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## Trial gets under way in drug conspiracy case

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A trial began Monday in U.S. District Court for three men who could face life in prison if convicted of participating in a decade-long drug conspiracy that moved millions of dollars worth of illegal drugs on Camden streets.

The drug business, working with a network of managers equal to many legitimate concerns, was controlled by intimidation, retribution and murder, Assistant U.S. Attorney Diana Carrig told jurors.

But defense attorneys for the trio made it clear that jury's verdict could be determined by the credibility of Raymond Morales, who has already pleaded guilty to his leadership role in the drug operation and will be the prosecution's star witness.

It was Morales, say both the defense team and the U.S. Attorneys presenting the case, who set up the drug network, delivered bulk amounts of cocaine, and ordered and paid for at least six killings when he was not respected.

On trial before U.S. District Judge Joseph Irenas are Ahmed Judge, 31, Jevon Lewis, 33, and Mack Jones, 35. They are the last of seven men indicted in 2006 on charges of running a continuing criminal enterprise beginning in 1993 on Atlantic Avenue in South Camden. The sidewalk drug market generated such traffic among buyers that some members of the organization had to direct traffic, Carrig said.

Judge and Lewis also are charged with using a gun and carrying out the October 2001 murder of Kenneth Fussell, shot three times as he was unlocking the door to his apartment on Chelton Avenue. The federal prosecutors said they will show Morales deducted \$50,000 from a debt Lewis owed him for delivery of drugs to cover the killing.

Lewis then subcontracted the killing to Judge without knowledge of Morales, Carrig said.

Judge also faces state charges for the murder.

With almost no concrete evidence -- no wiretaps, no surveillance photographs, no hand-to-hand sales of drugs -- federal prosecutors are hoping to get convictions primarily with Morales' testimony. Morales' guilty plea to charges that could mean seven life terms if he had not struck a plea bargain, was secret until less than a year ago.

Morales struck such fear among his underlings, investigators have said, that none of the co-defendants were willing to plead guilty, fearing retaliation but not aware he had made his own deal with the U.S. Attorney.

The three defense attorneys raised questions at the preview of the government's case, challenging Morales' credibility and the lack of such basic prosecutor's tools as fingerprints on the handgun used to kill Fussell.

David Rudenstein, representing Lewis, acknowledged that his client made his living selling drugs, but said he was just one of dozens of street-corner dealers who purchased their supply from Morales. That supply came from New York and Arizona, all attorneys agreed.

Morales was so proud of the quality of his cocaine, said Justin Loughry, attorney for Mack Jones, that he killed one dealer in April 2001 because he represented a lower-quality drug as coming from Morales.

Loughry said Morales, whose whereabouts are being kept secret by federal agents, has been "cleaned up" by the prosecution.

"He will try not to sound like a thug. He will try to convince you he's honest and sincere, a changed man with a commitment to tell the truth," said Loughry.

But as soon as Morales was released from state prison in 2002 after serving a sentence for drug conspiracy, Loughry said, he violated his parole by contracting murders and consulting with his suppliers.

"He was selling drugs and murdering people in Camden, going to counseling and therapy as a condition of parole. He's a consummate expert at telling lies," said Loughry of Morales.

Rocco Cipparone, attorney for Judge, said that while ballistics tests show the gun used to kill Fussell was found by police in a field 30 yards from where Judge was hiding several blocks minutes after the shooting, they cannot put the gun in Judge's hand.

Judge told police he was hiding because he had been shot at that night.

The trial is expected to last at least six weeks.

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