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News Release

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Final defendant pleads guilty in connection with the armed robbery of a White Bear Lake Bar

MINNEAPOLIS – Earlier today in federal court in the District of Minnesota, a 41-year-old St. Paul man pleaded guilty in connection with the November 27, 2010, armed robbery of a White Bear Lake bar. Maurice Anthony Lewis pleaded guilty to one count of interference of commerce by robbery, pursuant to the Hobbs Act, and one count of aiding and abetting the possession of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence. Lewis, who was indicted on April 20, 2011, entered his plea before United States District Court Judge Joan N. Ericksen. Two co-defendants have already pleaded guilty.

In his plea agreement, Lewis admitted that on November 27, 2010, he and two other men traveled to the White Bear Bar in White Bear Lake in order to rob it. Lewis admitted assisting his two armed accomplices in robbing the bar at gunpoint, and taking money from people by actual and threatened force. In the middle of the robbery, Lewis fled to a vehicle waiting in the parking lot after his mask was pulled off by a customer in the bar.

A law enforcement affidavit filed in the case states that the three men, all dressed in dark clothing with ski masks or stocking caps pulled down over their faces, entered the White Bear Bar in White Bear Lake just before closing. More than 50 patrons were in the bar at the time. The robbers brandished guns, and told everyone to “get down” on the floor. Surveillance video shows the men pushing customers. During the robbery, a bar patron grabbed the barrel of the gun held by one of the men, and a skirmish ensued. During that struggle, the gun discharged, striking another patron in the leg.

After grabbing the money out of the office safe as well as from customers, two of the robbers fled to their get-away car across the street, where the third suspect was waiting. The three men then took off in the car. One of the bar patrons briefly gave chase on foot. The vehicle was a black, late-model BMW sedan.

A White Bear Lake police officer shortly encountered a vehicle that matched the description of the get-away car. When the officer turned on his emergency lights, however, the vehicle tried to get away by turning into the entrance of an apartment complex. It then drove into a snowbank, prompting all three occupants of the car to jump out and run in different directions. A .40-caliber, semi-automatic pistol and a six-shot Ruger revolver were found along the paths taken by the robbers. A multi-colored stocking cap also was recovered near the front bumper of the abandoned vehicle.

The Hobbs Act, passed by Congress in 1946, allows federal prosecutors to prosecute criminals who commit robbery in places of business involved in interstate commerce. For violent defendants with aggravated criminal histories, federal prosecution of these cases can be beneficial since the penalties are often tougher than under state law. Furthermore, because the federal system has no parole, those who receive federal sentences serve virtually the entire time imposed.

For his crimes, Lewis faces a potential maximum penalty of 20 years on the Hobbs Act count and a consecutive mandatory minimum penalty of seven years for the charge of aiding and abetting the possession of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence. Judge Ericksen will determine his sentence at a future hearing, yet to be scheduled.

This case is the result of an investigation by the White Bear Lake Police Department and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Karen B. Schommer and Andrew R. Winter.

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