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Newcastle Robbers Jailed After Brutal Holiday Attacks Leave Pilot Grounded

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Two repeat offenders have been jailed after a violent robbery spree in Newcastle city centre that left one victim, a commercial airline pilot, temporarily unable to work due to blurred vision and facial injuries.

Mark Defty, 25, was sentenced to four years and one month, while Dean Baird, 37, received three years and ten months following their appearance at Newcastle Crown Court recently. Both pleaded guilty to robbery and attempted robbery, with Baird also admitting to a separate theft.

The attacks, which occurred within a 30-minute window in the early hours of December 27, 2023, targeted two men in unprovoked assaults that have reignited concerns over public safety during the festive season.

One of the victims, a pilot, was withdrawing money on Neville Street around 3:30 a.m. when he was approached by Defty and Baird. Defty demanded the man's Canada Goose jacket and threatened him, claiming there were no nearby cameras and instructing Baird to look for a weapon. The victim saw a dark object, panicked, and tried to push past it, but was punched in the face during the scuffle. He managed to flee and escape in a taxi.

"This has left me feeling totally shocked," the pilot said in a statement. "I'm now fearful of returning to Newcastle. I'm a pilot and can't fly with blurred vision or looking like I did."

About half an hour earlier, the same duo had assaulted another man near Westgate Road and St James' Boulevard. Baird approached under the guise of selling protein powder before the pair ambushed him, tackling him to the ground and stealing his phone and wallet. They later coerced him into withdrawing £130 from a cash machine under the pretence of returning the stolen phone, but he never got his wallet back.

"They clearly went out with the intention to prey on people," the first victim told the court.

Both Defty and Baird were arrested shortly after the incidents.

Baird also confessed to a separate offence involving a stolen wallet he found in October, which he admitted he had no intention of returning.

The sentencing has sparked renewed debate about city centre safety, particularly during busy nightlife hours and holiday periods, with questions raised over how effectively authorities are monitoring repeat offenders.