



# 2 found not guilty in motorcycle gang trial

Updated 11/22/2008 6:44 AM | Comments 17 | Recommend 3 | E-mail | Print | Reprints & Permissions | **RSS**



Enlarge By Cory Myers, (Sioux Falls, S.D.) Argus Leader, via AP

Outlaws members enter a campground in Custer State Park in South Dakota in August. A 2006 shootout at the park between Outlaws and Hells Angels left five injured.

By Josh Verges and Jeff Martin, USA TODAY

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — A two-week trial that put the spotlight on violence among rival motorcycle gangs ended here Thursday as two men involved with the Hells Angels were found not guilty of attempted murder.

The case stemmed from an August 2006 shootout in which three members of the rival motorcycle gang Outlaws and two others riding with them were injured.

As many as two dozen leather-clad Hells Angels members were in court as spectators at various times during the trial of Chad Wilson, 33, formerly of Lynnwood, Wash., who now lives in San Diego, and John Midmore, 35, of Valparaiso, Ind. Wilson was described in the state indictment as a Hells Angels member, and Midmore was described in the indictment as a "prospect."

The two bikers still face possible conspiracy-to-commit-murder charges, which were not part of the jury's verdict. Prosecutors said Thursday they were undecided whether they would seek to try the men on those charges.

The gunbattle, where Hells Angels and Outlaws began shooting at each other during a confrontation in a parking lot in western South Dakota, was part of a long-running, bloody feud, according to Steve Cook, president of the Midwest Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Investigators Association.

Violence between the two groups dates to the 1970s, Cook says. The South Dakota shooting, he said, "wasn't the first time, and it won't be the last time."

Custer County, S.D., State's Attorney Tracy Kelley argued that the two men affiliated with the Hells Angels pulled up in a pickup, and one of them got out and began shooting at a group of Outlaws and their acquaintances, injuring five of them.

Danny Neace, one of the Outlaws, testified that he was shot in the back and the leg, paralyzing him from the waist down. But defense lawyer David Kenner told jurors it was the Outlaws who fired first, and the outnumbered Wilson returned fire in self-defense.

Five rows on the defense's half of the courtroom were filled with Hells Angels last week. Their jackets, which a judge ordered them not to wear in the courtroom, indicated that they came from as far as California, British Columbia and Luxembourg. Only a few people attended in support of the Outlaws.

After the verdicts were announced, a dozen bikers streamed out of the courthouse. A few cut loose with shouts of celebration, and one man grabbed another in a bear hug.

The ongoing war between the Hells Angels and the Outlaws was a key part of the defense Kenner presented. Among the list of incidents he cited from federal court documents were:

- A July 2007 indictment in Boston. U.S. Attorney Michael Sullivan issued a statement mentioning the rivalry as his office announced the indictment of 15 members and associates of the Outlaws on drug and firearm charges. The Outlaws "have been engaged in a gang war with the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club that has resulted in numerous shootings and fatalities," the statement said.
- A July 2006 incident in which law officers met with Hells Angels leaders attending a bike rally in Cody, Wyo., and warned them of possible attacks by the Outlaws.

Chad Wilson



AP

John Midmore



AP

• An April 2006 incident during a swap meet in Indiana. Six members or associates of the Outlaws attacked Hells Angels with a hammer and motorcycle parts, according to an August 2007 indictment in Detroit, part of a federal racketeering case against the Outlaws which is ongoing.

The Hells Angels have 2,000 to 2,500 members in more than 230 chapters worldwide, according to an April 2008 U.S. Attorney General's report to Congress. There are chapters in 27 states, the report says.

The Outlaws have more than 1,700 members in 176 chapters worldwide, including 12 foreign countries, the attorney general's report states. The Outlaws have chapters in 21 states, according to the report.

Law enforcement officials who study biker gangs said last week that no outcome would stop the violence.

"They're like oil and water somewhat," said Sheriff Ron Merwin of Meade County, S.D., who deals with the influx of motorcycle clubs during the annual Sturgis, S.D., rally each August. "They're always going to be at odds."

*Verges and Martin report for the Argus Leader in Sioux Falls, S.D. Contributing: Peter Harriman, Matthew Gruchow, Argus Leader.*

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Posted 11/20/2008 10:14 PM

Updated 11/22/2008 6:44 AM

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