

09-18-06 -- Gantt, Steven -- Indictment -- News Release

Camden Man Arraigned on Federal Indictment For String of Armed Bank Robberies

CAMDEN – A Camden man was arraigned on a two-count federal Indictment today for his role in a string of nine bank robberies that were committed at gunpoint, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Steven Gantt, 40, was arraigned before U.S. Magistrate Ann Marie Donio on one count of conspiracy to commit robbery and one count of carrying and brandishing a firearm during and in relation to the commission of a crime of violence. Judge Donio ordered the defendant to be detained pending trial. Gantt's co-defendant Walter Johnson, 33, also of Camden, is scheduled to be arraigned on the Indictment before Judge Donio on Sept. 22.

On August 23, Gantt and Johnson were arrested in Camden on state charges as a result of an eight-month investigation by the FBI, Camden County Prosecutor's Office, and the police departments of Bellmawr, Camden, Cherry Hill, and Gloucester Township. The defendants have been detained on the state charges in lieu of \$500,000 bail. The U.S. Attorney's Office adopted the case for prosecution.

According to the Indictment, which was returned by a federal grand jury on Sept. 9, between December 2005 and September 2006, Gantt and Johnson conspired with one another, and others, to commit a series of bank robberies. As part of the conspiracy, the defendants attempted to conceal their identities by wearing gloves, masks, and head coverings and stole automobiles to travel to and flee from the banks. According to the Indictment, the defendants, who were armed with guns while committing the robberies, took control over the customers and bank employees by threats and use of physical violence, including the pointing of firearms at victims.

According to the Indictment, the defendants stole U.S. currency from banks as follows:

- Dec. 2, 2005 Commerce Bank, Bellmawr \$12,129
- Dec. 15, 2005 Commerce Bank, Gloucester Twp. \$25,963
- Feb. 2, 2006 Commerce Bank, Bellmawr \$12,845
- March 7, 2006 Commerce Bank, Cherry Hill \$2,226
- March 25, 2006 Commerce Bank, Camden \$12,350
- April 22, 2006 PNC Bank, Cherry Hill \$20,500
- May 30, 2006 Commerce Bank, Sicklerville, \$8,900
- July 21, 2006 Commerce Bank, Mount Holly \$4,945
- Aug. 1, 2006 Commerce Bank, York, PA \$34,000

The charge of conspiracy to commit robbery carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000 or twice the aggregate loss to the victims or gain to the defendants. The count of carrying and brandishing a firearm during and in relation to the commission of a crime of violence carries a maximum prison term of 10 years, which is consecutive to any other prison term because a firearm was actually discharged in the May 30 bank robbery.

In determining an actual sentence, the judge to whom the case is assigned would, upon a conviction, consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Despite indictment, each of the defendants is presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI's South Jersey Resident Agency, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge J.P. Weis in Philadelphia, the Camden County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Acting Prosecutor James P. Lynch, the Bellmawr Police Department, under the direction of Chief William Walsh, the Camden Police Department, under the direction of Police

Executive Arturo Venegas, the Cherry Hill Police Department, under the direction of Chief Charlie Jones, and the Gloucester Township Police Department, under the direction of Chief Edward S. Smith, with the investigation leading to the Indictment.

The Government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jacqueline Carle of the Criminal Division in Camden.

– end –