

ALERT TOP STORY

Man, guilty of murder, gets 67 years for role in 2019 Spotsylvania killing

Keith Epps

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A man who took part in killing a Spotsylvania County teenager in 2019 after mistaking him for someone else was ordered Monday to serve more than 67 years in prison.

William Gerard McDowney, 41, of King George County, received the maximum sentence of 67 years and seven months from Judge Ricardo Rigual for his role in the Aug. 12, 2019, slaying of 18-year-old James Wallin.

McDowney had previously pleaded guilty in Spotsylvania Circuit Court to felony murder, conspiracy, concealing evidence and two firearms offenses. He was also convicted Monday of a probation violation.

According to evidence presented in previous hearings, McDowney and codefendant Augustus Rhodes went to

Matti Hill Court looking for a man in connection with a drug debt. The home next to Wallin's had been raided 12 days earlier and a large amount of marijuana was seized.



McDowney

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McDowney later told police that someone referred to as “DB” had sent Rhodes to settle the debt. Rhodes has been convicted of murder and other charges. His sentence is pending in Spotsylvania.

Wallin and two other adults were on his front stoop when a silver Cadillac went by very slowly. A short time later, Rhodes got out of the car, “choke-slammed” Wallin against a door and held a gun to his head, witnesses said. Rhodes then pistol-whipped Wallin.

Evidence showed that Wallin, who was also armed, managed to shoot Rhodes seven times while he was being beaten. Surveillance camera footage showed that McDowney entered the fray for about eight seconds, during which time he shot Wallin in the back.

McDowney then drove Rhodes to the nearby Spotsylvania Regional Medical Center, where Rhodes was treated for life-threatening injuries. McDowney threw one of Rhodes’ guns into tall grass near the hospital. A second gun belonging to Rhodes was recovered at the scene of the gunfight.

A medical examiner ruled that Wallin’s cause of death was a combination of being pistol-whipped and being shot in the back.

During McDowney’s lengthy sentencing hearing, prosecutors Ryan Mehaffey and Jeff Adams argued that McDowney needed to be removed from society forever.

Mehaffey pointed out McDowney’s long criminal history, which includes convictions of shooting into a vehicle, assault on a law-enforcement officer, domestic assault, shooting at a vehicle, arson and multiple other offenses.

“He’s a violent and dangerous person, and he’s been a violent and dangerous person for many years,” Mehaffey said.

Prosecutors also pointed out McDowney’s admitted membership in a criminal street gang. They also showed a video from the Rappahannock Regional Jail well after his latest arrest in which he damaged property, including sprinkler heads and a computer. He is still facing charges in Stafford for that alleged outburst.

Defense attorneys Jim Ilijevich and Martha Norton lobbied Rigual for leniency. Ilijevich said McDowney is remorseful and took responsibility for his actions, and said he suffers from a number of mental health disorders.

“He was a sick man who was looking for help,” Ilijevich said.

Just before receiving his sentence, McDowney made a brief statement in which he said he was sorry for Wallin's death.

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