

WILKINS RECEIVES LIFE PRISON SENTENCE FOR CONVENIENCE STORE HOLD-UP

A Spartanburg County man received a life prison sentence today for robbing a local convenience store at gunpoint.

Johnny Wilkins, 39, was found guilty of armed robbery at the conclusion of a two-day jury trial. Wilkins and another man robbed the Li'l Cricket Food Store, 4884 Highway 221, on Jan. 13, 2008. The bandits escaped with about \$100.

Sheriff's deputies arrested Wilkins and Robert Benson, 33, a day later when the duo attempted to rob the Hot Spot store on Highway 110. Deputies were staked out at the Cowpens-area convenience store when one of the gunmen attempted to open a locked door. Deputies pursued Wilkins and Benson as they drove away from the business in a rental car. The fleeing bandits abandoned their getaway car near the intersection of Clearview Drive and Murray Court and ran on foot. Benson was arrested after a short foot pursuit and Wilkins was found under a nearby house.

Deputies connected Wilkins and Benson to 7 local armed robberies over a span of several days. Several of the robberies were recorded on security cameras.

Both men blamed their crimes on drug addictions in statements to deputies following their arrest.

Benson pleaded guilty and testified against Benson during the trial. Benson hasn't been sentenced.

Circuit Judge Derham Cole sentenced Wilkins in accordance with the state law for repeat violent offenders. Wilkins' prior criminal record included convictions for armed robbery and assault and battery with intent to kill. He is not eligible for parole.

"Johnny Wilkins is a good example why our state has tough sentencing laws for repeat offenders," Principal Deputy Solicitor Barry Barnette said. "He failed to learn from his past."

For more information, contact Murray Glenn at 809-4892.