

The One That Got Away

By

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On December 11, 1996, a West Palm Beach U.S. Customs Service (Customs) special agent received information from Customs inspectors at the Port of Jacksonville, Florida, regarding two stolen Toyota sport utility vehicles recovered at the port pending exportation to Haiti. The vehicles were discovered during an outbound inspection of suspicious cargo containers. Routine cargo inspections were rare as compared to inbound inspections. Customs placed a significant portion of its inspection and enforcement resources on inbound cargo and travel for narcotics and other contraband. There were very little resources and programs for outbound inspections so the inspectors often needed information, a keen eye or just plain luck to find the suspect exportations. This inspector had a keen eye and sparked many successful investigations.

The shipper and loader of the cargo container containing the stolen vehicles was identified only as South Florida Supply in Delray Beach, Florida with a Miami telephone number. The telephone number appeared to be a voice message service.

According to the bill of lading, the suspect cargo container was to contain shoes for exportation to Haiti rather than the stolen 1996 Toyota RAV4 and 1995 Toyota Land Cruiser. The Land Cruiser possessed an open lien and was not reported stolen as of that date. The owner of the vehicle was Joseph E. Ketant and K & M Shipping in Miami. The vehicle did not possess any visible damage indicating a forced entry and theft.

The Investigation Begins

The Customs agent initiated an outbound smuggling investigation. Outbound investigations primarily focused on the smuggling of firearms, munitions and dual-use or controlled technology out of the country to prohibited nations and groups. There are powerful export laws on the books to protect sensitive, dangerous and controlled items. These investigations also included stolen vehicles, construction equipment and other items where citizens and insurance companies were victimized. Understandably, stolen vehicles were a much lower priority than munitions and dual-use military related technology. The stolen property exportations did not directly threaten national security, but it did affect citizens and general commerce.

The Jacksonville shipping company handling the exportation of the cargo container was requested to inform the South Florida shippers that the cargo container successfully departed the United States for Haiti. Upon receiving the exportation confirmation, the 1995 Toyota Land Cruiser was reported stolen by the owner in Miami. Insurance fraud was added to the crimes. It also expanded the focus of the investigation.

Subsequent investigation revealed that K & M Shipping was encountered in previous Miami Customs outbound smuggling investigation. Miami Customs inspectors recovered four stolen vehicles being shipped by K & M Shipping in September 1995. The recovered stolen vehicles were identified as a 1994 Toyota 4Runner, 1995 Toyota Land Cruiser, 1995 Toyota 4Runner and 1995 Mitsubishi Montero – all vehicles popular for legal and illegal export to Haiti.

In the 1990s in South Florida, the outbound smuggling organization could often be identified by the make and model of vehicles. Toyota sport utility vehicles were often shipped to South America and the Caribbean region; they were also smuggled to Africa. Mercedes S class, Jeep Grand Cherokees and other popular vehicles at the time were frequently destined for the former Soviet Union nations and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Send Another Box

On December 17, 1996, the suspects ordered another cargo container from the shipping company in Jacksonville to be delivered to same Delray Beach location. The Customs agent attempted to coordinate the delivery of a local cargo container to the suspects to obtain the identification of any stolen vehicle storage location and other intelligence. With the priceless assistance of a West Palm Beach shipping company, a 40 foot container was delivered to the suspect business address for surveillance. The Jacksonville shipping company continued to assist in the investigation and work with the Customs agent. Two experienced local auto theft task force officers from the Lake Worth Police Department (LWPD) joined the investigation.

Three days later, the Customs agent and task force officers surveilled the delivery of a 40 foot cargo container to the Delray Beach warehouse. The investigators observed several black males approach, inspect and move the supplied cargo container. During the surveillance, the suspects advised the Jacksonville shipper that the merchandise was prepared to be loaded in the cargo container and exported to Haiti. The surveillance was conducted for approximately four days until the container was retrieved empty for failure to load it. The suspects were conducting their own surveillance and operation security. They ordered another container.

On December 27, 1996, the Customs agent and task force officers watched the delivery of a second 40 foot cargo container at the suspect address. The suspects again failed to load the container. When the container was later retrieved from the location for not loading it in a timely fashion (time was money for the shipping company and so was overtime for the task force officers), the suspects called to complain about its recovery.

It appeared that the suspects were suspicious and wished to be cautious by not loading the two containers. They were smart. The original cargo container with the stolen Toyota vehicles interdicted at the Port of Jacksonville was due in Haiti on December 22, 1996. It did not show yet. They knew they had a problem, but where and how much of one was the question.

During the initial surveillance of the supplied cargo container, a gold 1994 Honda four door registered to Louis Eddy Georges was observed by the agents. A leased bronze 1993 Range Rover was also observed at the suspect business. Georges, a Haitian national who resided in Boca Raton, possessed a criminal history for grand theft auto, title fraud and exportation of stolen vehicles. Georges was arrested in 1992 by Customs in Miami for the exportation of two stolen vehicles to the Bahamas. A review of the exportation documentation revealed that the certified titles, bills of sale and power of attorney forms were all fictitious for both vehicles; the ignitions of the vehicles had been changed for both vehicles.

They knew they had a problem, but the suspects did not give up. On January 13, 1997, they ordered another 40 foot cargo container for exportation to Haiti. This time they requested the delivery to a new address in Boynton Beach. They also changed their telephone number. The new one story warehouse contained 12 bays or units. Further investigation revealed that the suspects were utilizing unit or bay number 4.

Enter the Undercover

The Jacksonville shipping company furnished very valuable assistance to the Customs agent, but preferred to remove themselves from the process and investigation. They went above and beyond. It was time to directly introduce an undercover agent. The shipping company introduced the Customs agent to the customer only known as Peter. The shipping company also advised Peter that \$500 in cash must be paid for the transportation costs for the last two cargo containers that were not shipped to Haiti; if the \$500 in cash was not paid, the requested next container would not be delivered to the suspects. It was the opportunity for the undercover to force a face to face meeting.

On January 14, 1997, the Customs agent received a telephonic page with a Delray Beach telephone number (which turned out to be a beauty shop that also sold passport photographs). The Customs agent returned the page and spoke with Peter regarding the payment. The undercover offered several options for a meeting with negative results. Peter was reminded that no cargo container would be delivered without the prior cash payment. The undercover was a business man (cops often do not worry about money to make a case – they can be too easy to work with as a giveaway).

Peter provided a new pager number. The Customs agent received three pages with a Broward County telephone number. The undercover returned the page and spoke with Peter. The Customs agent was requested to meet in Deerfield Beach to obtain the required funds. The meeting did not occur. During a later conversation, a meeting with Peter was scheduled at the new suspect warehouse the next day.

The First Meeting

On January 15, 1997, the Customs agent met with Peter and Eric at the new Boynton Beach warehouse. The two suspects arrived in a black BMW bearing a Florida dealer tag for Master Auto Sales in Miami. Peter supplied the undercover with \$500 in cash. A container

would be delivered later that day. The undercover departed the scene, but was requested to return several minutes later for a second meeting. Peter and Eric requested the undercover to locate a motor vessel and barge to transport eight 40 foot containers from the United States to Haiti. The undercover explained and offered various customs broker services to the suspects. Eric supplied a telephone number for him. The case was forming.

Subsequent investigation revealed that Master Auto Sales was previously associated with the exportation of stolen vehicles from the United States to Haiti by Customs and local law enforcement.

The undercover returned to the warehouse later that same day to meet Peter and Eric for the delivery of the cargo container as promised. During the undercover conversation, Peter admitted to loading and shipping the first cargo container seized at the Port of Jacksonville (with the stolen vehicles). The newest container was delivered to an open spot immediately west of the warehouse as instructed by Peter. The undercover told Peter that the cargo container must be loaded and ready by the next morning without exception.

The around the clock surveillance continued. Peter was observed departing the area and arriving at another nearby storage business. During the early morning hours, several vehicles and suspects were observed in the immediate area of the cargo container; however, the cargo container was not loaded within the specified time frame. Peter contacted the undercover to report that the container could not be loaded due to the rain. The container was picked up and returned to the port yard. Once again, business was business (and overtime was adding up for the task force officers).

Interestingly, the Jacksonville shipping company advised that the suspects were charged \$3,250 for the shipment of the first cargo container that resulted in the recovery of the first two stolen vehicles. A cash payment to the shipping company was actually made in Haiti upon the eventual container delivery. Unfortunately for the smugglers, the stolen vehicles were not in the much awaited box with the clothing and other items. The Jacksonville shipping company also advised the Customs agent that they were going out of business. The closing of the business assisted in encouraging contact with the undercover agent.

In the 1990s, it was still a time of pagers and landlines for communications as cellular telephone technology continued to evolve and expand. The majority of telephone numbers used by Peter were pay telephones. Several were business numbers apparently linked to his friends or associates. These numbers also provided some anonymity. Many other associates possessed criminal histories for theft and other violations.

On January 22, 1997, the undercover received a page and returned the call to Peter and Eric. The telephone number that time was for a furniture store. Another number was for a pay telephone at a Texaco gas station in Boynton Beach. Peter and Eric requested yet another 40 foot cargo container. Eric stated that the next container must be delivered for two days to be loaded with china and glass wear. Eric stated that he continued to be interested in locating a motor vessel and barge

that will transport eight 40 foot cargo containers from the United States to Haiti. Later that week, Peter requested one to three cargo containers in the future to be loaded with cereal and clothing. The containers would be delivered for loading to either Boynton Beach or Miami.

The Customs agent spoke again with Peter on January 30, 1997. During a second call, the undercover advised that a cargo container could be delivered during the following week for exportation on or about February 7. The next day Peter asked if a container could be delivered on that same day. However, it was not possible for a weekend delivery. The undercover advised Peter that \$750 in cash must be paid prior to any cargo container delivery. The cost of failure was increased for the suspect shippers. Once again, the undercover could not appear too anxious to help the suspect shippers and function outside standard industry operations. Money talks and they were wasting time. It was also only fair that the smugglers helped pay for the mounting overtime costs.

Several days later, Peter telephonically contacted another Jacksonville shipping company in an attempt to bypass the troublesome undercover agent for container access. The new shipping company consisted of some personnel from the previously closed Jacksonville shipping company. Fortunately, the new company advised Peter that he needed to work with the undercover agent for the delivery of any cargo containers in South Florida. The new company reportedly did not have a current interchange agreement with any trucking company at that time. The undercover was the only game in town. Through several discussions, the undercover discussed the delivery of a cargo container on the following day upon the cash payment of now \$500 in cash.

On February 4, 1997, via additional pages and calls, Peter agreed to meet the undercover at a gas station in Boynton Beach to deliver the \$500 and provide the cargo container drop location. The undercover met with Peter and new suspect named James at a Texaco gas station in Boynton Beach (with the previously encountered pay telephone). Peter was operating a green Honda Accord bearing Florida temporary registration. Peter provided the Customs agent with \$500 for the delivery of the next container to the new warehouse location in Boynton Beach. The cargo container was to be placed the next day with its doors immediately next to the warehouse bay door at 5:00 p.m.

The Customs agent, in an undercover capacity, interviewed the Boynton Beach warehouse manager. The warehouse bay or unit was reportedly rented by a Jonathan and a Sonny in the past two weeks; the two subjects were described as Haitian males. The bay reportedly contained a printing business named Imprimri Deleternel, Inc. It was said to be a printing shop involved in exportations to Haiti.

Fourth Time's a Charm

On February 5, 1997, Eric requested that the cargo container to be placed in front of the suspect bay across the parking lot next to a boat, not directly against the main bay door as previously requested by the suspects. Eric requested ample room behind the container for the operation of a forklift. In a later call, Eric requested several more times for undercover to confirm that ten feet of open space was located behind the cargo container. The suspects stated that they would contact the undercover upon the completion of the loading. The cargo container was to be

retrieved the next day. Task force officers surveilled the delivery of the cargo container by the undercover at 5:00 p.m. and his departure from the area.

A popular local Fox 29 station reporter was concealed with the primary surveillance team. He was there to document the activities of the auto theft task force for an upcoming story and his night vision camera was amazing. It was better than any equipment owned by law enforcement at the time. The recording would later be used for a three part series on the Fox station with a focus on citizens preventing auto theft. During the watching and waiting, the reporter was repeatedly questioned if it was his real hair. It was impressive and a topic of discussion by the officers for quite some time. After a few tugs on his curly locks, it was confirmed as real and reported to the entire surveillance team via radio. The watching continued.



Container Drop and Suspect Arrival

WFLX Fox 1997

At approximately 6:45 p.m., the task force officers observed a black 1995 Land Rover Range Rover and pickup truck arrived at the suspect location. Three black males were observed in the area of the cargo container and warehouse bay. After off-loading sheets of heavy plywood, one of the black males departed the suspect location in the pickup truck at a high rate of speed. He was not followed to protect the surveillance – in case it was a heat run. The remaining two black males were observed removing two aluminum vehicle ramps from the bay and attaching them to the cargo container high on the chassis (trailer). The two suspects were then observed removing a late model black Toyota 4Runner from the bay and backing it into the cargo container. Eric was observed operating the suspect vehicle.



Ramps and Loading

WFLX Fox 1997

The undercover agent, task force officers and marked police units responded to the scene and arrested the two suspects – filmed with the night vision camera. One of the suspects attempted to enter the warehouse bay, but was blocked by a vehicle. During a sweep of the warehouse bay for officer safety, four additional sport utility vehicles were located in the bay – a 1996 Toyota Land Cruiser, 1996 Toyota 4Runner, 1996 Nissan Pathfinder and 1997 Jeep Grand Cherokee.



The First Loaded

Writer 1997



Stolen Vehicle and Bundles

Writer 1997

It turned out that the sport utility vehicles were stolen from an exclusive Miami condominium complex. Interestingly, one of the recovered vehicles had been stolen from a member of the band Blues Traveler. The thieves reportedly took the car keys from the valet board and stole the vehicles. To buy more time, they reportedly replaced the missing keys with mock ones. Another vehicle owned by singer Whitney Houston was also stolen from the Miami condominium, but was not recovered at the warehouse – didn't we almost have it all.

During the arrest, Eric was identified as Saint Jacques Bertrand, also known as Bertrand Saint Jacques. The other arrested suspect was identified as Pierre Yves Maurice. Peter was apparently in the delivery pickup truck that sped off earlier.

A Worthy Adversary

Saint Jacques repeatedly and forcefully demanded to have his handcuffs removed so he could shake the undercover agent's hand. He stated that he was extremely impressed that the undercover got him. Saint Jacques was afforded his request as a worthy adversary. He earned it. Saint Jacques admitted that he knew the vehicles were stolen, then later stated that he did not know the status of the vehicles. He stated that he was a former Haitian police officer, prison escapee and illegal alien. He thought he was too smart to get caught.

By his comments, skills and other gathered information, he was possibly a member of the much feared Tonton Macoute in Haiti at one point. The Tonton Macoute was the secret police or paramilitary in Haiti reportedly named after a mythical bogeyman who kidnapped and ate children. They were better known for human rights abuses, violent attacks and murders of adversaries of President Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier. His personal presence supported the assumption.



Bertrand Saint Jacques

Writer 1997

Saint Jacques stated that he was the renter of the warehouse bay. He was verbally afforded his constitutional rights and consented to a search of the warehouse bay. During a search of the warehouse bay, the four sport utility vehicles were identified by state registration number and public vehicle identification number. When the Customs agent requested that Saint Jacques sign a written consent waiver form, he hesitated for several minutes and then declined to sign it. Nonetheless, Saint Jacques did not withdraw the consent to search the warehouse bay. At that point, the search of the warehouse bay was immediately stopped and a state search warrant was applied for through the Palm Beach County State Attorney's Office to ensure a legal search for future proceedings. It would be one less motion to fight in the future.

A query of the Florida registration numbers and vehicle identification numbers confirmed that the bay sport utility vehicles were reported stolen. The black 1995 Land Rover operated by Saint Jacques possessed a suspicious vehicle identification number. Subsequent investigation revealed that the Land Rover Range Rover was a stolen vehicle, but was not formally reported to the police. The vehicle was reportedly purchased by a subject with a fictitious name utilizing a fraudulent check. The leasing company was attempting to locate and recover the seized vehicle at that time. They were later very appreciative.

Upon obtaining a state search warrant, the warehouse bay and cargo container were searched by the agents and detectives. The five stolen vehicles were seized by the officers and detectives. Upon completion of the evidence processing of the stolen vehicles by the LWPD crime lab, the stolen vehicles were turned over to the legal owners or lien holders.

Inside the warehouse bay, 16 bundles of clothes were located along with metal dividing/reinforcement bars. Outside the warehouse bay, six sheets of plywood were located next to the warehouse entry door. The items located inside and outside the warehouse were consistent with

materials utilized by smugglers to construct false walls in cargo containers to conceal contraband, such as stolen vehicles illegally pending exportation. No forklift was located in the warehouse bay.



Concealment Materials

Writer 1997

Peter, who was likely the third suspect that left the warehouse before the arrest, was a match to the Florida driver's license photograph for Louis Edward (Eddy) Georges.

A Very Clever Method

Subsequent investigation revealed that the stolen vehicle smuggling organization was also allegedly involved in the importation of large quantities of cocaine from Haiti. The outbound and inbound smuggling organization utilized a very unique and clever method to make massive profits with limited requirement for the movement of cash. The use and transfer of large quantities of currency increased the opportunity for violence, theft or seizure. These suspects utilized stolen vehicles as the currency.

The stolen vehicles, doubled their domestic value in Haiti, were allegedly traded for cocaine that was half the United States kilogram price – only \$10,000 a kilogram in Haiti. A \$25,000 vehicle would be worth up to \$50,000 to smugglers in the Caribbean or the few very wealthy in Haiti. The container would deliver two stolen vehicles. The \$100,000 credit could purchase 10 kilograms of cocaine. Smuggled into the United States, the cocaine would double its price to \$20,000 a kilogram for \$200,000 in cash. The investment of \$1,000 for the car thief to produce two vehicles and the outbound shipping costs of \$4,000 were small compared to the return in the United States. Nevertheless, the profits were still impressive - \$195,000 a container. The cost of the cocaine importation was the variable for the amount of profit. There was a lot of money to be made with reduced exposure to rip-offs and law enforcement.

Federal Prosecution

On February 6, 1997, a federal criminal complaint was submitted to a West Palm Beach magistrate. A federal arrest warrant was issued for Saint Jacques and Georges for stolen vehicle exportation. Maurice was to be prosecuted by the State of Florida for his role.

The Customs agent formally interviewed the Boynton Beach warehouse manager. The manager stated that on January 17, Jonathan and Sonny visited the business to rent a warehouse bay unit. They were described as Haitian males using a telephone number identified during the undercover investigation. The two subjects drove a black BMW 525 with custom wheels; this vehicle matched the black BMW 525 identified during the first undercover meeting. Jonathan (Georges/Peter) was a thin younger black male who spoke English better than Sonny. Sonny (Saint Jacques/Eric) was an older, heavier and darker black male with rough facial features. The pair were reportedly involved in the exportation of clothes and shoes from North Carolina through Miami to Haiti. The rent was \$630 a month. Jonathan and Sonny supplied a \$1,000 deposit in cash for the partial first month's payment and security deposit.

The green 1997 Honda Civic bearing the temporary registration tag identified at the undercover meeting was later associated with an addresses and family member of Georges. Customs agents conducted a surveillance in Miami for Georges at his business location where the Honda Civic was parked to locate the subject. He was not located for arrest.

On February 13, 1997, Saint Jacques and Georges were indicted by a federal grand jury for exportation of stolen vehicles and conspiracy. Saint Jacques was afforded his initial appearance for the indictment. Saint Jacques as assigned a federal public defender. Due to his illegal alien status and criminal charges, Saint Jacques was held without bond pending trial.



Federal Booking Photograph

Writer 1997

The United States Attorney's Office (USAO) in West Palm Beach later decided that due to the Fox news and press coverage of the seizure and arrest of the suspects, they would not prosecute the suspects on federal charges. They did not like the media attention, even if very positive. Unfortunately, the USAO in West Palm Beach was not the most aggressive office in South Florida – it was too often seen as a retirement office. The same charge, at times, was returned to the West Palm Beach Customs office. However, the case was sound.

One of the greatest concerns was when the federal pretrial detention order was cancelled with the dismissed charges and indictment. Saint Jacques stipulated to the pretrial detention while reserving the right to a hearing and possibility of an immigration bond. The court was aware of his immigration status. He was set free without an immigration hold.

The Palm Beach County State Attorney's Office immediately accepted prosecution of Saint Jacques and Maurice – the two arrested at the scene that night. Losing the federal prosecution was an exceedingly disappointing consequence, but at least the sentencing guidelines expanded from approximately 18 months in federal prison to possibly many years in state prison.

Nevertheless, the Fox news story did benefit the auto theft task force by attracting more police agency involvement in the county and South Florida area. It lost a federal prosecution but gained beneficial support from other agencies and organizations. It also re-enforced the existing agency support with additional resources from the positive press coverage.

A Miami Customs agent arrested Joseph E. Ketant for the state criminal charges of grand theft auto, insurance fraud and carrying a concealed firearm from the previously seized vehicle in Jacksonville. K & M Shipping was created in 1993 with Ketant as the president. Both the company and its owner would continue to be associated with suspicious activities. The company would be later administratively dissolved in 2001.

On April 17, 1997, Customs received information from U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) that an alien number had been located for Saint Jacques. It is unknown if the registration number was for the suspect in custody. INS requested that the file be forwarded to the INS office in Miami for review and comparison. Pending the review of the INS file, Saint Jacques was released from detention after he posted bail for the state criminal charges.

Other Interested Parties

In April 1997, a private investigative agency contacted the auto theft task force regarding the 1995 Land Rover Range Rover recovered from Saint Jacques. The private agency was investigating a significant fraud scheme involving the theft of four Land Rovers from a South Florida dealership. It was believed that Saint Jacques was associated with a larger fraud and theft organization. Saint Jacques, Georges and the other suspects were reportedly part of a considerable auto theft and fraud organization in Florida and Haiti. The organization was reportedly responsible for at least \$3,000,000 in theft involving financial fraud schemes; the organization utilized fictitious names and credit information to establish multiple identities to purchase expensive items such as jewelry and

high-end sport utility vehicles.

The Customs agent received a telephone call in June 1997 from an attorney representing Georges. The lawyer wanted to be contacted if Georges was subject to arrest. With the federal arrest warrant dismissed and no active state arrest warrant, Georges was no longer wanted. However, he continued to be the subject of investigation. Another Customs stolen vehicle exportation case was opened to investigate him. He was not going to get away with it.

State Prosecution

The state prosecution and trial of Saint Jacques and Maurice was set for July 1997 in Palm Beach County, but later postponed until September and then December. On December 16, 1997, Saint Jacques entered a guilty plea to a five-count felony information in West Palm Beach. Prior to any future substantial assistance, he was exposed to 60 to 100 months in state prison for the criminal violations. The Customs agent requested for Saint Jacques to be held for sentencing as an illegal alien and flight risk. Unfortunately, he was not held since he appeared at his previous state proceedings without incident.

Subsequent investigation indicated that Georges (Peter) was the driver of the pickup truck observed on February 5 at the arrest scene. However, the state did not wish to file charges at the time. They wanted more evidence.

On December 18, 1997, Maurice entered a guilty plea to a two count felony information in West Palm Beach. He was sentenced to 18 months of probation for his involvement in the loading of the stolen vehicle into the cargo container. It was a disappointing sentence, even with his limited involvement.



PBSO Booking Photographs

PBSO 1997

On March 3, 1998, a motion was entered in the state court in Palm Beach County to order Saint Jacques to appear in court for sentencing on March 10 for the previous five count conviction. He failed to appear for this court hearing. The circuit judge revoked his \$20,000 bond and issued an arrest warrant for him. The judge ordered the State of Florida Probation Department to supply the Customs agent with Saint Jacques' addresses, telephone numbers and relative information. It took a week to find out they only had a bad addresses and telephone number for the fugitive.

Ten days later, the Customs agent received information from Saint Jacques' bail bondsman that the fugitive could not be located in Dade County (now known as Miami-Dade County). The bond would most likely have to be paid to the court. A check for \$20,000 was later delivered at night to his business to pay for Saint Jacques' bond. With the check was reportedly a note attached requesting the bail bondsman to stop looking for him. The check from Marie-Line Thomas and Wilson Thomas bounced for insufficient funds. These names would be encountered again.

On March 20, 1998, Saint Jacques was sentenced in absentia to eight years in state prison for the stolen vehicle smuggling violations. It was the maximum sentence according to sentencing guidelines. The judge was not pleased. Upon location, Saint Jacques would be transported directly to the Florida Department of Corrections for the full prison sentence. If not arrested within 30 days, he waived his right to appeal the prison sentence.

The state arrest warrant for the fugitive was entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) automated system and Treasury Enforcement Communications System II (TECSII) should he be located in the United States.

The Search Begins Again

The outbound smuggling case was now a fugitive case with some interesting findings. The Customs agent started the next chase and phase of the case. It was yet another challenge to locate the one that got away. Subsequent investigation indicated that Saint Jacques was known by several alias names through law enforcement interactions. Through document analysis, a previous criminal history for the fugitive was identified with several different names.

The fugitive was reportedly arrested on July 27, 1982, under the name Thomas Wilson, by Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office for cocaine trafficking. He was reportedly convicted and sentenced to three years confinement on February 20, 1983. He was also charged and convicted for failure to appear.

Due to his criminal arrest and immigration status, he was arrested by INS on January 10, 1984. On January 13, 1994, the immigration court reportedly ordered him deported from the United States.

If executed, the deportation did not last very long. On October 24, 1994, the fugitive was reportedly arrested under the name Milot Legoute by the U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) in Miami for making a false statement on passport application, false

claim to United States citizenship and a counterfeit access device. On January 13, 1995, the immigration court again reportedly ordered him deported from the United States.

If actually deported, it apparently did not last long again. On October 9, 1996, the fugitive was arrested by Miami Police Department for carrying a concealed weapon, fraud with a counterfeit driver's license and one other charge of fraud. The charges were later dropped.

The investigation identified numerous alias names, but could never definitively confirm his true name. He was alleged to have used the following names:

Bertrand Saint Jacques
Saint Jacques Bertrand
Gerard Bertrand
Pierre Gerard
Gerard Pierre
Milot Legoute
Morgan Milo
Thomas Saint Jacques
Joe Morgan
Joe Earl Morgan
Thomas Wilson
Wilson Thomas
Elysee Saint Jusma
Milo Gerard
Siro Thomas
Earl Legoute Milot

The fugitive was reportedly previously married to Marilyn Thomas (Marie-Line Thomas from the bad check above). His brother-in-law was reportedly Atanael Thomas.

The name Thomas Wilson or Wilson Thomas appeared to be one of the oldest names used and possibly his true name. However, Wilson's Florida driver's license had been cancelled due to fraud. Wilson has an address history in New York, Georgia and Florida. Wilson also had many associates in South Florida. The Customs agent requested Customs agents in New York and Atlanta to check specific addresses for the fugitive with negative results.

Not Forgotten

Georges was not initially prosecuted by the state, but was not forgotten. A second or spin-off case was opened on him by the Customs agent to ensure his prosecution and interdict any possible outbound smuggling violations. Louis Edward (Eddy) Georges had an address in Boca Raton and business in Miami. He was also associated with several addresses in South Florida and Pennsylvania. He was born in Haiti and possessed the previously identified criminal history of the exportation of stolen vehicles.

The Customs agent conducted surveillance at Georges' business in Miami known as L.E.G. Enterprises, Inc. The business location was doing business as Baby Food Center. The telephone number was previously utilized by Georges while communicating with the undercover agent. His 1997 Honda Civic was also located at the business.

The Customs agent continued to work with state prosecutors for the arrest and prosecution of Georges. On May 14, 1998, the Customs agent, who was also a sworn special deputy sheriff, submitted a state probable cause affidavit to the Palm Beach County State Attorney's Office for Georges. Five days later, an arrest warrant was issued for him charging five counts of grand theft. The arrest warrant was entered into NCIC and TECSII – the two best methods to trip over him.

However, the surveillance of his known addresses continued by Customs agents. An incentive of a couple cases of beer was also shared with the Palm Beach, Broward and Dade auto theft task forces to find Georges. You must leverage all of your options.

Valuable Intelligence

The Customs agent met with a Metro Dade Auto Theft Task Force detective in May 1998 regarding Saint Jacques and a Haitian auto theft organization in Miami. The fugitive had been identified in a 1995 stolen vehicle investigation. On June 20, 1995, the task force located and recovered ten stolen vehicles pending exportation to Haiti. Louis Wilgler Cencord was arrested when he attempted to export two vehicles to Haiti through K & M Shipping. Cencord and Wilner Pierre Saint Juste were arrested for the possession of stolen vehicles.

During his arrest, Cencord stated that he had eight more vehicles in his Miami warehouse. The vehicles were reportedly placed in the warehouse by a subject named Milo while Cencord was reportedly in Haiti on business. Cencord claimed that he did not know the stolen vehicles were in the warehouse until he returned from Haiti. His secretary reportedly allowed Milo access to the warehouse to store them. Milo reportedly advised Cencord that the vehicles were stolen vehicles from either dealerships, rental agencies or owners involved in insurance fraud. Cencord submitted to a polygraph examination to confirm his story.

Cencord stated that he knew Milo for approximately eight months. They reportedly met in Little Haiti in Miami. Milo was described as in his late 50s with a crippled walk, matching the description of the fugitive. Cencord stated that Milo was previously arrested by the Miami Police Department under the name of Thomas Wilson.

The Metro Dade Police Department (MDPD) Fingerprint Analysis Unit confirmed that Wilson's fingerprints matched the fingerprints of Saint Jacques taken by the Customs agent during the Boynton Beach arrest.

MDPD previously identified a subject named Pierre Gerard as a Haitian auto theft suspect who utilized the name Milo. The fugitive was previously associated with the name and date of birth. Gerard, also known as Milot Earl Legoute and Joe Morgan, was also reportedly encountered during a U.S. Secret Service credit card fraud investigation.

Upon arrest of the fugitive, MDPD intended to charge him with possession of ten stolen vehicles and other related state criminal violations.

More on the Fugitive

While investigating Georges, additional information continued to be received for the fugitive Saint Jacques. On June 1, 1998, the Customs agent received facsimile copies of the State of Florida driver's licenses for Thomas Wilson and Elysee Saint Jusma. The driver's license photographs for both subjects were of the fugitive known as Saint Jacques. The State of Florida was advised of the fictitious driver's licenses. Saint Jusma, born in Haiti, was associated with several Miami addresses. He was also associated with Marie Line Thomas as a possible relative.

According to a Miami Police Department arrest report, Thomas Wilson was also known as Elysee Saint Jusma. Wilson was identified during a 1996 burglary surveillance in a gray BMW bearing Florida dealer registration plate (the same dealer registration number identified on a BMW during an undercover meeting with Saint Jacques). When Wilson was stopped, a black handgun was observed on the floor of the vehicle. Wilson reportedly worked for Master Auto Sales.

Looking for any avenue of assistance, the Customs agent submitted a fugitive lookout request to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Florida Criminal Activity Bulletin for Saint Jacques. All of the identifying information, alias names and photographs were forwarded for the publication. The monthly publication was distributed to law enforcement agencies throughout Florida and in other states. Additional information was provided to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office to enhance the active NCIC record.

Toll Analysis

Telephone toll analysis for Mariline Thomas' Miramar telephone number identified numerous calls to New York, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas and around Florida. The calls in Florida included the Baby Food Center and other previously encountered telephone numbers. There were calls to a trucking company in New Orleans and a container company in Houston (maybe attempting to cut-out the troublesome undercover). There were also numerous international calls to Switzerland, Canada, Bahamas, Dominican Republic and Haiti. Many calls were made to 14 different numbers in Haiti and two different numbers in Switzerland.

Most interestingly, there were calls to or from eight pay telephones at the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office jail during the time period that Saint Jacques was detained for the criminal charges. Atanael Thomas may have also been in the same jail during the toll analysis period for federal cocaine distribution charges. Once again, there was an association between Mariline

Thomas and the fugitive.

There was even a call to the Customs inspectors at the Port of Jacksonville. They accidentally paged the suspects when looking for the Customs agent. They were rock stars, but we all made mistakes. That one was held in the Customs agent's back pocket for any future need. The undercover made mistakes too.

One Down, One to Go

The search for Georges continued through regular surveillances and drive-by checks at his known addresses. On July 14, 1998, Georges was arrested by Customs inspectors at the Miami International Airport during his entry from Haiti. The active TECSII and NCIC records ensured his immediate arrest and contact with the Customs agent.

On August 28, 1998, Georges was arraigned at Palm Beach County Circuit Court for the stolen vehicle criminal violations where he entered a not guilty plea. A case disposition was set for November. The assistant state attorney offered Georges an opportunity to cooperate with the U.S. Customs Service.

Let's Make a Deal

On December 7, 1998, the Customs agent, prosecutors and defense counsel met with Georges at the county court house. Georges stated that he wished to supply information regarding the exportation of stolen vehicles from the United States and narcotic smuggling from Haiti via motor vessel through the Miami River. The proposed assistance was offered in an attempt to reduce the prison sentencing guidelines of a maximum of five to eight years in prison. Georges stated that the fugitive was reportedly hiding in New York to evade arrest for the outstanding arrest warrant and prison sentence.

A substantial assistance agreement was created for Georges. On December 14, the group met again. Georges advised again that he wished to supply information regarding the exportation of stolen vehicles from the United States and narcotic smuggling from Haiti via motor vessel. Georges stated that the fugitive's wife, Marie Thomas, resided at the known Miramar address. He provided two telephone numbers and a Florida license plate.

One of the furnished telephone numbers was reportedly identified in a U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) drug smuggling investigation involving Atanael Thomas – a possible brother-in-law for the fugitive.

Buy Bust

During a meeting with an undercover DEA agent in August 1998, Atanael Thomas claimed to be a boat captain who could smuggle 1,000 kilograms of cocaine from Haiti through the Miami River area. As a first step, the DEA undercover arranged to purchase 25 kilograms from Thomas at

a bargain rate of \$15,000 a kilogram. The undercover later flashed \$375,000 in cash to seal the deal. Thomas was arrested the next day during the delivery of five kilograms as the first increment of the load. Two other Haitian nationals were arrested with Thomas. Thomas was held in pretrial detention at the Palm Beach jail due to the charges and his immigration status.

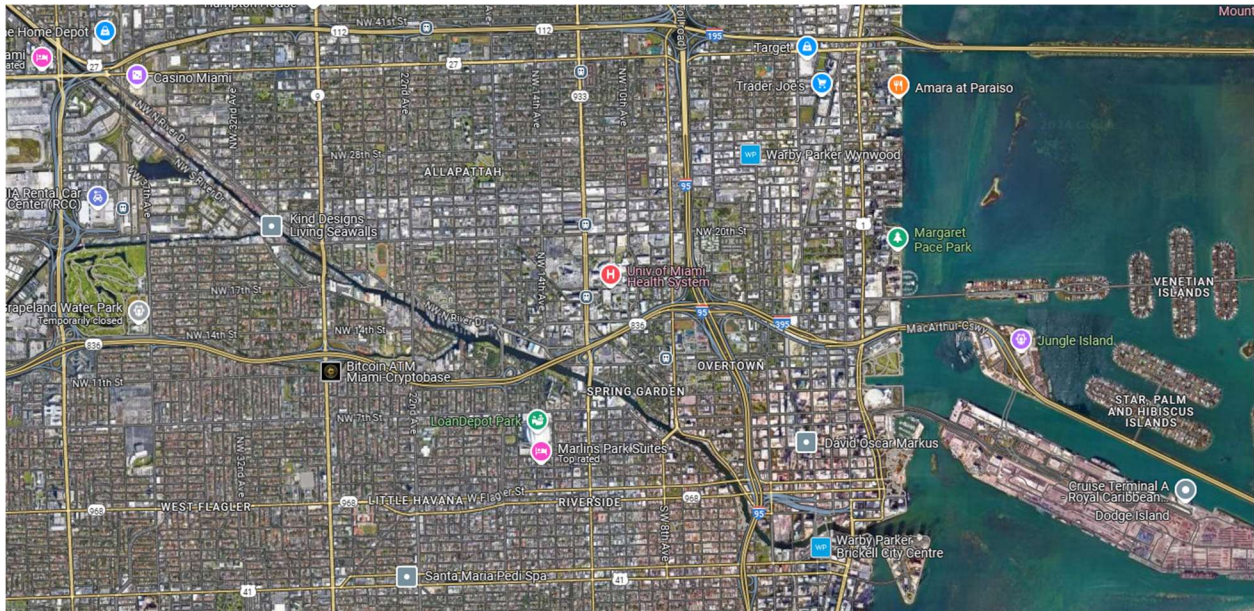
Thomas entered into a cooperation agreement with DEA to assist in the investigation of cocaine smuggling from Haiti. Thomas reportedly identified a specific smuggling vessel which was later stopped and searched by federal officials. No cocaine was located during the vessel search, but his information was judged significant, timely and truthful. It was deemed as substantial assistance and merited a downward departure for his sentence. After several continuances and changes of legal representation, he pled guilty to one count of possession with intent to distribute cocaine. He was sentenced 48 months in prison, 36 months of supervised release and a \$2,500 fine.

Atanael Thomas was released from prison in October 2001 to begin his supervised release. Amusingly, he would find employment on the Miami River as an office manager at a shipping terminal. Thomas requested a modification of his supervised release so he could travel to Haiti. The motion was denied by the court. Thomas renewed the motion and it was denied a second time. It is unknown if deportation proceedings were ever initiated from his newest conviction.

DEA agents later confirmed that the fugitive Saint Jacques was present during a consent search of Atanael Thomas' residence in September 1998 – after his original arrest. The fugitive provided a United States passport and other forms of identification in a name that passed inspection by an INS agent who was on scene at the time. Regrettably, the name was not retained in their files. The fugitive slipped by again and appeared to still be in the game.

Miami River

The Miami River is more a polluted canal than a river that runs approximately six miles through Miami from the Miami Canal spillway to Biscayne Bay and the Port of Miami. It is fed by the approximately 77 mile long manmade Miami C-6 canal from Lake Okeechobee as well as other sources entering sources along the way.



Miami River
Google Maps 2024

The Miami River is home to number shipping companies and carriers servicing coastal freighters (shallow draft cargo ships) and other motor vessels via terminals, boatyards and marinas. The river provides services to motor vessels that would be too physically or financially small to utilize the large and fast moving Port of Miami. The majority of the coastal freighters and other motor vessels provide services to the Caribbean islands along with Central and South America ports. River terminals and marinas also provide repair, maintenance, paint and other services to various motor vessels from freighters to yachts. According to a Miami River alliance of shipping and marine businesses, the coastal freighters complete approximately 2,000 entries and exits a year with an average of five a day.

The Miami River has been the repeated location of the seizure of narcotics since the 1970s. With the number of vessels utilizing the river from the source or transshipment countries, it was the perfect method for narcotic smuggling. Even though the frequency of narcotic seizures ebbed and flowed over the decades, it remains an active area for the importation of drugs.

The river has also been the location of the seizure of stolen vehicles, construction equipment, firearms and other contraband since the 1980s. The freighters departed Miami with various cargo, to included stolen and restricted contraband. The same freighters often returned empty, with the exception of narcotics deeply concealed within the vessels. The river was busy and constant concern for Customs and local law enforcement – inbound and outbound.

Additional Information

Atanael Thomas was reportedly identified in a Customs money laundering investigation in New Jersey; he was reportedly arrested by the New Jersey State Police for state money laundering violations. His address and telephone number were located at the next door apartment to Marie Thomas in Miramar.

The Customs agent conducted an analysis of Georges and Atanael Thomas' international travel and possible associates in an attempt to identify a new passport and name for the fugitive – looking for the needle in the electronic haystack. At the time, TECSII had been recently modified to conduct an analysis of others that entered two or more times in a specified time frame along with an individual. This was impressive technology in the late 1990s to identify associates and other possible smugglers. In a time of green screen technology and large mainframe computers, this was high-speed stuff. Suspect names were identified for secondary border inspection upon entry to the United States – without finding the fugitive.

The Talks Continued

On December 28, 1998, Georges stated that the fugitive was reportedly in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. He reportedly planned to return to New York in the next month. The challenge was the name and date of birth he was travelling under. Biometrics were not quite as robust in 1998 as today, to include facial recognition. We needed a lot of luck.

Georges was not able to provide any actionable assistance, but he really did not have to. On August 18, 1999, he entered a guilty plea for the possession of stolen vehicles. As a part of the plea agreement, Georges received a sentence of time served and a fine.

On August 30, 1999, the Customs agent forwarded the certified conviction forms, fingerprints, criminal history, personal identification and related documentation for Georges to Miami INS for deportation. The Georges spin-off case was closed.

Moving on Up

The Customs agent would transfer to Baltimore Customs field office in 1999 then to Customs headquarters a few years after that. The chase would continue as much as possible from a distance. The TECSII and NCIC records would remain updated with any new information. The odds were definitely with the fugitive.

Even though the search never stopped, it slowed down with no new information. The Customs agent was waiting for a fingerprint match hit from another arrest or lucky border crossing with a sharp inspector. He waited and hoped.

Cocaine in Canada

On October 8, 2003, sixteen kilograms of cocaine were seized in a suitcase at the Montreal International Airport. The suitcase was checked in with the name Thomas Wilson. This was one of the known aliases of the fugitive. Three days later, the fugitive was arrested by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) while attempting to leave Canada traveling back to Haiti. At the time of his arrest, the fugitive possessed a United States passport and a New York State driver's license. Further information developed by the RCMP revealed that the fugitive was part of a narcotics smuggling organization that operated at the Montreal International Airport.



Booking Photograph

RCMP 2003

The United States passport utilized by the fugitive was in the name Wilson Thomas (Thomas Wilson). According to reports, the passport was utilized for entry to Haiti, Colombia, Martinique, Bahamas and Canada. On March 25, 2004, the fugitive pled guilty in Canada to the importation of 16 kilograms of cocaine from Haiti. He was sentenced to six years in prison.

As a result of the information and in an attempt to extradite the fugitive to the United States, a federal arrest warrant was issued for the fugitive's fraudulent passport that allowed him to smuggle narcotics. The fugitive was later indicted in 2005 in South Florida by DSS under the names Gerard Pierre and Milot Legoute, for the obtaining the false passport. The indictment stated that Wilson Thomas was a fictitious name and the defendant was not born in the United States.

The fugitive allegedly first applied for the Wilson Thomas false passport on or about August 27, 1996. The application was only a couple a years after he was reportedly arrested by DSS for applying for a false passport under the name Milot Legoute in South Florida.

Due to the criminal indictment, a federal arrest warrant issued for Pierre/Legoute with a pretrial detention bond recommendation. Two months later in 2006, the court ordered and adjudged that Pierre/Legoute was a fugitive from justice; the case was removed from the court's pending list to the federal clerk's fugitive case list. It was on the back burner for the court until the fugitive was found. Even the court was not very optimistic.

On February 15, 2006, information was relayed to the Customs agent that the fugitive had been incorrectly released from prison in Canada on November 29, 2005. The exact reason why he was released in error was unknown. The fugitive served approximately a quarter of his prison sentence in Canada. There was to be a formal investigation. No information was ever shared with the Customs agent.

The fugitive was good, lucky or both. He was in the wind again.

Still in the Wind

As the Customs agent advanced in rank within the organization, other agents took over the search for Saint Jacques. Two very competent Customs (now Homeland Security Investigations) agents conducted their own investigations over the years with negative results.

Alive or dead today, the fugitive won. He is the one that got away.