

Elizabeth drug kingpin convicted on all charges

An Elizabeth drug kingpin who became one of the nation's most wanted fugitives after eluding capture multiple times has been found guilty of all 19 criminal charges against him following a two-month trial, acting Union County Prosecutor Grace H. Park announced Thursday.

A Union County jury delivered the verdict against 34-year-old Luqman Abdullah of Elizabeth on Wednesday afternoon following deliberations spread over four days.

Abdullah was the primary target of a five-month joint investigation into large-scale drug sales in the city's Midtown neighborhood by the Prosecutor's Office's Guns, Gangs, Drugs, and Violent Crimes Task Force, the Elizabeth Police Department, the Union County Sheriff's Office, the New Jersey State Police, and the FBI, according to Union County Assistant Prosecutors Julie Peterman and Jeremiah Lenihan, who prosecuted the case. The investigation culminated with the execution of search warrants on April 23, 2009, when nearly seven pounds of cocaine – enough to fill 30,000 individual vials – plus more than 800 folds of heroin, two handguns, an AK-47 rifle, and hundreds of items used for the processing and packaging of cocaine were recovered from a stash house in Newark, Peterman and Lenihan said.

However, of 24 defendants charged in the case, only Abdullah remained at large, having eluded capture following a police foot pursuit outside of a restaurant in a Middlesex County mall on the day the search warrants were executed.

Abdullah was confronted by police again during a traffic stop in Clifton five months later, but he again escaped on foot. After being featured in the television program "America's Most

Wanted” and being listed among the FBI’s most wanted fugitives nationally, he turned himself in to police on December 28, 2012.

Abdullah was convicted on charges including first-degree racketeering, first-degree racketeering conspiracy, first-degree maintaining a controlled dangerous substance production facility, first-degree possession of cocaine with the intent to distribute, second-degree conspiracy, second-degree unlawful possession of an assault rifle, three second-degree weapons offenses, third-degree money laundering, multiple third-degree drug offenses, and two counts of fourth-degree resisting arrest.

Abdullah’s criminal record prior to trial included seven felony convictions for crimes ranging from aggravated assault to burglary to other drug and weapons offenses – including a conviction connected to an incident in which he and others kidnapped a rival drug dealer, placed him in the trunk of his own vehicle, and sprayed the vehicle with gunfire. The victim, who survived, was rescued hours later by a passerby who heard his cries for help.

Sentencing in the case has been scheduled for January 6, 2017 before state Superior Court Judge Stuart Peim, who presided over the trial. The State intends to file a motion for an extended term that could result in a sentence of up to life in state prison.