



Department of Justice

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Second Whitley County Man Sentenced to Life Imprisonment for Violent Kidnappings

LONDON, Ky. — Jake Messer, 39, of Rockholds, Kentucky, was sentenced to Life in federal prison on Tuesday, by United States District Judge Robert E. Wier. On February 10, 2022, Messer was convicted by a federal jury of two counts of kidnapping, following his indictment in November of 2020.

According to evidence at trial, the kidnappings were motivated by an unsuccessful drug deal, where Messer and his co-conspirators lost \$10,000. Jake Messer organized, directed, and recruited assistance for the armed kidnappings. Messer ordered the two victims transported to a remote trailer in Clay County, where they were held for 24 hours. There, the victims were separated, interrogated, threatened, and assaulted. After several hours of captivity, Messer held the female victim down and raped her. Messer then provided his father, George Oscar Messer, duct tape and zip ties. His father then duct taped the victim and sexually assaulted her a second time, at gunpoint. The victims only escaped after a family member spotted them in a ditch on the side of the road with Messer. Thereafter, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Kentucky State Police (KSP) recovered 15 firearms, including an assault rifle, from the Messer residence.

Messer received numerous sentencing enhancements, including use of a dangerous weapon, acting as an organizer, demanding ransom, and sexually exploiting a victim. At the sentencing hearing, witnesses also testified that Jake Messer had previous incidents of violence, sexual assault, and threats. In rendering the sentence, Judge Wier described the Messers' conduct as the "very basement of human conduct." Judge Wier also said the sentence reflected the importance of declaring that the rule of law exists and applies to everyone, regardless of location and culture.

"This is a disturbing example of the incidence of unspeakable violence that often accompanies illegal drug trafficking," said Carlton S. Shier, IV, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky. "This case included kidnappings, threats, firearms, repeated sexual assaults, and even a true sense of lawlessness. This unconstrained violence and infliction of

suffering certainly warrants the sentence imposed. Cases like this will embolden our efforts to combat this blight on our communities; it should also serve as a stark warning to those who continue to participate in destructive violence and drug trafficking.”

“This is the second defendant to receive a life sentence from an armed drug-trafficking group that kidnapped, tortured and raped the victims in this case,” said ATF Special Agent in Charge R. Shawn Morrow of the Louisville Division. “This was a joint effort between the Kentucky State Police and ATF. We hope this life sentence brings some sense of justice 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.

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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