

Big-time hacker from Miami sentenced in 3rd case

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(AP) -- For the second time in as many days, a computer hacker accused of one of the largest-ever thefts of credit and debit card numbers stood before a federal judge and apologized for his actions.

"I have violated the sanctity of millions of individuals around the United States," said Albert Gonzalez, in pleading for lenience. "I'm guilty of the crimes ... I accept full responsibility for my actions."

Federal Judge Douglas Woodlock sentenced Gonzalez to 20 years and a day in prison, but ordered that the term run concurrently with a 20-year term Gonzalez received from a different judge Thursday in two related cases.

The concurrent sentence means the 28-year-old Miami man, a one-time federal informant, will not serve any significant additional prison time.

Woodlock said he believed the sentence was sufficient to deliver a message of deterrence to other technologically-gifted individuals from pursuing similar crimes.

"You're in your mid-20s. You're going to be in your mid-40s when you get out," the judge said to Gonzalez. "That's a tremendous loss."

The case Friday involved the theft of credit card numbers from the Scarsborough, Maine-based Hannaford Bros. supermarket chain, Dallas-based convenience store chain 7-Eleven, and Heartland Payment

Systems, a New Jersey-based card payment processor.

Thursday's sentence stemmed from two cases that were combined and involved major retailers including TJX Cos., BJ's Wholesale Club, Barnes & Noble, OfficeMax, and the restaurant chain Dave & Buster's.

Prosecutors said tens of millions of credit and debit cards numbers were stolen, costing the companies, banks and insurers nearly \$200 million.

Gonzalez, who pleaded guilty, was also fined \$25,000 by Woodlock and will be required to serve three years of supervised probation following his release from prison. Prosecutors had sought a 25-year sentence, while defense attorney Martin Weinberg asked that his client serve 15 years.

Gonzalez still faces a hearing in June on what restitution he might have to pay. Woodlock indicated that Heartland was the only defendant in the case before him that is seeking restitution.

Authorities said Gonzalez amassed \$2.8 million he used to buy a Miami condo, a car, Rolex watches and a Tiffany ring for his girlfriend. They said Gonzalez and two foreign co-defendants would drive past retailers with a laptop computer, tapping into those with vulnerable wireless Internet signals. The trio would then install "sniffer programs" that picked off credit and debit card numbers as they moved through a retailer's computers before trying to sell the numbers overseas, authorities said.

Prosecutors have said the two co-defendants, identified in court documents as "Hacker 1" and "Hacker 2," are fugitives.

Gonzalez was first arrested for hacking in 2003, but was not charged because he became an informant, helping the Secret Service find other hackers.

A report submitted by a defense psychiatrist said Gonzalez was addicted to the Internet and displayed behavior consistent with Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism.

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