



ATF News

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
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ATF, Fort Wayne Police Partnership Led to Conviction of Crew Associated with Gang Members

FT. WAYNE, Ind. — Melvin Taylor is the most recent crew member associated with a known gang member removed from the Ft. Wayne area through the partnership with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Fort Wayne Police Department (FWPD). Taylor was found guilty today in U.S. District Court of armed drug trafficking and conspiracy to distribute cocaine. Taylor could receive a sentence in excess of the statutory mandatory minimum 15 years imprisonment. A nine-month investigation into the 5th Avenue Vice Lords resulted in seven federal and one state indictment of gang members Clarence Bibbins, Devon Matthews, Marlyn Barnes and his crew members Michael Alexander, Theodis Armstead, Vernell Brown, Herbert Hightower and Melvin Taylor.

The investigation began in October 2005 with Bibbins, a longtime Vice Lord gang member from Gary, Ind. Bibbins came to Ft. Wayne with fellow Vice Lords Matthews and Marlyn Barnes. In October 2005 Bibbins and Matthews committed an armed carjacking. Bibbins, a multiple convicted felon, was charged federally as a convicted felon in possession of a firearm and was sentenced to 63 months imprisonment. Matthews was charged in Allen County Superior Court with carjacking and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

A Ft. Wayne Police officer, detailed to ATF as a task force officer (TFO), became involved in the carjacking investigation. The TFO and an ATF special agent obtained the cooperation of Bibbins and initiated an investigation regarding Barnes and the Vice Lords from Gary. Garret Police Department and Dekalb County Sheriff Department later joined the investigation as the gang member's criminal activity extended to those areas.

ATF and the FWPD developed information and intelligence regarding the Vice Lords operating in Ft. Wayne. The gang members were committing violent crimes and dealing narcotics while armed. The investigation intensified when Barnes learned of a possible delivery of more than 20 kilograms of cocaine to the Ft. Wayne area. Barnes then recruited his crew members from Gary to assist in coming to Ft. Wayne where they planned an armed robbery of the narcotics delivery.

All six crew members were arrested on May 5, 2006, prior to the robbery. Upon arrest, ATF recovered two firearms a Ruger P-89, 9mm pistol and a Sig Sauer P229, .40 caliber pistol, 5 magazines and more than 80 rounds of ammunition. Additionally, ATF recovered a duffle bag that Barnes had packed, which contained an AK 47 rifle with a 75 round drum magazine, Kel-Tec 5.56 caliber pistol,

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two banana clips (30 round capacity), 125 rounds of ammunition and two bulletproof vests to use during the robbery.

Of the six crew members arrested in May 2006 and charged in the drug trafficking conspiracy, four pleaded guilty and two were convicted by federal juries. The disposition of the all eight individuals is as follows:

- Clarence Bibbins was indicted and pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court as a previously convicted felon in possession of a firearm. Bibbins was sentenced to five years, three months (63 months) imprisonment in federal prison.
- Michael Alexander was indicted and pleaded guilty in February 2007 in U.S. District Court to conspiracy to distribute cocaine. Alexander is currently facing a sentence of 10 years imprisonment.
- Vernell Brown was indicted and pleaded guilty in March 2008 in U.S. District Court to conspiracy to distribute cocaine. Brown is currently facing a sentence of 10 years imprisonment.
- Herbert Hightower was indicted and pleaded guilty in December 2006 in U.S. District Court to conspiracy to distribute cocaine. Hightower is facing a sentence of 10 years imprisonment.
- Marlyn Barnes was tried and convicted in February 2008 in U.S. District Court of conspiracy to distribute cocaine and armed drug trafficking. Barnes is awaiting sentencing and is facing a statutory mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.
- Melvin Taylor was tried and convicted in U.S. District Court in April 2008 of conspiracy to distribute cocaine and armed drug trafficking. Taylor could receive a sentence in excess of 15 years imprisonment.
- Theoidis Armstead indicted and pleaded guilty in March 2008 in U.S. District Court to conspiracy to distribute cocaine and armed drug trafficking. Armstead is facing a sentence of 10 years imprisonment.
- Devon Matthews was tried and convicted in July 2006 in Allen County Superior Court for carjacking. Matthews was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

ATF is the federal agency with jurisdiction for enforcing federal firearms laws. ATF and the FWPD Gang Unit are committed to removing the tools of the trade — firearms — from gang members. The FWPD Gang Unit comprises five FWPD officers and an ATF special agent; and is partially funded by a Department of Justice Project Safe Neighborhood grant. This investigation included ATF, FWPD, Garret Police Department, Dekalb County Sheriff Department, U.S. Attorney's Office and the Allen County Prosecutor's Office.

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Since its formation in July 2007, the Gang Unit, made up of FWPD and ATF, has employed a comprehensive approach to stemming the tide of gang activity. In addition to law enforcement activities such as conducting investigations, interviews and patrolling, the Gang Unit takes proactive steps to reach out to gang members, their families and the schools through community outreach.

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