

Man gets life in prison for armored car robbery

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A Detroit man faces mandatory life in prison without parole after a federal jury convicted him Thursday of murder in the 2001 armed robbery of an armored truck in Dearborn.

A jury of six men and six women convicted **Earl L. Johnson**, 40, of conspiracy, bank robbery, and aiding and abetting a murder. The murder charge, involving a firearm while committing a violent crime, carries mandatory life with no parole under federal law.

Johnson shook his head and turned back to smile at his wife and parents after the jury forewoman pronounced him guilty on all three counts.

Three other men charged in the case, who have yet to come to trial, face possible death sentences if convicted.

"The verdict today is just chapter one of the chapters in this case," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Bullotta. "It's brought some measure of justice and relief to the family. There's still work to do."

Witnesses who testified at the weeklong trial before U.S. District Judge Victoria A. Roberts said **Johnson** helped plan the Dec. 14, 2001, robbery, conducted surveillance of the Dearborn Federal Credit Union, and recruited others who participated.

Johnson carried a handgun and grabbed bags of cash from the armored truck but did not fire either of the two shotgun blasts to the back that killed Norman "Anthony" Stephens, a 30-year-old Detroit husband and father of six, the court was told.

Prosecutors said although **Johnson** did not pull the trigger, he was still guilty of murder because he was part of the conspiracy and a reasonable person would know someone could likely be killed committing the heist.

Stephens' sister, Dorothy Parker of Detroit wept quietly after the verdict and said she hoped it would deter others from planning and carrying out similar armed robberies.

Tiffany Hoskin, 26, Stephens' niece, said the verdict does not lessen the family's grief.

"I don't feel any remorse for him but my heart goes out to his family," Hoskin said. "I wouldn't wish what we had to endure on anyone."

The crime remained unsolved for three years, until a prisoner at the Ryan Correctional Facility reportedly began bragging about his and others' roles in the robbery and 2004 and was secretly tape-recorded by another inmate.

Johnson , a former line worker at Ford Motor Co., testified he was not involved in the robbery and could not run or drive a vehicle at the time because of an injured Achilles tendon.

Johnson 's lawyer, Jim Feinberg, said appeals are being considered.

Jurors deliberated less than six hours over two days.

Johnson , who remains in custody, is to be sentenced April 22.

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