

TOP STORY

Man sentenced for threatening officer with sword

Keith Epps

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A man who was shot in the groin while chasing a Spotsylvania County deputy with a 32-inch sword was ordered Monday to spend a year and a half in prison.

Nicholas Gene Howell, 28, of Spotsylvania, received the sentence in Spotsylvania Circuit Court, where he had previously pleaded guilty to attempted malicious wounding of a law-enforcement officer.

The evidence presented by prosecutor Alex Vakos and Commonwealth's Attorney Travis Bird showed that then-deputy J.

Carnahan had gone to 6620 Timberbrook Lane on July 18 in response to a reported domestic disturbance. Carnahan, who has since been promoted to detective, learned that Howell had been chasing animals with what he described as a large "Spartan-style" sword and had threatened his mother.

Carnahan testified Monday that after seeing the deputy, Howell ran toward the back of the home. Carnahan said he heard crashing sounds and was concerned about the safety of Howell's grandmother, who was still in the house.



Howell

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Howell came out of the house and charged at Carnahan with the sword raised. The detective said he ran away from Howell and repeatedly told him to stop, but Howell kept charging before Carnahan shot him several times.

Carnahan and the defendant's mother then tended to Howell while waiting for rescue workers. Carnahan said the wounded Howell explained his actions by claiming he was "in psychosis."

Defense attorney Ghislaine Storr Burks asked Judge William Glover to sentence Howell to the 10 months he's already served. She said he has a significant mental health history that includes being hospitalized two months before the incident. She added that Howell has no criminal history.

But Bird countered that anyone who tried to kill a police officer deserves a prison sentence. He said Howell's claim of psychosis "belies the definition."

"See this for what it is, a violent attack on a law-enforcement officer," Bird said. "But for [Carnahan's] actions, [Carnahan] would be dead."

Glover's sentence included a condition that Howell cannot possess any edged weapon with a blade longer than four inches.

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