

Man held in drug case testifies in effort to get released on bail

The alleged organizer of an extensive drug operation in Minnesota took the witness stand Monday in federal court in Minneapolis in an effort to get himself released on bail.

Ralph (Plukey) Duke has been held without bail since being arrested May 17. Judge David Doty said he probably will rule next week on whether he can be released.

Under questioning by his attorney, Joe Friedberg, Duke said he made money by gambling and by dealing in exotic cars such as Ferraris, Rolls Royces, Jaguars and Mercedeses.

He denied that phone calls recorded as a result of taps on five phones, including two car phones, during last winter and spring were coded discussions about drugs. He also denied

that his home in Delano, Minn., is a fortress. Friedberg said that Duke has no previous drug-related convictions and that no drugs were found when he was arrested.

Duke and 20 others were indicted last month on drug-related charges, including conspiracy to distribute cocaine.

Four other defendants are also being held without bail.

When Duke was questioned by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jon Hopeman, he said he couldn't remember many of the transactions or amounts of money involved because the government has seized all his records. He said he couldn't tell Hopeman where his records had been.