



PRESS NOTICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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“OPERATION JACKPOT” FUGITIVE PLEADS GUILTY

COLUMBIA, South Carolina ---- United States Attorney W. WALTER WILKINS stated today that Robert Ashley Brunson, age 59, formerly of Frogmore, South Carolina, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to import marijuana and hashish into the United States, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 963, from a period of time beginning in 1974 and ending in 1983. Brunson had been a fugitive for over 25 years.

Chief United States District Judge David C. Norton accepted the guilty plea and will sentence Brunson after a presentence report is completed by the United States Probation Office.

In addition to other evidence presented to the court, Brunson admitted that a co-conspirator, Leon Durwood Harvey, hired him, and two other

individuals, Kenneth Wayne Gunn and Christopher Ward Campbell, to crew the sailboat "Love Affair" to bring approximately 8,000 pounds of marijuana from Cartagena, Colombia, into Hilton Head, South Carolina. The sailboat was seized on the high seas by the Coast Guard on November 8, 1978, but no charges were brought at that time. Not until later when Campbell, the captain of the sailboat, informed "Operation Jackpot" investigators that the load was intended for Hilton Head, South Carolina, were charges made against the three men on board the boat, including Brunson. Brunson also admitted his involvement in the importation of approximately 30,000 pounds of hashish from Lebanon to Hilton Head in June of 1980. Brunson was a lookout in a small boat in Calibogie Sound while a sailboat was offloaded and also drove a truck containing hashish to a stash house.

Brunson had remained a fugitive for over 25 years until he crossed the border from Mexico into Southern California last year using a fictitious passport. He was arrested and fingerprint analysis linked him to the charges in South Carolina. He served 9 months for using a fictitious passport to enter the United States and was then removed to South Carolina to face the Operation Jackpot charges.

Mr. Wilkins stated the maximum penalty Brunson could receive is a fine of \$15,000.00 and imprisonment for five years.

Mr. Wilkins stated that the case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Robert C. Jendron, Jr., of the Columbia office. Mr. Jendron

was one of the original prosecutors of the Operation Jackpot cases.

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