

## Ashe Trucker Convicted in Federal Court

Written by Federal Court Press Release  
Tuesday, 31 August 2010 08:41

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A federal jury in the Western District of North Carolina sitting in Statesville convicted Robbie Paul Howell, 31, of Ashe County, NC, a long haul truck driver, on two counts alleging kidnapping and interstate domestic violence.

Charged in U.S. District Court in March of this year, Howell has been in federal custody since March 11, 2010.

The announcement was made yesterday by U.S. Attorney Anne M. Tompkins, who was joined by Owen D. Harris, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in North Carolina, and Ashe County Sheriff James Williams.

The guilty verdict came after a three-day trial, which began on August 24, 2010 in U.S. District Court in Statesville before the Honorable Richard L. Voorhees. Jury deliberations lasted approximately two hours. According to evidence presented at the trial, beginning on October 31, 2009, Howell, who at the time was serving as a long haul truck driver, took his wife, against her will, along with their two-year-old child, on a cross country truck trip. Trial evidence and testimony showed that over the course of the six-day trip, Robbie Howell repeatedly beat his wife, using his fists and a Mag Light flashlight. The victim was beaten severely more than once about her head and face, on her upper body, her arms, elbows and knees, according to trial testimony. The victim, according to trial testimony, experienced three seizures after Robbie Howell attempted to suffocate her by holding his hands over her face. The defendant, according to the trial testimony, responded to the victim's seizure condition by pouring Mountain Dew over her face and head.

The evidence showed that based on phone calls from concerned friends and family members, law enforcement in Oklahoma stopped the tractor trailer in which they were riding on November 6, 2009. Court documents and trial testimony showed that the two-year old child witnessed some of the beatings and kept asking why it was happening and repeatedly asked the defendant to stop hurting her mother.

U.S. Attorney Anne Tompkins expressed her thanks to the Ashe County North Carolina Sheriff's Office and the FBI, as well as the Oklahoma authorities who assisted at the point where the truck was stopped. The prosecution was handled for the government by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kimlani M. Ford and Kurt Meyers of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Charlotte.