

# Joseph “Rambo” Hunter, Paul Le Roux’s Former Enforcer, Sentenced to 20 Years in Prison — The Atavist Magazine

---

**A** [magazine.atavist.com/joseph-rambo-hunter-sentenced](http://magazine.atavist.com/joseph-rambo-hunter-sentenced)

May 31,  
2016

**May 31, 2016** — Joseph “Rambo” Hunter, a one-time enforcer for the criminal kingpin Paul Le Roux, was sentenced to 20 years in federal prison this morning in a Lower Manhattan courtroom. A decorated former U.S. soldier from Kentucky, Hunter had pleaded guilty in 2015 to charges including conspiracy to murder a federal agent and import narcotics. Wearing a navy blue prison jumpsuit, Hunter stood calmly as Judge Laura Swain outlined his punishment for what she called “grave and serious crimes.”

The DEA arrested Hunter in September 2013 in Thailand, following an elaborate sting operation carried out with the help of Le Roux, who had been in U.S. custody since being captured in Liberia a year earlier. At the direction of Le Roux, his on-and-off employer since 2009, Hunter recruited a group of ex-military men from around the world to provide security for what they believed was a Colombian drug cartel. As I traced in [Episode 6](#) of “The Mastermind,” that work included monitoring drug shipments and plotting the murder of a DEA agent and his informant inside the cartel.

The cartel, drug shipments, agent, and informant were all concoctions of the DEA. But Hunter’s enthusiastic participation in the plot was captured on video and audio recordings at a safe house in Phuket, and in emails between Hunter and Le Roux, whom Hunter believed was still at large. In the face of that evidence, Hunter and his four codefendants (two of whom faced only drug-related charges) all pleaded guilty. American Timothy Vamvakias and German Denis Gögel were each sentenced to 20 years for their involvement in the murder-for-hire plan.

Hunter’s attorneys, arguing for a ten-year sentence at his hearing, asserted that Le Roux had threatened Hunter over a bungled gold deal early in Hunter’s employment, a fact that my reporting [confirmed](#). They also presented evidence that Hunter suffered from PTSD as a result of his time as a decorated soldier and his subsequent work as a contractor in Iraq. Marlon Kirton, one of Hunter’s lawyers, noted that Hunter’s PTSD had created a “heightened sense of fear” that made him particularly vulnerable to Le Roux’s threats. “Mr. Le Roux is a man with money, a man with international connections, and most importantly, he knows where Mr. Hunter lives,” Kirton said.

Federal prosecutors countered that Hunter had once left Le Roux’s employment and returned at a higher salary, and that he had turned down other Le Roux assignments, both with no consequences. “To the extent that Paul Le Roux ran an organization that was

dangerous,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Emil Bove said in court, “it was dangerous because he had men like Joseph Hunter working for him.” Bove cited an expert questioning Hunter’s PTSD diagnosis, and argued that even if it was correct, “people with PTSD do not go out and commit murder.”

Ultimately Judge Swain largely sided with the prosecution in those arguments. But she nevertheless deviated downwards from federal sentencing guidelines covering Hunter’s crimes—under which he faced between 24 and 30 years—citing his acceptance of responsibility, his military service, and the fact that he would enter prison at age 51.

“Much has happened in the last few years, most of which I would not wish on anyone,” Hunter said when offered a chance to make a pre-sentencing statement. He apologized to the court and “the citizens of the United States.” Hunter then choked up when addressing family and friends. “They are not embarrassed by me or ashamed of me,” he said, “but I have shamed them.”

Le Roux, meanwhile, remains in U.S. custody waiting for another federal judge to decide his fate, having negotiated his own plea agreement. He faces anywhere from ten years to life.