Defendant: Jamie Hood

Victim(s): Kenneth Omari Wray and Athens-Clarke County Police Officer Elmer Christian, among others affected by the crimes listed.

Court decision: Charged on a total of 36 counts, which include murder, aggravated assault, kidnapping, carjacking, and other offenses.

Case Facts:

Appellant Jamie Donnell Hood appeals his 2015 convictions on a total of 36 counts charging him with murder, aggravated assault, kidnapping, carjacking, and other offenses. The charges arose from the December 2010 shooting death of Kenneth Omari Wray and a series of crimes in March 2011 that resulted in the death of AthensClarke County Police Officer Elmer Christian.

The evidence at trial showed that Appellant was involved in the drug trade and had been supplying an associate, Kenyatta Campbell, with marijuana from a third party in Atlanta. At some point before the crimes, Campbell began bypassing Appellant by purchasing directly from the source, angering Appellant.

On the evening of December 28, 2010, Wray, an associate of Campbell, was shot outside the Athens home Wray shared with his mother, Ruby Jordan. Jordan testified that on the night of the shooting, she was dozing in her bedroom when she heard a knock or slam on the door and then another loud noise and her son calling for her. She then heard what sounded like firecrackers. Jordan peeked out the door and saw someone run from her driveway and, believing it was Wray, returned to her bedroom. A few minutes later, a friend of Wray came to the door, looking for Wray, and then saw him lying in the driveway.

The friend, Billy Howington, testified that he had arranged to buy marijuana from Wray on the night of December 28. Shortly before arriving at Wray’s home, he texted Wray that he was approaching. When Howington arrived, he parked his car in front of the house and waited for Wray to come out. Wray did not appear and did not return Howington’s texts or calls. Finally, Howington went to the door, and as he was talking to Jordan he realized Wray was lying in the driveway.

A neighbor of Jordan, Mike Barnett, came outside after hearing a loud noise from the direction of Jordan’s home and saw Wray’s body in the driveway. As he was dialing 911, Barnett was approached by a police officer patrolling nearby, and emergency responders were dispatched. Wray had sustained multiple gunshot wounds, including one through his neck, and died after being transported to the hospital.

At the scene, investigators recovered six .40-caliber shell casings. Interviews with Howington and another neighbor indicated that the shooter was a black male. Appellant was not identified as a suspect at the time.

Some three months later, on March 22, 2011, Judon Brooks, an associate of Wray and Campbell, went to Appellant’s home to inspect some marijuana. Brooks testified that, shortly after he arrived, Appellant and three masked men with firearms surrounded him, and one of the men began tying him up with zip ties. Appellant demanded that Brooks tell him Campbell’s whereabouts. When Brooks replied that he did not know, Appellant brandished a knife and threatened to kill him. The men put duct tape over Brooks’ mouth, covered his face, and put him in the trunk of Appellant’s car. Appellant drove away with Brooks in the trunk. After managing to break his hands free, Brooks opened the trunk latch and escaped when the car came to a stop. An acquaintance of Brooks who happened to be driving in the same vicinity saw him in the street seeking help and summoned him to his car. Brooks called 911, and a “be on the lookout” notice (BOLO) was issued for Appellant.

In the meantime, Appellant had abandoned his car and called his brother, Matthew Hood, to pick him up. Athens-Clarke County Police Officer Tony Howard testified that he was patrolling the area in response to the BOLO. He recognized Matthew driving and flagged him down. When Matthew stopped, Officer Howard saw a man he recognized as Appellant exit Matthew’s car and run toward the driver’s side of Officer Howard’s patrol car. Officer Howard grabbed Appellant through his open window, but Appellant broke free, then turned and shot Officer Howard in the face and the back. The responding EMT testified that when he arrived on the scene, Officer Howard’s gun was still in the holster on his belt.

Appellant continued running and came upon Officer Christian’s patrol car. Two witnesses saw Appellant run past the car and shoot twice through the driver’s side window. Officer Christian, who at the time was talking on his phone, was struck by both bullets. By the time emergency responders arrived, Officer Christian was deceased.

Continuing to run, Appellant approached a stopped car, in which Deborah Lumpkin was sitting. Lumpkin testified that Appellant, who was armed with a gun, got in the passenger seat and told her that he was running from the police and needed her to drive. She complied. After a short time, Appellant, whom Lumpkin described as calm and focused, instructed her to stop and get out. Appellant drove off and later abandoned the car, continuing his escape on foot.

The manhunt for Appellant proceeded into the following day and night. At approximately 1:00 a.m. on March 24, Appellant went to the home of Darius Lanier, a longtime acquaintance, who supplied Appellant with food and clothing. Lanier testified that, during Appellant’s time at his home, Appellant admitted to shooting the two police officers. Appellant also told Lanier that he had killed Wray because Wray would not tell him where he could find Campbell. Appellant left at around 4:00 a.m. Later that morning, Lanier reported Appellant’s visit to his probation officer, who contacted the police.

After leaving Lanier’s home, Appellant found his way to the Athens subdivision of Creekstone, where he gained entry into the home of Chayandre Bess and Mandrell Hull, also acquaintances of Appellant. Bess’s 13-year-old cousin, who was living with Bess and Hull at the time, testified that, as she prepared to leave for school on the morning of March 24, Appellant approached her outside the home, brandished a gun, and ordered her to let him inside. Bess, Hull, and others in the home testified that Appellant forced them into a single room, then barricaded them in the home and held them hostage until the following evening, when he surrendered to the police.

During his time in the Creekstone home, Appellant made several incriminating statements about the murder of Wray, kidnapping of Brooks, and shootings of Officers Howard and Christian. These witnesses testified that Appellant said he had shot Wray when Wray would not tell him where Campbell lived and that Appellant described specifically how Wray had called for his mother before being killed. Appellant also told these witnesses that he had kidnapped Brooks for the same reason and had intended to kill him as well. Appellant also said that, while he was sorry for killing Officer Christian, he was glad he had shot Officer Howard, with whom he had a history of ill will. In reference to the gun he used to shoot Officers Howard and Christian, Appellant remarked, “[I]f you think this one’s pretty, you should have see[n] the one I killed Omari [Wray] with.” Many of Appellant’s statements about the crimes were surreptitiously recorded by one of the Creekstone witnesses, Quintin Riden, and the recordings were played for the jury at trial.

Also while at the home, Appellant had phone conversations with both Brooks and Campbell. Brooks testified that Appellant told him, “B\*\*ch, you better be lucky you got away. . . . I was going to kill your b\*\*ch a\*\* just like I did your boy”; Brooks believed Appellant’s statement was a reference to Wray’s murder. In Appellant’s conversation with Campbell, which Riden overheard and testified about, Appellant told Campbell that the reason he killed Wray was “because yo’ b\*\*ch a\*\* was hiding out. You got [Wray] killed because I couldn’t find you.”

Shortly after his surrender on March 25, Appellant was interviewed by investigators and admitted that he had shot Officers Howard and Christian. He wrote a letter of apology to Officer Christian’s family, telling them that “I just seen [Christian] at the wrong time in the wrong situation.” The video recording of Appellant’s interview was played for the jury, and the letter was read aloud at trial.

The State also offered audio recordings of two police interviews with Lanier, both of which were played for the jury. In the first interview, conducted on March 24, 2011, Lanier told the detective that Appellant admitted he had shot two police officers and hijacked a woman’s car and said he wanted to kill Campbell before he turned himself in. Lanier also told the detective that Appellant said he had killed Wray. In the second interview, conducted in April 2011, Lanier again stated that Appellant admitted to killing the officers and to killing Wray; that Appellant said he had gotten rid of the gun with which he had killed Wray; and that he had killed Wray because Wray would not reveal Campbell’s whereabouts.

The State also offered testimony from a GBI firearms examiner that a .40-caliber shell casing, found in a search of Appellant’s car, was fired from the same gun as that used to shoot Wray. Additional testimony established that Wray had been shot seven times, but that only six shell casings were recovered from the scene. The firearms examiner also testified that the gun used to kill Wray was not the same gun used in the police shootings.

Appellant testified in his own defense. He maintained that he was not involved in Wray’s murder and told the jury that the shell casing found in his car was the vestige of an armed robbery of which he had been a victim, in which the assailant’s gun had discharged in his car during their struggle. Appellant also claimed that the Brooks kidnapping incident was actually initiated by Brooks, when Brooks showed up at his house with two men, threatening to kill him. Appellant claimed it was only in response that he and his associates tied Brooks up and drove away with him. Appellant testified further that, when he was fleeing after the Brooks kidnapping and encountered Officers Howard and Christian, he heard the voice of his deceased brother — who had been killed by a police officer — telling him, “Don’t let them do you like they done me.” Appellant testified that he continued running “out of fear. I’m running trying to get away. I’m running not to kill. I’m running to get away from them. They fixing to kill me, man.”