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Spotsy man sentenced to 6 years for mistakenly shooting friend

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A Spotsylvania County man who shot and killed his best friend in late 2021 after mistaking him for someone else was ordered Thursday to serve six years in prison.

Terrence Oliver Smith, 38, killed 28-year-old Dequan C. Thomas early Dec. 18, 2021, as Thomas was walking into the home they shared in the 6600 block of Wagon Road. Thomas was shot in the chest as he came inside from smoking a cigarette.

According to the evidence presented Thursday and previously, Smith had been receiving threats from the ex-husband of the woman he was dating at the time. The woman was with Smith in the house, and he apparently thought the man was coming in to make good on his threats.

Judge Ricardo Rigual sentenced Smith in Spotsylvania Circuit Court to a total of 15 years with nine years suspended. He had previously pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter and possessing a firearm as a felon. Under the terms of his plea agreement, he could not have received an active sentence of more than 10 years.



Smith

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Thomas and Smith were longtime friends, and Thomas worked for Smith at a restaurant Smith operated in Bragg Hill in Fredericksburg. The woman who was with Smith that morning testified that they thought Thomas was in his room at the time of the shooting.

A 911 call made immediately after the shooting clearly showed that Smith was distraught about his error. “I thought someone was breaking into my house ... he’s my friend ... I shot him ... ma’am I’m so sorry,” Smith told the 911 operator.

Much of Thursday’s sentencing hearing focused on the man who witnesses said had been threatening Smith for nearly two years. Defense attorney James Maloney produced text messages and social media posts in which the man threatened to fire a shot into Smith’s head and “two to the chest.”

At one point the man, who used various aliases, told Smith he was fortunate not to be there when he showed up at the restaurant. “That was God protecting you and keeping me from catching a case,” the man posted.

Maloney argued that there was no reason to give Smith more than the mandatory two years required for the firearms charge. He said it was clear that Smith didn’t intend harm to his friend, saying Smith was “shocked, horrified and very taken aback” when he realized his blunder.

Prosecutor Jeff Adams countered that Smith wouldn’t have made the mistake if he hadn’t been breaking the law by having a gun in the first place. “If this felon hadn’t armed himself with a firearm, a 4-year-old would still have a father,” Adams said.

Prior to being sentenced, Smith read a statement in which he apologized to Thomas’ mother and others. He called Thomas the most “genuine, loving and kind-hearted” person he’d ever met.

“I’m so sorry my mistake has hurt his family,” Smith said. “I loved him and would have never hurt him on purpose.”

The gun used to kill Thomas had been reported stolen in Stafford County seven months earlier, according to the evidence.

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