

Courts

Cleared in girlfriend's murder

But gang member gets 17 years for other lesser crimes

CORY SHAFFER
cshaffer@cleveland.com

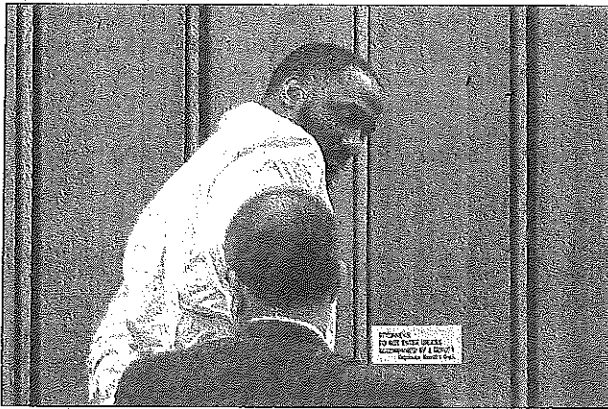
A Cleveland man considered a high-ranking member of the Heartless Felons gang was acquitted of murder Monday in his girlfriend's death.

However, Demetris Bolden, 28, was found guilty of leading investigators in Tiffany Smith's death on a high-speed chase in which he almost struck a detective and hid a pistol in the basement of a family home.

Cuyahoga County Judge Michael E. Jackson sentenced Bolden to 17 years in prison after finding him guilty of aggravated burglary, felonious assault of a police officer, failure to comply and tampering with evidence charges.

"I think that's necessary to protect the public from future crimes," Jackson said.

Arrested the same day as the murder: Bolden, who waived his right to a jury trial, has been in a Cuyahoga County jail since Dec. 5, 2014, the day of Smith's murder. A newspaper delivery person found Smith's body in the middle of a street in the city's Corlett neighborhood with several gunshot wounds.



CORY SHAFFER | CLEVELAND.COM

Demetris Bolden, 28, was found not guilty of killing Tiffany Smith on Monday, but a judge sentenced him to 17 years in prison on lesser charges.

Bolden drove Smith's car past police near the murder scene, and officers tried to stop him. Bolden sped away and almost ran over Cleveland homicide detective David Borden.

Officers chased Bolden to East 128th Street and Soika Avenue, where he jumped from the car and ran away. A police helicopter, K-9 officers and dozens of officers searched the neighborhood for Bolden. Officers went door to door searching homes.

Police found him hiding in the basement of a family's home on Soika Avenue. They also found a 9mm pistol.

Police and prosecutors accused Bolden of shooting Smith and then leaving her body in the street. Investigators also found gunshot residue on Bolden's shirtsleeve.

Bolden's court-appointed

lawyers, Fred C. Crosby and Michael Maloney, argued that gunshot residue tests performed on Bolden's hands were inconclusive. They also pointed out the bullets that killed Smith came from a .38-caliber handgun, not the 9mm handgun that Bolden hid in the basement.

Bolden often drove Smith's car: Bolden lived with Smith and regularly drove her car around — including to pick up his other girlfriend, who testified that she was with Bolden the morning of the murder.

The woman said that Bolden picked her up from the Alibi Inn, a men's club in downtown Cleveland where she dances, and they then went to the now-defunct Club Fly High for drinks.

Surveillance footage from

a gas station at East 116th Street and Union Avenue showed Bolden and the dancer in Smith's car buying food at 4:01 a.m.

Bolden threw his head back in relief when the judge announced that he had found him not guilty of aggravated murder, murder, felonious assault and aggravated robbery.

Admits to having gun: Bolden denied killing Smith before the sentencing, but admitted to Jackson that he ran from police because he had a loaded handgun.

Bolden also addressed members of Smith's family who were in the courtroom. He said Smith was his friend.

"You all probably feel ill about me, but your loss is my loss is too," he said.

He turned to members of his family and told them he loved them.

"It is what it is," he said, smiling. "I'll be home. That's the good part."

Minutes later, Jackson announced the 17-year sentence. One man let out an expletive, threw his jacket over his forearm and walked out of the courtroom. Two women burst into tears. Bolden lowered his head to the floor.

Crosby declined to address the sentence after the hearing, but said he was pleased with Jackson's not-guilty verdict on the aggravated murder, which could have put Bolden behind bars for life.

"The judge got it right."

News

MAPLE HEIGHTS Shooting su

Bond is set at \$1 day shooting in I charged with att pleboro Avenue n a preliminary he Garfield Heights uted for Feb. 18, today at the Maple the Cuyahoga Co

CLEVELAND Police seek g

Cleveland police kicking in the doc ing six people, in old boy, at gunpo gunmen stormed 3000 block of We gunpoint as they spokesman Sgt. J away with an uns Ciaccia said. No c

WILLOUGHBY I One dead in

A man is dead fol Hills that left his crash happened a westbound near I Department said. identity hasn't be

CLEVELAND Teen charges

A 17-year-old boy tried to hit a Clev a traffic stop, a dep and another 17-ye County Juvenile I police chase on th report. No officers

AKRON Man crashes

An Akron man cra the host after bei Thomas Nevins, Derek Davis, 41, i

Downtown Cleveland

