

[Ex-Delta agent freed for giving information](#)

Sarasota Herald-Tribune (Florida)

February 08, 2001, Thursday,

ALL EDITIONS

Copyright 2001 Sarasota Herald-Tribune Co.

Section: A SECTION,

Length: 562 words

Byline: Timothy O'Hara STAFF WRITER

Body

After serving less than half his one-year sentence, former Manatee County sheriff's deputy Thomas Wooten has been released from federal prison.

He was released Tuesday morning after serving 5 1/2 months for lying to investigators, tampering with witnesses and conspiring to commit civil rights violations.

A judge cut his sentence in half because Wooten gave federal prosecutors information that led to a conviction in the ongoing investigation of Delta, the sheriff's anti-drug team.

Wooten gave federal prosecutors "substantial and truthful information" that led to former Delta agent Christopher Wilson accepting a plea bargain on charges of evidence planting and civil rights violations, court records say.

For years, prosecutors aggressively but unsuccessfully pursued charges against Wilson. During that time, five other former deputies admitted to and later pleaded guilty to various corruption charges.

Wilson would not cooperate with investigators. But he accepted a plea deal late last year, after Wooten gave information to prosecutors.

Wooten bartered for leniency on his original sentence, which was handed down Aug. 14 in a federal courthouse in Tampa. In exchange for helping prosecutors catch fellow agents, Wooten had a potential 10-year sentence slashed to 12 months.

That Wooten is getting out even earlier angered Sarah Smith, who was set up by Delta agents, including Wooten, in 1997.

Wilson, Wooten and other Delta agents raided Smith's home in 1997. Agents planted crack cocaine in her home and later lied about it in court. As a result, Smith was convicted of possession of rock cocaine.

"How can this happen? That's not even half of his sentence," Smith said Wednesday, upon hearing the news of his release. "I think a judge should be harder on cops, because they have so much power over us."

Smith spent a month in jail and lost custody of her child. Her record was later cleared and she received \$ 275,000 from the Sheriff's Office to prevent a lawsuit.

Ex-Delta agent freed for giving information

Federal prosecutor Jeff Del Fuoco, who is leading the Delta investigation, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Wooten is one of five former deputies sentenced to federal prison after a two-year federal investigation into corruption at the **Sheriff's** Office.

Former deputies Paul Maass, Lance Carpenter, Christopher Moore and Sgt. Wayne Wyckoff have been sentenced to federal prison on civil rights violation charges. Wilson is awaiting sentencing.

Wooten will be on supervised release for the next two years, but does not have to further cooperate with federal investigators. **Wooten**, who spent his prison term in Eglin Federal Prison Camp in northern Florida, plans to stay in the Bradenton area to be close to his two sons, said his attorney, Jeff Brown. **Wooten** could not be reached for comment.

Del Fuoco also requested a sentence reduction for convicted drug dealer Dematro Bacon, who has been helping federal agents in their Delta investigation. Bacon was beaten by Delta agents during a 1997 drug bust.

He was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 1998 on cocaine sales charges. He is in federal prison in Jessup, Ga.

He has been questioned numerous times by investigators and called to federal court in Tampa twice on matters involving the Delta investigation. A judge has not ruled on Bacon's sentence reduction.

Staff writer Timothy O'Hara can be contacted at 742-6158 or tim.ohara@herald-trib.com.

Load-Date: February 9, 2001