed approximately 100 percocets pills when he was arrested.

Furthermore, Muhammad admitted that he provided the loaded Taurus .45 caliber semiautomatic pistol that was recovered by police from Johnson’s vehicle to Johnson, who gave it to Brown for use in the robberies. Muhammad admitted that the firearm was purchased in Philadelphia by straw buyer on his behalf.

Muhammad faces a maximum statutory penalty of 25 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000 on each of the two counts of robbery of a pharmacy involving controlled substances. The one count of aiding and abetting the use of a firearm during and in relation to a robbery carries a mandatory minimum penalty of 5 years in prison and a maximum penalty of life, and a fine of \$250,000.

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.

Brown and Johnson are pending trial on the Indictment. The seven-count Indictment charges both of the defendants in Count One with conspiracy to rob pharmacies of controlled substances. Both defendants are charged in Count Two with the Sept. 19, 2006, robbery of the Hillcrest Pharmacy in Pennsauken, and in Count Three with the robbery of the Covered Bridge Pharmacy. Count Four charges both defendants with use of a firearm in the furtherance of a crime of violence. Johnson is charged in Count Five with being a previously convicted felon in the possession of a firearm. Count Six had charged Muhammad with being a previously convicted felon in the possession of a firearm. Count Seven charges each defendant with conspiracy to distribute controlled substances.

Despite indictment, each of the defendants is presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Christie credited Special Agents of DEA Diversion, 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 and Collingswood, with the investigation leading to the Indictment.

The Government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jason Richardson of the Criminal Division in Camden.

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Defense Attorney: James Conley, Esq. Haddon Heights