

# Former 'Goon Squad' officer gets 40 years

**Actions described by victim of racist attack as 'most wicked'**

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

JACKSON, Miss. – A fourth former Mississippi sheriff's deputy has been sentenced for his part in the racist torture of two Black men by a group of white officers who called themselves "the Goon Squad." Christian Dedmon was sentenced Wednesday to 40 years in federal prison, hours after Daniel Opdyke was sentenced to 17.5 years.

Dedmon, 29, did not look at the victims as he apologized and said he'd never forgive himself for the pain he caused.

All six of the white former officers charged in the torture pleaded guilty, admitting that they subjected Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker to numerous acts of racist torture in January 2023 after a neighbor complained that the men were staying in a home with a white woman.

Federal prosecutors detailed sexual assaults by Dedmon that made him stand out among the other officers charged.

Jenkins, who still has trouble speaking due to his injuries, said in a statement read by his lawyer that Dedmon's actions were the most depraved of any of those who attacked him.

"Deputy Dedmon is the worst example of a police officer in the United States," Jenkins said. "Deputy Dedmon was the most aggressive, sickest and the most wicked."

Earlier Wednesday, Opdyke, 28, cried profusely as he spoke in court before the judge announced his sentence. Turning to look at the two victims, he said his isolation behind bars has given him time to reflect on "how I transformed into the monster I became that night."

"The weight of my actions and the harm I've caused will haunt me every day," Opdyke told them. "I wish I could take away your suffering."

Parker rested his head in his hands and closed his eyes, then stood up and left the courtroom before Opdyke finished speaking. Jenkins said he was "broken" and "ashamed" by the cruel acts visited upon him.

U.S. District Judge Tom Lee said Opdyke may not have been fully aware of what being a member of the Goon Squad entailed when Lt. Jeffrey Middleton asked him to join, but he did know it involved using excessive force. "You were not a passive observer. You actively participated in that brutal attack," Lee said.

All six of the former officers pleaded guilty last year to breaking into a home without a warrant and torturing the



**Melvin Jenkins, second from right, speaks to reporters while standing with lead civil attorney Malik Shabazz, second from left, and his son Michael Corey Jenkins, right, on the sentencing of former Rankin County, Miss., law enforcement officers Wednesday.** PHOTOS BY ROGELIO V. SOLIS/AP



**From top left are former Rankin County sheriff's deputies Hunter Elward, Christian Dedmon, Brett McAlpin, Jeffrey Middleton and Daniel Opdyke, and former Richland police officer Joshua Hartfield.**

Black men with a stun gun, a sex toy and other objects. Christian Dedmon, 29, also faced a lengthy prison term at his sentencing, set for Wednesday afternoon before Lee.

On Tuesday, Lee gave a nearly 20-year prison sentence to Hunter Elward, 31, and a 17.5-year sentence to Middleton, 46, calling their actions "egregious and despicable." They, like Opdyke and Dedmon, worked as Rankin County sheriff's deputies during the attack.

Another former deputy, Brett McAlpin, 53, and a former Richland police officer, Joshua Hartfield, 32, are set for sentencing Thursday.

Last March, months before federal prosecutors announced charges in August, an investigation by The Associated Press linked some of the deputies to at least four violent encounters with Black men since 2019 that left two dead

and another with lasting injuries.

The former officers stuck to their cover story for months until finally admitting that they tortured Michael Corey Jenkins and Parker. Elward admitted to shoving a gun into Jenkins' mouth and firing it in a "mock execution" that went awry.

In a statement Tuesday, Attorney General Merrick Garland condemned the "heinous attack on citizens they had sworn an oath to protect."

The terror began Jan. 24, 2023, with a racist call for extrajudicial violence when a white person in Rankin County complained to McAlpin that two Black men were staying with a white woman at a house in Braxton. McAlpin told Dedmon, who texted a group of white deputies asking if they were "available for a mission." "No bad mugshots," he texted – a green light, according to prosecutors, to use excessive force on parts of the body that wouldn't appear in a booking photo.

Once inside, they handcuffed Jenkins and his friend Parker and poured milk, alcohol and chocolate syrup over their faces. They forced them to strip naked and shower together to conceal the mess. They mocked the victims with racial slurs and shocked them with stun guns. Dedmon and Opdyke assaulted them with a sex toy.

After Elward shot Jenkins in the mouth, lacerating his tongue and breaking his jaw, they devised a coverup that included planting drugs and a gun. False charges stood against Jenkins and Parker for months.

The majority-white Rankin County is just east of the state capital, Jackson,

home to one of the highest percentages of Black residents of any major U.S. city. The officers shouted at Jenkins and Parker to "stay out of Rankin County and go back to Jackson or 'their side' of the Pearl River," court documents say.

Opdyke was the first to admit what they did, his attorney Jeff Reynolds said Wednesday. On April 12, he showed investigators a WhatsApp text thread where the officers discussed their plan and what happened. Had he thrown his phone in a river, as some of the other officers did, investigators might not have discovered the encrypted messages.

Reynolds also said Opdyke was sexually assaulted as a child and had seen the older deputies as father figures. That made him susceptible to the culture of misconduct within the Rankin County Sheriff's Office, Reynolds said.

"When a new officer goes over there, they start indoctrinating people," Reynolds said. "Where is the true leadership? Why aren't they in this court?"

On Tuesday, Elward's attorney also referenced a "culture of corruption" inside the sheriff's office.

Dedmon, like Opdyke and Elward, also pleaded guilty to taking part in an assault on a white man during a traffic stop on Dec. 4, 2022 – weeks before Jenkins and Parker were tortured. Prosecutors revealed the victim's identity Tuesday as Alan Schmidt. Reynolds said Opdyke held Schmidt down until Dedmon arrived, but didn't beat him or sexually assault him.

According to a statement from Schmidt that prosecutors read in court, Dedmon accused him of possessing stolen property. Schmidt said he was handcuffed, pulled from his vehicle and beaten until he "started to see spots."

Prosecutors said Elward and Opdyke failed to intervene as Dedmon punched and kicked him, used a Taser on him, fired his gun into the air to threaten him, and then sexually assaulted him.

Schmidt said Dedmon forced him to his knees, pulled out his "private part" and hit him in the face with it, trying to insert it into his mouth. Dedmon then grabbed Schmidt's genitals and rubbed against his body as he screamed for them to stop, Schmidt said.

"What sick individual does this? He has so much power over us already, so to act this way, he must be truly sick in this head," Schmidt wrote in his statement.

Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey, who took office in 2012 and was reelected in November after no one ran against him, revealed no details about his deputies' actions when he announced they had been fired last June. After they pleaded guilty in August, Bailey said the officers had gone rogue and promised changes. Jenkins and Parker called for his resignation and filed a \$400 million civil lawsuit against the department.