

## CHARGES CALLED END TO DRUG GANG'S GRAB

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Author: JOE SWICKARD, JOHN DUNPHY and ERIC KINKOPF , e Press Staff Writers

A sweeping federal indictment, aimed at the brains and muscles of **Pony Down** , has ended what authorities allege was a brief but bloody grab by a highly structured drug gang to seize control of the Detroit narcotics market.

But law enforcement officials and others familiar with the often factionalized drug world predicted that other organizations will try to take over the gang's lucrative share of Detroit's multimillion-dollar dope trade.

The pattern -- fueled by fantastic profits for those willing to take the risks -- was perpetuated by the **Pony Down** gang when they allegedly tried to corner much of the area's drug market after leaders of Young Boys Inc. were rounded up, convicted and jailed by federal authorities in 1982 and 1983.

A federal grand jury, in a 49-count indictment unsealed Tuesday, charged 38 alleged members of the **Pony Down** group with drug, conspiracy, income tax, racketeering and firearms violations.

**PONY DOWN** , apparently modeled after the Young Boys Inc., allegedly sold and distributed large quantities of heroin and cocaine using a network of teenage street dealers hawking drugs identified by brand names such as " **Pony** ," "Nodd City" and "Atomic Dog."

The federal indictment charges that security was provided by a "Wrecking **Crew** ," an enforcement arm responsible for physically intimidating -- or "wrecking" -- transgressors.

**Pony Down** allegedly was run by LeRoy Buttrom Willis, 35, who is being sought. Other alleged leaders, according to the indictment, include Robert Latine, Willie Burch Dawson, and Willis' brothers -- Anthony, Larry and Walter Buttrom.

Authorities, who estimated the operation was grossing \$100 million annually in 1983, charge that street-corner shootings, a toddler's kidnapping and a man allegedly beaten to death as a lesson to straying gang members are parts of the gang's legacy.

"WE'VE REACHED the top, wiped out the top," said Lt. Ronald Cronin of the Detroit Police Department narcotics section. "Now, they'll have to start all over."

But Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer, who headed Detroit's narcotics section from 1975 to 1981, said the potential profits will attract new challengers.

"It's a made a significant dent in the heroin trafficking, but it's only a temporary dent. Other dealers will take over; they're waiting in the wings. It's not going to solve the narcotics problem. To do that, you have to take the profit out of narcotics," said Dwyer, adding that a kilo of heroin costing \$25,000 to \$30,000 can produce \$2.5 million in street sales.

The large profits allegedly reaped by the gang also attracted attention from outside law enforcement authorities.

In September 1983, a 2 1/2-year-old relative of Buttrom was kidnapped and held for \$100,000 ransom. But the police-monitored payoff ended in a shoot-out when the child's uncle, Walter Buttrom, and another relative, Darryl Young, tried to gun **down** the man collecting the ransom.

The child was released unharmed at a fast-food restaurant after the bungled ransom drop.

Both Walter Buttrom and Young are charged in the federal drug indictment.

ALLEGEDLY starting as small-scale dealers on Detroit's west side in 1980, the **Pony Down** gang, which may have taken its name from a popular, expensive leather athletic shoe, became prominent in 1982 with a series of street-corner shootings, according to law enforcement officials who have tracked them.

After the leaders of Young Boys Inc. were removed from the scene, the officials said, the **Pony Down** gang persuaded the street-level salesmen to switch allegiances. Often the recruiting pitch was backed by gunplay, investigators said.

In a 1983 interview, one local police official described the gang's method as "just pull up to a street corner and shoot at the remnants of YBI who were still working. They're crazy. They all think they're Al Capone."

At least two slayings and numerous shootings in early 1983 were linked by officials to the gang's drive for control.

A notorious May 1983 Detroit murder was laid to the **Wrecking Crew** by the federal indictment. The victim, Douglas Pace, was beaten with baseball bats in a vacant house on the 21100 block of Pickford because he was believed to be ripping off the **Pony** runners.

More than two dozen suspects were originally arrested when police raided the house and found Pace's battered body in the basement. Investigators believe Pace was killed in front of other gang members as a graphic lesson about the importance of loyalty.

No charges were ever brought in local court because authorities were unable to determine who struck the blows and who merely watched.

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