

MELISSA TOWNSEND: This is *Minnesota Now*. I'm Melissa Townsend. Former Minneapolis police officer Thomas Lane was sentenced this morning to three years in prison for his role in George Floyd's killing. He was one of the officers who held Floyd down on the pavement as he died under the knee of Derek Chauvin. MPR reporter Jon Collins was in the courtroom this morning and he joins me now. Hi, Jon.

JON COLLINS: Hey, Melissa.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: Hey. So what was former officer Thomas Lane charged with?

JON COLLINS: So Lane was initially charged with aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter. And the more serious charge of abetting murder was dropped in this plea deal. So Lane pleaded guilty to the manslaughter charge. And in return, he got a three-year sentence that he'll serve in federal prison.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: And I understand this three-year sentence is shorter than the state guidelines. How much shorter? And why is that?

JON COLLINS: So it's six months less than the presumptive sentence that's in state guidelines. And prosecutors said they agreed to this deal because Lane was, quote, "less culpable" than the other officers who were charged in George Floyd's killing. And Judge Peter Cahill also said he was granting this-- it's called a downward departure-- due to Lane's actions that he observed while watching video and other evidence as he presided over Derek Chauvin's trial.

And it's important to remember that Lane was the officer who held down Floyd's feet. And he asked Chauvin twice if they should turn Floyd over to what's called a recovery position, which Chauvin disregarded. And then Lane afterwards helped paramedics treat Floyd in the ambulance.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: So those are the actions that Judge Cahill was noting.

JON COLLINS: Yeah. Both prosecutors and Cahill spoke to why they approved of the downward departure and sentencing.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: Got it. Now, Lane was previously sentenced in federal court. Remind us why there were two cases and two sentences.

JON COLLINS: So these are two different jurisdictions. It's Minnesota and the federal government. And they operate under different statutes. So the federal charges were based on allegations that Lane violated George Floyd's civil rights by not providing him with medical treatment. And then the state charges would be more familiar to most listeners, that's aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter. And as far as the sentences, apart from pretty unusual circumstances, it's typically presumed that sentences for the same act, even if they're from different jurisdictions, will be served concurrently, meaning at the same time.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: OK. And how long was this federal sentence?

JON COLLINS: He was sentenced federally to 2 and 1/2 years, and that's less time than the other three defendants who also faced federal charges in this case.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: And he's already in prison. Where is he serving? And what level security is it?

JON COLLINS: You're right. Right now, he's at a minimum security facility. It's in Littleton, Colorado. But the federal judge presiding over his case did recommend that Thomas Lane serve his time in a facility that's closer to here. Yes, he will serve both the federal and the state sentences at the same time. But when you factor in what's called good time and how the actual prison sentences are served in both federally and in Minnesota, Lane will have served, at the end of this, a little more than two years in prison and the rest will likely be under supervised release.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: OK. And this isn't over. We should note there's still another trial in state court, I think, that's scheduled to start next month.

JON COLLINS: This will be the third trial on George Floyd's killing. And this is the trial for the two remaining officers charged in George Floyd's death, that's J. Alexander Kueng, and Tou Thao. And the charges, again, are aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter. And both men have rejected plea deals, similar to the one that Lane took. So that trial for those two men is scheduled to start on October 24, which means it's going to be one more time that bystander, witnesses, and others will be called to the stand to relive those moments, and it's going to be one more trial for George Floyd's family and friends to go through.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: How are they doing? I know they spoke in court today. What are they saying, George Floyd's surviving relatives?

JON COLLINS: They sent in a victim impact statement and it was read by a prosecutor. And they expressed lots of understandable frustration about all these different court processes, which have dragged on for more than two years. And they asked how many victim impact statements they would have to give. And they said, they're trying to work through their grief on this very public killing.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: This morning, I understand the sentencing was very short, just 10 minutes. Did Lane say anything?

JON COLLINS: No, he didn't. And previously, the only thing he has said about the incident involving George Floyd was during his testimony in federal court, where he and his lawyers argued that he didn't realize how bad off Floyd was, that he tried to intervene, and that he was depending on the paramedics' expertise to assess George Floyd's medical condition.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: All right. Well, thank you, Jon.

JON COLLINS: Thanks, Melissa.

MELISSA TOWNSEND: That's MPR reporter Jon Collins. There's more on this story on our website. You can go to mprnews.org.