

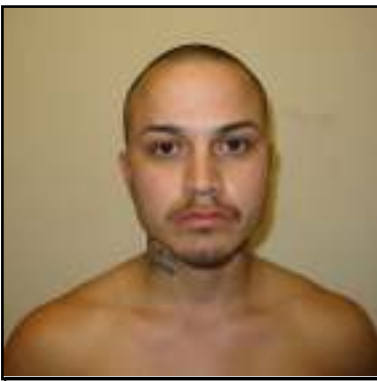
On June 7th a Stanislaus County Superior Court jury returned guilty verdicts of guilty on brothers, Jose & Willie Torres (Modesto) and Lawrence Mejia (San Jose) for multiple counts of robbery, committing a crime for the benefit of a street gang, and personal use of a firearm. The trial attorney was Deputy District attorney and Gang Impact Task Force member Doug Maner.

At 1140pm, on May 22,'05 Norteno gang members Lawrence Mejia & Jose Torres committed an armed robbery of the AM\PM mini mart in Riverbank. They stole a small amount of cash and beer. They threatened two witnesses at gunpoint who saw them flee in a beat up pick up truck. Less than one hour later Torres & Mejia robbed the Stop 'n' Save on Yosemite Blvd in Modesto, stealing a small amount of cash and cigarettes.

Two days later, at 3am, Torres & Mejia committed another armed robbery of a convenience store. This time they robbed the Quikstop store on Carpenter road in Modesto, and took a small amount of \$250 and cigarettes. Less than twenty minutes later, they were joined by fellow gang member Willie Torres and robbed the AM\PM minimart on Standiford, in Modesto of \$130 and two cartons of Camel Cigarettes

After hearing about the last robbery, Modesto Police Sgt. Dave Van Diemen noticed that the robberies two days earlier had many similarities and obtained a vehicle description which be broadcast to his fellow officers. Officer Gutierrez had previously been watching a suspicious pick up near the AM/PM before robbery that matched this description. Two suspects near the vehicle fled when they saw the officer approaching. The driver of the vehicle was taken into custody while a perimeter was set up in an attempt to locate the suspects who ran. The driver, Willie Torres Jr., DOB: 06-08-81, who is an active parolee and documented Norteno gang member, was arrested.

Due to the suspects being armed with handguns during the robbery, the Modesto Police Department SWAT Team was activated to conduct a yard-to-yard search of the homes within the perimeter. During the extensive search, a second suspect, **Lawrence Mejia, DOB: 12-03-84**, was located and arrested, a semi-automatic pistol and a mask used during one of the robberies was found nearby. The third suspect eluded capture, however. Detectives followed up on leads in an attempt to identify him. **Jose Torres, DOB: 04-24-83**, who is a documented West Coast Norteno and brother of the driver, Willie Torres, was identified as the third suspect in the robberies.



Jose Torres  
DOB: 04-24-83



Willie Torres  
DOB: 06-08-81



Lawrence Mejia  
DOB: 12-03-84

On 05-26-05, at 1900 hours, members of the MPD Street Crimes Unit began searching for Jose Torres. The team developed information that Torres was staying at a residence in Oakdale. Oakdale PD set up surveillance and said they believed Torres was at the 3rd Street residence. Teaming up with Oakdale PD and the Gang Impact Task Force, police detained a group of men in front of the house. One of the men was identified as Torres. Jose Torres was arrested for the prior 211's, while two other juvenile suspects were arrested for unrelated offenses.

During the trial expert witness testimony was presented by Modesto Police detectives Al Brocchini and Rich Delgado on robberies and criminal street gangs. All of the robberies were captured by in store video surveillance. Modesto Police officer Mike Hicks obtained the surveillance films and formatted them so that they could be played in court. Turlock Police Detective and Sacramento Hi-Tech Task Force member Kipp Loving obtained the cell phone of Mejia, and recovered extensive evidence of Mejia's gang ties, including this photo where he appears to be practicing for a robbery.



The District Attorneys office was fortunate to be able to take advantage of the expertise of these highly skilled officers and present the evidence to the jury in a logical and cohesive manner. After convicting these defendants of virtually all the crimes they were charged with, the jurors were interviewed. They praised the skill and professionalism of these officers. Sentencing will be on July 17 where it is expected that the defendants will be sentenced to many decades in prison.