

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE EIGHTH CIRCUIT

Edgar Keaton Martin v. United States of America

904 F.3d 594 (8th Cir. 2018) · No. No. 17-2232 · Decided September 14, 2018

SUMMARY

The Eighth Circuit affirmed the denial of Edgar Martin’s successive 28 U.S.C. § 2255 motion challenging his Armed Career Criminal Act sentence. The court held that Martin’s Arkansas first-degree terroristic-threatening convictions qualified as violent felonies under the ACCA’s force clause, applying the modified categorical approach and relying on the controlling decision in *United States v. Myers*. The court alternatively held that *Descamps* and *Mathis* did not establish new retroactive constitutional rules authorizing successive collateral relief.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Loken, Circuit Judge; Smith, Chief Judge; Wollman, Circuit Judge
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	September 14, 2018
DOCKET	No. 17-2232
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Martin appealed the denial of his successive 28 U.S.C. § 2255 motion challenging his Armed Career Criminal Act sentence. The district court rejected his argument on the merits but granted a certificate of appealability.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed the legal issues de novo.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published and precedential
PARTIES	Edgar Keaton Martin v. United States of America

TOPICS

[federal habeas corpus](#) [post-conviction relief](#) [sentencing](#) [statutory interpretation](#) [appellate procedure](#)

PRACTICE AREAS

[criminal procedure](#) [post-conviction relief](#) [sentencing](#) [constitutional law](#) [appellate procedure](#)

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Martin's Arkansas first-degree terroristic-threatening convictions qualified as violent felonies under the ACCA's force clause.
2. Whether *Descamps v. United States* and *Mathis v. United States* required reconsideration of the Eighth Circuit's prior determination that Arkansas first-degree terroristic threatening is a divisible offense subject to the modified categorical approach.
3. Whether *Descamps* and *Mathis* established new constitutional rules made retroactive on collateral review, thereby authorizing successive relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2255(h)(2).

HOLDINGS

1. Martin's two Arkansas first-degree terroristic-threatening convictions qualified as violent felonies under the ACCA's force clause because the statute is divisible and the relevant state-court documents established that Martin was convicted of threatening to use physical force against another person.
2. *Descamps* and *Mathis* did not require reconsideration of the controlling Eighth Circuit precedent that Arkansas first-degree terroristic threatening is divisible and subject to the modified categorical approach.
3. Martin was not eligible for successive § 2255 relief based on *Descamps* and *Mathis* because those decisions did not announce new rules of constitutional law made retroactive to cases on collateral review by the Supreme Court.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“In United States v. Myers, 896 F.3d 866 (8th Cir. 2018), we concluded that (i) Mathis did not address the ACCA’s force clause and therefore does not require reconsideration of the otherwise controlling decision in Boaz I that § 5-13-301(a)(1)(A) “is divisible, and requires the modified categorical approach,” id. at 869; (ii) even if the Mathis analysis applies, “this court must look to the record of conviction to determine whether Myers’ conviction for terroristic threatening is a crime of violence,” id. at 871; and (iii) the state court Sentencing Order confirmed that Myers was convicted of a violent felony under the force clause for “threaten[ing] to kill his girlfriend,” id.” (904 F.3d at 596)

“Our decision in Myers that § 5-13-301(a)(1)(A), the Arkansas first-degree terroristic threatening statute, “is divisible, and requires the modified categorical approach,” is controlling on our panel.” (904 F.3d at 597)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Martin was convicted of being a felon in possession of a firearm and received a 188-month sentence under the Armed Career Criminal Act. The sentence rested in part on two Arkansas first-degree terroristic-threatening convictions. The charging documents for those convictions alleged that Martin threatened physical injury to an officer and threatened to kill a woman he held captive.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

A jury convicted Martin of being a felon in possession of a firearm, and the district court imposed a 188-month ACCA sentence based on at least three prior violent felony convictions. The Eighth Circuit affirmed his conviction and sentence, and the district court later denied his initial § 2255 motion. After *Johnson v. United*

States invalidated the ACCA residual clause and *Welch v. United States* made *Johnson* retroactive, the Eighth Circuit authorized Martin to file a successive § 2255 motion. The district court denied relief, and the Eighth Circuit affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- *United States v. Martin*, 493 F. App'x 814 (8th Cir. 2012)
- *United States v. Martin*, No. 4:09CR00133 JLH, 2014 WL 2946262 (E.D. Ark. June 27, 2014)
- *Johnson v. United States*, 135 S. Ct. 2551, 2557 (2015)
- *Welch v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 1257, 1265, 1268 (2016)
- *Martin v. United States*, No. 16-2296 (8th Cir. July 8, 2016)
- *United States v. Boaz*, 558 F.3d 800, 807 (8th Cir. 2009)
- *Boaz v. United States*, 884 F.3d 808, 809 (8th Cir. 2018)
- *United States v. Headbird*, 813 F.3d 1092, 1095-96 (8th Cir. 2016)
- *United States v. Swopes*, 886 F.3d 668, 670-71 (8th Cir. 2018) (en banc)
- *Descamps v. United States*, 570 U.S. 254, 257, 260 (2013)
- *Mathis v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 2243, 2253, 2257 (2016)
- *United States v. Myers*, 896 F.3d 866, 869-71 (8th Cir. 2018)

OPINION

LOKEN, J.

United States Court of Appeals For the Eighth Circuit _____ No. 17-2232 _____ Edgar Keaton Martin llllllllllllllllllllPlaintiff - Appellant v. United States of America llllllllllllllllllllDefendant - Appellee _____ Appeal from United States District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas - Little Rock _____ Submitted: April 12, 2018 Filed: September 14, 2018 _____ Before SMITH, Chief Judge, WOLLMAN and LOKEN, Circuit Judges. _____ LOKEN, Circuit Judge.

A jury convicted Edgar Martin of being a felon in possession of a firearm. The district court1 concluded he had at least three prior violent felony convictions and sentenced him under the Armed Career Criminal Act (ACCA) to 188 months 1 The Honorable J. Leon Holmes, United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Arkansas. imprisonment. See 18 U.S.C. § 924(e).

We affirmed his conviction and sentence, *United States v. Martin*, 493 F. App'x 814 (8th Cir. 2012), and the district court denied his 28 U.S.C. § 2255 motion for post-conviction relief, *United States v. Martin*, No. 4:09CR00133 JLH, 2014 WL 2946262 (E.D. Ark. June 27, 2014).

In 2015, the Supreme Court struck down the ACCA's "residual clause" as unconstitutionally vague in *Johnson v. United States*, 135 S. Ct. 2551, 2557 (2015), a decision the Supreme Court applied retroactively to cases on collateral review in *Welch v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 1257, 1265 (2016).

We granted Martin's petition for permission to file a successive § 2255 motion alleging that his prior felony convictions were unlawfully determined to be violent felonies under the residual clause. *Martin v. United States*, No. 16-2296 (8th Cir. July 8, 2016); see § 2255(h).

In the district court, Martin moved to vacate his sentence, arguing he lacked the three prior violent felony convictions required to trigger ACCA sentencing because his two Arkansas convictions for first-degree terroristic threatening were not violent felonies. This new argument does not warrant successive § 2255 relief under *Johnson* because Martin's terroristic threatening convictions were classified as violent felonies under the ACCA's "force clause," 18 U.S.C. § 924(e)(2)(B)(i), not the residual clause in § 924(e)(2)(B)(ii) that was invalidated in *Johnson*.

See *Welch*, 136 S. Ct. at 1268. Moreover, in *United States v. Boaz*, 558 F.3d 800, 807 (8th Cir. 2009) ("Boaz I"), we held that the Arkansas terroristic threatening statute was properly classified as a violent felony under the force clause because "review of permissible materials shows Boaz pleaded guilty to threatening to kill a woman." However, Martin argues, the Supreme Court's recent decisions in *Descamps v. United States*, 570 U.S. 254 (2013), and *Mathis v. United States*, 136 S. Ct.

2243 (2016), established that his terroristic threatening convictions were improperly classified as violent felonies under the force clause because each subsection of the first-degree terroristic threatening statute, Ark. Code Ann. § 5-13-301(a)(1), is overbroad and indivisible.

The district court rejected this argument on the merits but granted Martin a certificate of appealability. Reviewing these issues *de novo*, we affirm. -2- We begin with a summary of the established judicial formula for determining whether a prior conviction qualifies as a "violent felony" under the ACCA: [C]ourts use a categorical approach that looks to the fact of conviction and the statutory elements of the prior offense.

In cases where a statute describes alternate ways of committing a crime -- only some of which satisfy the definition of a violent felony -- courts may use a modified categorical approach and examine a limited set of documents to determine whether a defendant was necessarily convicted of a violent felony. These materials include charging documents, jury instructions, plea agreements, transcripts of plea colloquies, or "some comparable judicial record." *United States v. Headbird*, 813 F.3d 1092, 1095-96 (8th Cir.

2016) (citations omitted). In determining if a conviction was a violent felony under the ACCA's force clause, we examine whether "the conviction, based on the elements of the offense, necessarily involved the 'use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against the person

of another.” *Boaz v. United States*, 884 F.3d 808, 809 (8th Cir.), quoting 18 U.S.C. § 924(e)(2)(B)(i), cert. denied, 138 S. Ct.

2695 (2018). If there is a “‘realistic probability’... that the statute encompasses conduct that does not involve use or threatened use of violent force,” the statute “sweeps more broadly” than the ACCA’s definition of violent felony. *United States v. Swopes*, 886 F.3d 668, 670-71 (8th Cir. 2018) (en banc).

The Arkansas terroristic threatening statute provides, in relevant part: “A person commits the offense of terroristic threatening in the first degree if: (A) With the purpose of terrorizing another person, the person threatens to cause death or serious physical injury or substantial property damage to another person....” Ark. Code Ann. § 5-13-301(a)(1)(A).

In *Boaz I*, we applied the modified categorical approach to this statute because it “defines two separate offenses: threats of death or serious bodily injury and threats to property.” 558 F.3d at 807. -3- In *Descamps*, the Supreme Court noted that it had applied the modified categorical approach only if a state statute was “divisible,” that is, a statute that “sets out one or more elements of the offense in the alternative.” 570 U.S. at 257.

In *Mathis*, resolving a circuit conflict, the Court held that the modified categorical approach may not be applied if a statute, instead of defining multiple crimes by listing elements in the alternative, merely “lists alternative means of fulfilling one (or more)” elements. 136 S. Ct. at 2253. *Martin* argues that each subsection of § 5-13-301(a)(1) is both indivisible (precluding use of the modified categorical approach) and overbroad (because it criminalizes threats of physical injury or property damage to another person).

Therefore, he argues, an Arkansas first-degree terroristic threatening conviction is not a violent felony under the ACCA’s force clause. In preparing for oral argument, we discovered that this same argument had been submitted two months earlier to another panel in *United States v. Myers*, No. 17- 2415, a case arising on direct appeal rather than by a successive § 2255 motion.

To conserve resources and avoid possible inconsistent panel rulings that would require en banc attention, we had this case submitted without argument and awaited the other panel’s decision. In *United States v. Myers*, 896 F.3d 866 (8th Cir. 2018), we concluded that (i) *Mathis* did not address the ACCA’s force clause and therefore does not require reconsideration of the otherwise controlling decision in *Boaz I* that § 5- 13-301(a)(1)(A) “is divisible, and requires the modified categorical approach,” *id.* at 869; (ii) even if the *Mathis* analysis applies, “this court must look to the record of conviction to determine whether *Myers*’ conviction for terroristic threatening is a crime of violence,” *id.* at 871; and (iii) the state court Sentencing Order confirmed that *Myers* was convicted of a violent felony under the force clause for “threaten[ing] to kill his girlfriend,” *id.* On August 29, we denied his petition for rehearing en banc.

Our decision in Myers that § 5-13-301(a)(1)(A), the Arkansas first-degree terroristic threatening statute, “is divisible, and requires the modified categorical approach,” is controlling on our panel. Here, as in Myers, state court documents that -4- may be examined using the modified categorical approach establish that Martin was twice convicted of the ACCA violent felony of threatening to use physical force against another person.

In one case, the Felony Information charged that Martin “threatened to cause physical injury to Officer Kevin Brown.” In the other case, the Felony Information charged that Martin “threatened to kill [the victim] if she tried to leave him during the time he held her captive.” Thus, on this record, Myers and Boaz I establish that Martin was properly sentenced under the ACCA.

Alternatively, we conclude that Martin is not eligible for successive § 2255 relief. The recent Supreme Court decisions on which he relies -- Descamps and Mathis – did not announce “a new rule of constitutional law, made retroactive to cases on collateral review by the Supreme Court.” 28 U.S.C. § 2255(h)(2).

First, these decisions are simply the Supreme Court’s latest interpretations of the categorical approach the Court has long applied in deciding whether a prior conviction is an ACCA violent felony. See Mathis, 136 S. Ct. at 2257 (“For more than 25 years, we have repeatedly made clear that application of the ACCA involves, and involves only, comparing elements.”); Descamps, 570 U.S. at 260 (“Our caselaw explaining the categorical approach and its ‘modified’ counterpart all but resolves this case.”); Headbird, 813 F.3d at 1096.

Second, the Supreme Court has not declared either Descamps or Mathis retroactive, as Johnson was declared retroactive in Welch. Indeed, in Welch the Court noted that, on remand, the court of appeals might decide that “Welch’s strong-arm robbery conviction qualifies as a violent felony under the [force] clause of the Act, which would make Welch eligible for a 15-year sentence regardless of Johnson.” 136 S. Ct. at 1268 (emphasis added).

For these reasons, we affirm the Order of the district court dated May 16, 2017.