

LOCAL

Ex-Zetas boss who took part in slaughters gets seven life sentences

Guillermo Contreras, Jason Buch | on June 28, 2017

Photo: Marvin Pfeiffer, Staff / San Antonio Express-News

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Former Zeta plaza boss Mariano Millan Vasquez leaves the federal courthouse after being sentenced to seven consecutive life sentences on Wednesday, June 28, 2017. Millan was arrested here and convicted of ... [More](#)

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Marciano "Chano" Millan Vasquez, 34, was handed seven consecutive life sentences. Then the judge stacked on another five years for lying to federal agents.



A former regional boss for the Zetas who was hiding out in San Antonio was sentenced Wednesday to seven life terms for his role in 29 deaths and for participating with the cartel in drug-trafficking operations that included a rampage in which more than 300 people in northern Mexico were slaughtered.

Marciano “Chano” Millan Vasquez, 34, stood straight-faced as U.S. District Judge Xavier Rodriguez pronounced life sentences for seven charges, and ordered them to run consecutively.

Then the judge stacked on another five years for lying to federal agents. The prison terms for two other counts were ordered to run concurrent. The judge also fined him \$1 million.

Asked if he wished to say anything, Millan told the judge: “*No. Está bien.*” No. It’s all right.

Testimony at trial established that he began as a foot soldier for the Zetas, the former paramilitary enforcement arm of the Gulf Cartel. But he rose to be boss of the Piedras Negras plaza, an important smuggling corridor across the border from Eagle Pass.

All of the killings, including 29 pegged specifically on Millan, took place in Mexico between 2009 and 2015.

Millan was arrested while living under a fake name in July 2015 in the 300 block of Jesse Avenue on San Antonio’s West Side, where he had settled with some relatives.

He was tried here last year and convicted on all 10 charges he faced, including killing in furtherance of drug-trafficking crimes.

U.S. law allowed the federal government to prosecute him for killings in another country as long as those violent acts were part of a drug conspiracy with connections to the U.S.

“Without mercy or compunction, he brutally murdered anyone and everyone as it suited him and his cartel, at times inflicting the cruelest of pain, forcing relatives to watch their loved ones murdered before he turned his blades on them,” U.S. Attorney Richard L. Durbin Jr. said. “Today’s sentence marks an end to his reign of terror over the drug plaza in Piedras Negras.”

A witness testified at Millan’s trial that Millan chopped up a 6-year-old girl with an ax while she still was alive and made her parents and other tied-up witnesses watch — to teach them a lesson. He then ordered the parents killed, and 15 others, in the same brutal fashion.

But they were just some of his victims. Millan also conspired with fellow cartel members who rounded up and slaughtered 300 people.

“The level of violence ... is something that is rarely seen in the courtroom and ... rarely seen even in fiction,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Russ Leachman told the judge.

Not only were victims chopped up, but their bodies were dissolved with acid or burned in barrels until little was left. The murders and disposal of the bodies were “horrific,” Leachman told the judge.

Despite the denials at trial of Millan and his lawyer, Jaime Cavazos, Millan also was placed at the scenes of a mass roundup in March 2011 ordered by then-leader Miguel “Cuarenta” Treviño Morales of more than 300 people in towns south or near Piedras Negras.

The cartel sacked the towns, bombed homes and other buildings and killed men, women and children — some who had nothing to do with the drug trade — because Treviño and other leaders were angry that one of their own had turned U.S. informant. The cartel burned their bodies in barrels of acid or with diesel fuel, testimony indicated.

The events, known as the “Allende massacre,” left many searching for answers on their loved ones for years.

The trial also revealed that the Zetas controlled law enforcement and other local or regional officials by bribing them or threatening them.

Explosive testimony also alleged the Zetas paid millions of dollars in cash bribes to officials of the Mexican state of Coahuila, including a previous governor, Humberto Moreira, and his brother Rubén Moreira, the current governor.

Both brothers have denied the allegations.

In exchange for the bribes, witnesses testified, the Zetas were protected as they took over Coahuila, which borders Texas from just west of Laredo to the Big Bend region. Witnesses said state police helped gang leaders evade federal authorities, the gang was able to invest in construction and coal mining and the Zetas took control of state jails, where they had freedom to carry out an array of crimes.

The charges Millan was convicted of also include conspiracy to distribute and import marijuana, employing minors in a drug crime, conspiracy to distribute cocaine, conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, conspiracy to possess firearms as part of the drug conspiracy, and lying to agents about his identity.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security Investigations, Texas Department of Public Safety and several other agencies investigated the case.

“The life sentence imposed on Vasquez should be a reminder to all criminals that violence and victimization of the public will not be tolerated and will be met with the full weight of the law,” said Shane Folden, special agent in charge of HSI in San Antonio. “HSI and its law enforcement partners are committed to ensuring the safety and security of our communities in South Texas.”

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