

'AK-47 Bandit ' sentenced to 227 years

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By Paul Egan

The Detroit News

DETROIT — The leader of a violent gang of bank robbers who shot a teller and a police officer and made off with more than \$750,000 over two years was sentenced Wednesday in federal court to 227 years in prison.

"These were horrific crimes and very, very violent crimes," U.S. District Judge Sean F. Cox told the group's leader, Andre Jones, 28, of Detroit. "The emotional trauma to those bank employees ... is something they will never overcome."

Jones, leader of the gang known as the " **AK-47 Bandits** " because of the type of weapons members carried, admitted to robbing nine banks in Livonia, Southfield, Dearborn Heights, Southfield, Troy, Sterling Heights, Flint and Toledo in 2006 and 2007.

The non-fatal shootings committed by Jones happened during a Sterling Heights robbery in November 2007 and a police stop in Detroit.

"I've obviously made many mistakes in my life, some of which I have to use the rest of my life pay for," Jones told the judge, while begging for leniency for his 23-year-old spouse, Sparkle Eldridge, who was a getaway driver and is the mother of his two sons.

On Tuesday, Cox gave co-accused Jawan Martin, 28, of Detroit a 32-year sentence. Martin pleaded guilty Sept. 22 to two counts of using and carrying a firearm during a crime of violence. All of the defendants will have to pay \$633,492 in restitution to the nine banks robbed in 2006 and 2007.

Four other members of the ring pleaded guilty earlier and two are behind bars.

"This was one of the longest and most violent crime sprees in the city's recent history," Assistant U.S. Attorney Leonid Feller, the lead prosecutor in the case, told Cox Wednesday.

Eldridge is to be sentenced Jan. 14.

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