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TWO FORT DEPOSIT MEN CONVICTED OF LOWNDES COUNTY CARJACKING

Montgomery, Alabama - Wayne Ware, age 25, and James Steiner, age 20, both of Fort Deposit, Alabama, were convicted on October 1, 2009, for their roles in a carjacking in Lowndes County that occurred on January 16, 2009, U.S. Attorney Leura G. Canary announced today. Ware and Steiner were both convicted of conspiracy to commit carjacking, carjacking, and using a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence by a jury after a four-day joint trial in United States District Court in Montgomery.

The evidence at trial showed that Ware, Steiner, and two co-conspirators followed a car with four teenagers in it from the Fort Deposit Chevron gas station late on January 16, 2009. They then intentionally caused an accident with the victims' car to force the car to stop along an isolated country road outside Fort Deposit. At that point Ware, Steiner, and their co-conspirators exited their vehicle. Two of them had firearms and began shooting in the direction of the victims' car. The victims' car attempted to escape but the shooting caused the vehicle to drive into a ditch and hit a tree.

At that point, two of the victims were able to escape into the surrounding woods. The other two victims were left behind. Ware, Steiner, and their two accomplices then robbed the two victims at gunpoint. When their own vehicle would not start, Ware, Steiner, and the other two assailants forced the victims to turn over their keys and held them at gunpoint while they pushed the victims' car out of the ditch.

While the four assailants were working to get the victims' car out of the ditch, another vehicle happened to drive down the same road towards the scene of the crime. When that driver stopped to assist in what he thought was a traffic accident, the assailants opened fire on him, hitting his vehicle at least two times before he drove off to safety. One of the bullets went through the front windshield and caused flying glass to cut and injure the driver's face, hands, and eyes.

Ware, Steiner, and their two accomplices then finished getting the victims' car out of the ditch and drove away, leaving two victims behind at the scene. The two victims at the scene were uninjured and the other two victims who escaped into the woods were later located uninjured as well.

Ware, Steiner, and their co-conspirators were quickly spotted by local law enforcement as they drove away in the victims' car, but were able to elude capture after a high-speed chase. They abandoned the victims' car in Fort Deposit and then escaped on foot.

Later investigation led to the identification of Ware and Steiner. Their two co-conspirators in the case have also been identified and charged. One, Jihad Walker, age 19, of Fort Deposit, pled guilty in federal court on September 15, 2009, to carjacking and is awaiting sentencing. The other, Torie Wilson, age 23, also of Fort Deposit, was indicted on federal charges of carjacking and using a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence. Wilson is scheduled for trial on December 7, 2009, in Montgomery.

Ware and Steiner will be sentenced at a later date set by the court. At sentencing Ware and Steiner face maximum punishments of five years in federal prison for the conspiracy, fifteen years for the carjacking, and a mandatory minimum of ten years up to a maximum of life in prison for using the firearm. The sentence for the firearm charge must be served consecutively

to any sentence either receives for the conspiracy or carjacking. There is no parole from federal prison.

The case was investigated as part of the Department of Justice's Project Safe Neighborhoods and Middle District of Alabama's Alabama ICE programs, aimed at preventing violent crime and the illegal possession and use of firearms. According to United States Attorney Leura G. Canary, "This case was about a violent carjacking in which several innocent victims were terrorized by these defendants. Their conviction will make our community safer and protect potential victims from further attacks by these individuals."

This case was investigated through the joint efforts of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives ("ATF"), the Alabama Bureau of Investigation, the Lowndes County Sheriff's Office, and the Fort Deposit Police Department. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Matthew Shepherd and Louis V. Franklin, Sr.