

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA * CRIMINAL NO. 20-37
v. * SECTION: "E"
BYRON JAMAL WATSON *
* * *

FACTUAL BASIS

The above-named defendant, **BYRON JAMAL WATSON**, ("WATSON") has agreed to plead guilty as charged to Count One and Count 2 of the Indictment. Had this matter proceeded to trial, the government would have proven beyond a reasonable doubt the allegations of Count One and Count Two of the Indictment, namely that **WATSON** committed two bank robberies as that crime is defined in Title 18, United States Code, Section 2113(a) and Title 18, United States Code, Section 2.

FACTS

Count 1

On Tuesday, September 10, 2019, at approximately 3:06 P.M., the Total Choice Federal Credit Union (TCFCU), located at 100 Palmetto Drive, La Place, Louisiana 70068, was robbed. A black male entered the TCFCU wearing a white long-sleeve shirt, medium to light washed jeans, black shoes, a red belt with "Savage" in white writing, large-framed sunglasses, and a black fanny-pack worn across the body. The robber was described as 6'0 to 6'3 in height, slim build, in his early 30's, and wore a brown/auburn dread lock wig with a red headband around his forehead.

The robber approached the teller counter with a handwritten note stating:

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DEF *B.W.*
ATTY *V.W.*

"ROBBERY. I DON'T WANT TO (HURT) OR (KILL) YOU OR ANYONE IN HERE SO I AM GOING TO GIVE YOU (FIVE SECONDS) TO (EMPTY) YOUR (REGISTER)."

(Parenthesis in original). The note establishes the required element of taking money from a bank by intimidation. As a result, the teller removed all of the money from the drawer, including the bait bills, and handed it to the robber. The robber fled on foot with over \$7,000 in United States currency and headed Northwest on Palmetto Drive. The robber left the note with the teller which contained forensic evidence that was then sent for testing.

During the initial investigation of the bank robbery, a canvass was conducted to locate any surveillance cameras that might be in the area of the bank. In the process of the canvass, a camera was discovered. Approximately one to two minutes subsequent to the robbery, surveillance video from the camera captured an older model white single-cab pickup truck stopped in the area directly behind the bank.

A search of the Automated License Plate Readers (A.L.P.R.) in the area of the bank was conducted in search of a white single-cab pickup truck. An A.L.P.R. located approximately 1.1 miles from the bank captured an older model white single-cab pickup truck matching the description of the one captured on surveillance cameras behind the bank before the robbery was committed. The license plate on the pickup truck was Louisiana C917378. This vehicle, a white 2001 GMC Sierra, is registered to **WATSON** at 7540 Trapier Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana.

On Friday, September 13, 2019, a Special Agent of the F.B.I. authored and obtained a search warrant for the historical cellphone records belonging to **WATSON**. This search warrant was issued by a judge from the Eastern District of Louisiana United States District Court. After the warrant was obtained it was forwarded to Sprint. On Monday, September 16, 2019, Special

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Agents received the historical cellphone records of WATSON, from Sprint, which revealed the following information. The records demonstrate that on September 10, 2019, the cellphone bearing telephone number 504-224-3862, was communicating with towers in New Orleans, LA until approximately 10:50 A.M. The phone began communicating with towers in an area from East Jefferson Parish, LA (in or near Kenner, LA) to west St. John the Baptist Parish (in or near Laplace, LA) by approximately 12:03 P.M. There are no communications to map between 10:50 A.M. and 12:03 P.M. Communications with these towers demonstrate the phone moved west to the area in or near Kenner to in or near the Laplace area during that time period. The phone remained in this general vicinity, from the Kenner area to the Laplace area, until after 2:30 P.M. Between approximately 2:14 P.M. and 2:34 P.M., the phone began communicating exclusively with the four towers surrounding the Total Choice Credit Union in Laplace, LA. These towers were situated from 2600 feet to 3.09 miles from the bank. There are no communications which can be mapped from 2:34 P.M. until 3:46 P.M. by which time the phone had returned to the City of New Orleans.

Count 2

On Thursday, September 26, 2019, at approximately 3:06 P.M., the Fidelity Bank located at 9099 Jefferson Highway, Jefferson, Louisiana 70123, was robbed. A black male with a trimmed beard entered the Fidelity Bank wearing a white shirt, blue jeans, black sunglasses, and a black baseball cap with a silver brim. The robber was described as light skinned, approximately 20 - 30 years old, with a slim build.

The robber approached the teller counter with a handwritten note stating words to the

effect "I do not want to hurt anybody, give me all your money, you have 5 seconds." This note also satisfies the required element of taking money from a bank by intimidation. As a result, that teller removed all of the money from the drawer, including the bait bills, and handed it to the robber, along with returning the note to the robbery suspect. The robber fled on foot with approximately \$6,000 in United States currency and headed north on Jefferson Highway. The robber retrieved the note before leaving the bank.

Investigators obtained surveillance footage from the interior of the bank, at which time, investigators observed numerous physical similarities between this suspect and **WATSON**. These similarities included, but are not limited to, similar physical build, similar tattoos on the neck and forearms, and similar facial features.

During the initial investigation of the bank robbery, a canvass was conducted to locate any surveillance cameras that might be in the area of the bank. In the process of the canvass, a camera was discovered on a residence on Moss Lane, which is the street located north of the bank. Approximately one minute after the robbery, surveillance video from the camera captured an older model white single-cab pickup truck stopped in the area directly behind the bank. This truck was immediately identified by law enforcement as the same vehicle used in the Total Choice Federal Credit Union robbery, which carried the Louisiana license plate number of C917378.

A statewide query on the A.L.P.R. system was conducted, on the aforementioned plate, which revealed the following information. At approximately 11:38 A.M., the GMC Sierra is captured on North Causeway Boulevard in Jefferson Parish. At approximately 12:45 P.M., approximately 23 minutes after the robbery, the GMC Sierra is captured on Airline Drive, as it

exited Jefferson Parish. At approximately 12:55 P.M., the GMC Sierra is captured as it drove through the city of New Orleans.

Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation would further testify that both Total Choice Federal Credit Union (Count 1) and Fidelity Bank (Count 2) were insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

WATSON's Mirandized Statement

On Friday, September 27, 2019, **WATSON** was located by members of the FBI New Orleans Violent Crimes Task Force and taken into custody. At that time, **WATSON** was transported to the FBI New Orleans Field Office and secured into an audio and video recorded interview room. Investigators advised **WATSON** of his rights per Miranda, which **WATSON** stated that he understood and waived.

During the interview, **WATSON** was presented with a photograph of the 2001 white GMC Sierra, registered to **WATSON**, which was used in both bank robberies. **WATSON** immediately identified the vehicle as his, but refuted that he robbed a bank. **WATSON** offered that he often makes money by driving people around, "no questions asked." On Tuesday, September 10, 2019, **WATSON** explained that, "I drove my friend T to Laplace." **WATSON** was instructed by "T" to the Total Choice Federal Credit Union and told to park behind the bank. "T" then exited the truck and returned a short time later with a black bag containing U.S. currency. **WATSON** and "T" returned to New Orleans, where "T" compensated **WATSON** with \$300.00 in U.S. currency. **WATSON** agrees and understands that under Title 18, United States Code, Section 2, "Whoever willfully causes an act to be done which if directly performed by him or another would be an offense against the United States, is punishable as a principal." **WATSON** agrees that his role in

planning the robbery, acting as the getaway driver, and sharing in proceeds, is punished the same as if he actually took the money himself.

WATSON was able to describe the exact outfit worn by the suspect at the Total Choice Federal Credit Union. It should be noted, that the details about the bank robbery were never released to the public, meaning that the only manner, in which, **WATSON** would be able to know what the suspect wore during the robbery, including wearing makeup, was to be physically present at the time of the robbery. When presented with a photograph of the suspect leaving the TCFCU after the robbery, **WATSON** identified the suspect as "T."

When **WATSON** was asked about the second robbery, he stated that he drove with "T" to the area behind the bank. Once parked, they were equipped with two-way walkie talkies, which allowed for direct communication between "T" and **WATSON**. **WATSON** advised that the walkie-talkies were used to signal to each other when the robbery was completed. **WATSON** was confronted with photographs, obtained from the interior of the Fidelity Bank, which clearly identified **WATSON** as the perpetrator of the second robbery.

On Tuesday, October 15, 2019, at approximately 1:00 P.M., TFO Quaintance and SA Fretwell met with **WATSON**, his attorney, and representatives from the United States Attorney's Office. As **WATSON** was aware of all of the evidence gathered from both robberies, **WATSON** provided a full confession and admitted that he and the person he had identified as "T" had participated in both robberies. **WATSON** further explained that his coconspirator robbed the Total Choice Federal Credit Union, while **WATSON** drove the getaway vehicle, and that **WATSON** robbed the Fidelity Bank, while his codefendant drove the getaway vehicle. **WATSON** offered intimate details of both robberies, which had not been released to the general public. These details

included his codefendant bringing the wig and fanny pack for use in the TCFCU robbery, with his codefendant wearing make up to cover a tattoo on his neck, where they went and what they did after the TCFCU robbery, the nature of cell phone records confirming contact between **WATSON** and his codefendant before and after the robberies, discussions between the two prior to and after both robberies, as well as how the money was split after each robbery. These statements corroborated the physical evidence from both robberies.

Prior to **WATSON's** statements on October 15, 2019, investigators already knew that Reginald Lumar was his coconspirator, as DNA results from the note used in the September 10, 2019, positively matched that of Lumar, and cell phone records confirmed that **WATSON** had been in contact with Lumar. Investigators had also reviewed Lumar's social media posts which showed him wearing red clothing matching the description of the robber in the September 10, 2019 robbery. Investigators were also previously aware that his codefendant, Reginald Lumar, went by the nickname "Tank" or "T."

Lumar's Mirandized Statement

On February 18, 2020, Lumar was located by members of the FBI New Orleans Violent Crimes Task Force and taken into custody. At that time, Lumar was transported to the FBI New Orleans Field Office and secured into an audio and video recorded interview room. Investigators advised Lumar of his rights per Miranda, which Lumar stated that he understood and waived. When confronted with the above evidence, Lumar admitted to his participation in both bank robberies. He admitted to being the actual robber in Count 1 and being the getaway driver in Count 2. Lumar also corroborated incriminating information that was received from **WATSON**.

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The foregoing facts would be proven by the testimony of agents and employees from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office, St. John Parish Sheriff's Office, New Orleans Police Department, Total Choice Federal Credit Union, Fidelity Bank and Louisiana State Police and by the production of various certified documents.




JON MAESTRI
Assistant United States Attorney

4/7/21
Date



BYRON JAMAL WATSON
Defendant

4-6-21
Date



VALÉRIE WELZ JUSSÉLIN
Attorney for Defendant

4-6-2021
Date