



OPERATION SILENT NIGHT

Burbank Police Department ♦ Los Angeles Police Department
United States Attorney's Office ♦ Drug Enforcement Administration

News Release

June 21, 2005

Release No. 1

43 MEMBERS OF SAN FERNANDO VALLEY STREET GANG NAMED IN FEDERAL RICO INDICTMENT THAT ALLEGES MURDER OF BURBANK POLICE OFFICER

Vineland Boys Street Gang Dismantled in Massive Police Action Prompted by Murder, Weapons and Narcotics Charges

Burbank, California: Twenty-three members of the Vineland Boys (VLB) street gang were arrested over the last 24 hours pursuant to a federal racketeering indictment that accuses them of a host of narcotic, weapon and violent crimes, including the murder of a 16-year-old witness and a Burbank Police Officer. Twelve other defendants are already in custody, including the man accused of pulling the trigger that killed Burbank Police Officer Matthew Pavelka. Eight of the 43 indicted persons remain at large.

The arrests came early this morning as part of Operation Silent Night, in which some 1300 law enforcement officers executed 43 search warrants, made 36 arrests, and seized 39 guns, over 12 pounds of narcotics (primarily marijuana), and \$30,000 cash.

The indictment accuses a total of 35 defendants with violating RICO, the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. The RICO and RICO conspiracy charges outline the establishment of the gang and how it grew in power, eventually developing a reputation as one of the most violent street gangs in the San Fernando Valley. The gang, which is made up of several cliques, exercises control in parts of Burbank, North Hollywood, Sun Valley and Palmdale. The indictment also details an arrangement the gang made with the Mexican Mafia, under which the gang agreed to pay "taxes" on its drug trafficking activities.

In addition to the two RICO counts, the 56-count indictment alleges six counts of violent crimes in aid of racketeering and the murder of a police officer in relation to a drug trafficking crime. A total of seven defendants are linked to four murders, and those seven defendants are eligible for the death penalty.

The indictment also alleges several weapons and money laundering charges. Many of the defendants are also accused in a conspiracy to distribute narcotics, including cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana. The drug conspiracy count alleges that the gang was distributing drugs in the Los Angeles area, but also in Hawaii and Indiana.

The case against the Vineland Boys gang members was announced at a press conference this afternoon by United States Attorney Debra Wong Yang, DEA Associate Special Agent in Charge Briane Grey, Burbank Police Chief Thomas Hoefel and Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton.

“The federal RICO statute has been an effective tool to fight criminal gangs, including violent street gangs who terrorize our neighborhoods,” said United States Attorney Debra Wong Yang. “It is particularly gratifying to see this powerful weapon used against those who would stop at nothing – not even killing a police officer – to protect their power.”

“The police community came together to assist the Burbank Police Department in arresting a Vineland Boys gang member for the murder of Officer Matthew Pavelka,” said Burbank Chief Thomas Hoefel. “This task force and these indictments represent the continuing cooperative efforts of local and federal law enforcement to wipe out the entire Vineland Boys Gang.”

“After Burbank Police Officer Matthew Pavelka was murdered, I made a promise that the Los Angeles Police Department would help to find his killers and eradicate the gang responsible for his death,” said LAPD Chief William Bratton. “Working with other local law enforcement agencies over the past 18 months, we have fulfilled that promise to the Pavelka family and to the communities that we serve. We are putting the Vineland Boys out of business.”

In addition to the 23 arrests of indicted subjects, the task force netted 13 additional arrests for a variety of narcotics and weapons violations, as well as arrest warrants, which brings the grand total to 36 arrests for *Operations Silent Night*.

Robert Corso, Associate Special Agent-in-Charge of the Los Angeles Division of the DEA stated, “The successful conclusion of this investigation exemplifies the true partnership that exists among federal, state, and local law enforcement in Southern California. We will continue to utilize all resources available to target and bring to justice those involved in illegal drug trafficking and gang activity.”

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“These criminals know no jurisdictional boundaries,” said Glendale Chief Randy G. Adams. “We have worked together in an unprecedented way with our local, state and federal counterparts to bring these criminals to justice.”

The following persons were named in the indictment. Underscored names indicate persons arrested during Operation Silent Night, June 21, 2005:

- Jose De Jesus Agredano, 39, a fugitive believed to be residing in Mexico;
- Espiridion Aranda, 26, of Sun Valley, who is currently in federal custody;
- Ricardo Avila, 29, of Sylmar;
- Eric Avina, 25, of Sun Valley, who is currently in state prison;
- Ruben Ayala, 30, of Sylmar;
- Ricardo Barba, 20, of Sun Valley;
- Jaime Bautista, 30, of Sun Valley;
- Gilberto Carrasco, 35, of Sun Valley;
- Carlos Able Cassillas, 34, of Sylmar;
- Carlos Campos, 34, of Winnetka;
- Saign Mahaya Charlsestein, 26, of Sylmar;
- Jesus Contreras, 32, of Sun Valley;
- Javier Covarrubias, 21, of Sun Valley, who is eligible for the death penalty in relation to the murder of a witness to a crime, and is already in state custody;
- David Garcia, 21, Sun Valley, who is currently in Los Angeles County jail facing charges of murdering a Police Officer and who faces a potential death penalty in the federal case;
- Luis Garcia, 32, of Rosamond;
- Juan Cedona Gomez, 41, of Bakersfield;
- Ignacio Haro, 26, of Sun Valley, previously in custody in Los Angeles County Jail;
- Joel Haro, 29, of Sun Valley;
- Baldemar Hernandez, 34, of Palmdale;
- Ameer Khan, 28, of North Hollywood;
- Jose Ledesma, 22, Sun Valley, who is currently in state prison and who is eligible for the death penalty in relation to the murder of the witness;

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- Marcelino Macias, 29, of Rosamond;
- Ruben Medina, 30, of Sun Valley;
- Ernesto Mendez, 38, of Sylmar;
- Jose Luis Mejia, 35, of Bakersfield;
- Sergio Mejia, 38, of Bakersfield;
- Joel Morin Rangel, 41, of Pacoima;
- Luz Maria Rangel, 29, of Pacoima;
- Raul Robledo, 27, of Sun Valley, who is eligible for the death penalty in relation to the murder of the witness, previously in custody;
- Agustin Rodriguez, 32, of Sun Valley, previously in custody;
- Gustavo Rodriguez, 31, Sun Valley, who is currently in federal prison and who is eligible for the death penalty in relation to the murder of a rival gangster;
- Alonzo Saenz Rangel, 35, of Valencia;
- Juan Salinas, 25, of Sun Valley;
- Alberto Sanchez, 28, of Perris, who is currently in jail in San Bernardino County;
- Arnold Sandoval, 30, of Sun Valley, who is currently in state prison;
- Jesus Sandoval, 22, of Sun Valley;
- Luis Sandoval, 22, Sun Valley, who is currently in state prison and who is eligible for the death penalty in relation to the murder of the witness;
- Cleto Vasquez, 31, of Sun Valley;
- Horacio Yepiz, 31, of Sun Valley, who was already in federal custody and who is eligible for the death penalty in relation to the murder of a rival gang member;
- Hilda Rodriguez Yepiz, 35, of Reseda;
- Manuel Yepiz, 30, of Shadow Hills;
- Rafael Yepiz, 33, of Reseda; and
- Francisco Zambrano, 27, of Mission Hills.

The defendants taken into custody this morning are expected to make their initial court appearances this afternoon in United States District Court in Los Angeles.

An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

Those not eligible for the death penalty face substantial prison terms in federal prison. For example, the RICO charges and the narcotics conspiracy carry a statutory maximum sentence of life without parole in federal prison.

This case is the product of an 18-month investigation by High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force (HIDTA), which is made up of agents and officers from several agencies, including the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Los Angeles Police Department, and IRS-Criminal Investigation Division.

Providing substantial assistance in this morning's takedown were: the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office, the Simi Valley Police Department, the Pasadena Police Department, the Glendale Police Department, the United States Marshals Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Internal Revenue Service, the Bakersfield Police Department, the Kern County Sheriff's Office, the Los Angeles Port Warden, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, the Los Angeles City Fire Department, the Los Angeles County Fire Department, the Burbank Fire Department, the Glendale Fire Department and the Pasadena Fire Department.

In the 18-months preceding today's operation, the Silent Night Task Force arrested 231 persons, impounded 25 cars, seized 75 firearms, over 300 pounds of cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin, and over \$1 million.

The Vineland Boys gang is responsible for the deaths of two police officers in a span of 15 years. The first officer killed was LAPD Officer James, June 7, 1988. Officer Beyea had been out of the Police Academy only three months when he confronted a 17-year-old VLB gang member Robert Steel in North Hollywood during a burglary investigation. During a life-and-death struggle, Steel shot Officer Beyea, who later died at the hospital. The suspect then holed up for three hours in a local residence. He was shot and killed by police during the attempt to arrest him.

Fifteen years later, November 15, 2003, another young police officer, 26-year-old Burbank Officer Matthew Pavelka, stopped a pair of VLB gang members, who decided to protect their stash of methamphetamine by shooting it out with Officer Pavelka and his partner, Officer

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Greg Campbell. Officer Pavelka became the first Burbank officer to be shot and killed in the line of duty. Officer Campbell was wound and paralyzed. While one suspect was killed in the shootout, one escaped, until he was captured thirteen days later. Matthew was the son of 31-year veteran LAPD Detective Michael Pavelka.

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