

STAR TRIBUNE  
ST. PAUL EDITION

Star Tribune/ Wednesday/November 22/1989

• 7Bc

**Prosecution calling Duke Minnesota's cocaine king****He and 6 others are on trial in federal court in St. Paul**By Paul Gustafson  
Staff Writer

Until his arrest in May, Ralph C. (Plukey) Duke was Minnesota's cocaine king, selling up to 75 kilos of cocaine a month and netting over \$1 million from drug sales since 1986, a federal prosecutor said Tuesday at the trial of Duke and six others in St. Paul.

Duke, 44, was "the cocaine dealer in the state of Minnesota, and he was the big boss" of an organization that bought large quantities of cocaine in Houston and Los Angeles from Colombian sources, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jon Hopeman said during opening arguments in U.S. District Court.

Duke is accused of running a continuing criminal enterprise, selling cocaine directly to others, and faces three federal weapon charges, as well.

Also on trial for involvement in the alleged drug ring are Duke's son, Ralph LaMont Nunn, 19; Nunn's

mother, Doris (Tina) Admon, 41; Duke's niece Serena D. Nunn, 20; Shawn Q. Regan, 21; Walter L. Hughes, 43, and Kim A. Willis, 19.

Several people who had been slated to go on trial, including Duke nephews Loren A. Duke and Joseph A. Ballard, have pleaded guilty and agreed to testify against their uncle and the other defendants, Hopeman told jurors.

Duke's attorney, Joseph Friedberg, said the prosecution has no direct evidence of Duke's involvement in drug dealing because he is not a drug dealer.

Rather, Friedberg said, the money that finances Duke's lavish lifestyle comes from dealing in expensive cars with burglars, pimps, prostitutes and others who, like Duke, make a living in "soft money" enterprises where income goes unreported.

In addition to a downtown Minneapolis high-rise apartment, Duke owned through others a large house in Los Angeles and a house in Delano, Minn., that federal officials have described as a fortress.

"He's a 44-year-old flashy, high-profile, jewelry wearing, bad-talking, gun-toting car jockey that's made cops mad for 25 years, and they're (out) to get him," Friedberg said.

He and attorneys for other defendants also told jurors that the credibility of many prosecution witnesses is questionable because they have agreed to testify to avoid long prison sentences.

Hopeman said an FBI analysis of about 30 transactions will show that Duke actually lost money on his car deals, and that they were only a front to hide and help launder money from his alleged drug operations.

He said Duke and other defendants will be incriminated by the testimony of former associates, evidence from a May 17 videotaped "sting" operation by a federal Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force, and by information from telephone wiretaps.

Some of the most damaging statements could come from Loren Duke, who pleaded guilty earlier this week and agreed to testify in exchange for favorable sentencing considerations.

Loren Duke will testify that he bought 10 kilos of cocaine from his uncle in 1988, and that his uncle said he and convicted Los Angeles drug dealer Marvin McCaleb together sold 100 kilos of cocaine a month and purchased it through Colombian sources working out of Houston, Hopeman said. McCaleb also will testify against Duke, he said.

In addition, Loren Duke will testify

about his involvement with Ralph L. Nunn and Willis in the May 17 attempt to purchase 20 kilos of cocaine from Andrew Chambers, a federal informant, the prosecutor said.

Yesterday, jurors were shown videotapes of the drug sale "sting" sale at the Hilton Hotel on Industrial Blvd. in Minneapolis that resulted in the arrests of Ralph Duke, Ralph Nunn and Willis. In the videotapes, Chambers and Ralph Nunn are shown removing what are alleged to be packages of cocaine from a car trunk, then later discussing the drug deal in a hotel room where Nunn sampled the drugs.

State Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Agent Robert Bushman said Nunn told Chambers during the meeting that Ralph Duke got his cocaine "direct from the factory" through Colombian sources. Nunn also said that he was looking for a

source of cocaine for himself.

In an earlier recorded conversation, Nunn is alleged to have told Chambers that his father "ran all of the dope business in Minneapolis and St. Paul" and that Ralph Duke had sold 75 kilos of cocaine in a two-month or three-month period.

Nunn agreed to buy cocaine from Chambers and returned with more than \$117,000 to the hotel the night of May 17 accompanied by several associates, including Loren Duke, who transported the "buy" money in a pickup truck.

Thomas Shiah, Ralph Nunn's attorney, said in his opening statement that his client was facing criminal charges only because drug agents approached Nunn and sold him "government dope."

The drug conspiracy trial before U.S. District Judge David Doty is expected to continue for several weeks.