



Department of Justice

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Whitley County Man Sentenced to Life Imprisonment for Violent Kidnappings

LONDON, Ky. — George Oscar Messer, 62, of Rockholds, Kentucky, was sentenced to Life Imprisonment on Wednesday, by United States District Judge Robert E. Wier. Messer was convicted by a federal jury of two counts of kidnapping, in January of this year.

According to evidence presented at trial, the kidnappings were motivated by an unsuccessful drug transaction, during which Messer's son and his co-conspirators lost \$10,000. Messer arrived at the scene of the kidnappings with numerous firearms, including an assault rifle and .44 magnum revolver. Messer held the revolver to one victim's head while demanding the lost money. Thereafter, Messer learned that one of his co-conspirators had raped the second victim. In response to this, Messer then bound the second victim and sexually assaulted her, again, at gunpoint.

Messer and his co-conspirators held the two victims for approximately 24 hours, during which time the victims were interrogated, threatened, and assaulted. The victims only escaped after a family member spotted them in a ditch on the side of the road with Messer. Law enforcement recovered 15 firearms and numerous controlled substances from the Messer residence. At sentencing, Messer received numerous enhancements based on the use of a dangerous weapon, acting as a manager or supervisor, demanding a ransom, and sexually exploiting a victim. Messer also had a prior conviction for Sexual Abuse, Third Degree, from Whitley County in 2014.

Messer was indicted in November of 2020. His co-conspirators, Jake Messer, Joshua Mills, and Stephen Jewell, are awaiting sentencing.

"This is an unsettling example of the disturbing effects of illegal drug trafficking on our communities," said Carlton S. Shier, IV, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky. "In this case, it also wrought armed kidnappings, tortuous threats, and repeated sexual assaults. That unconstrained violence and unspeakable infliction of suffering certainly warrants the sentence imposed. I want to commend our law enforcement partners for their dedicated

efforts in this case, without which this prosecution would not have been possible.”

“This defendant was part of an armed drug-trafficking organization that committed heinous acts of violence,” said ATF Special Agent in Charge R. Shawn Morrow of the Louisville Division. “I commend the efforts of the ATF agents and Kentucky State Police who worked diligently on this investigation to help bring justice to the victims who were kidnapped, tortured, and forced to endure the unimaginable. We hope that this life sentence brings some form of healing to the victims and sends a very clear message that ATF and our law enforcement partners will not stand by and allow these acts of violence.”

United States Attorney Shier, Special Agent in Charge Morrow, and Colonel Phillip Burnett, Jr., Commissioner of the Kentucky State Police, jointly announced the sentence.

The investigation was conducted by the ATF and KSP. United States was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jenna E. Reed.

This case prosecuted as part of the Department of Justice’s “Project Safe Neighborhoods” Program (PSN), which is a nationwide, crime reduction strategy aimed at decreasing violent crime in communities. The PSN program involves a comprehensive approach to public safety — one that includes investigating and prosecuting crimes, along with prevention and reentry efforts. In the Eastern District of Kentucky, U.S. Attorney Shier coordinates PSN efforts in cooperation with various federal, state, and local law enforcement officials.

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