

Gang leader found guilty in '09 slaying

Newport News man faces life in prison under mandatory sentencing guidelines

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NEWPORT NEWS — A federal jury on Monday convicted a 39-year-old Newport News man in a 2009 gang-related killing and several other violent crimes — and he's now expected to spend the rest of his life behind bars.

The U.S. District Court jury found that Michael Hopson, then a security guard at Denbigh High School, ordered the killing of

Erique D. Shaw, a 19-year-old former Denbigh High student, for his "perceived disloyalty" to Hopson's fledgling street gang, the "Black P-Stones."

According to court documents, Hopson gave another P-Stones gang member, Darius Crenshaw, the green light to kill Shaw because they thought he was cooperating with a rival gang. So on Nov. 7, 2009, court documents state, Crenshaw "lured" Shaw out of his family's home near Tillerson Drive in Denbigh, then shot him to death. Crenshaw called Hopson to report "that the killing ... was carried out," with Crenshaw then getting promoted within the P-Stones street gang for his actions, court records state.

Federal prosecutors say P-Stones members and former members were involved in several other killings, shootings and robberies over several years in the city.



Hopson

That includes the Oct. 16, 2010, slaying of Samuel S. Aaron during a home invasion at his home on Roanoke Avenue — as gang members attempted to rob the marijuana dealer. Aaron, 51, whose daughter was sleeping upstairs, pleaded for his life before being shot in the head. In that case, another P-Stones gang member, Rico Rashad Jones, pleaded guilty to first-degree murder in June 2012 in Newport News Circuit Court, and was sentenced in January to serve 25 years.

The killings also included the Nov. 29, 2010, slaying of Ernest James Crudup, 20, at an apartment complex on River Road, near the Newport News shipyard. Crudup was killed after one of his best friends, former P-Stones gang member Desmond Finnell, accused him of stealing pot from him. Finnell, 26, of Hampton, pleaded guilty in federal court on Nov. 16 to racketeering conspiracy and using a gun in a drug crime, resulting in death. He will be

sentenced in March.

Federal prosecutors say Hopson was a founding member of the Black P-Stones, involved in recruiting, collecting dues, presiding at meetings and organizing marijuana distribution. He "used his security officer position" at Denbigh to further the gang "by recruiting minors and selling narcotics to high school students," prosecutors said. They said Hopson was also behind several other shootings and attempted killings in the area.

Among them:

■ In December 2008, Hopson authorized the killing of a man who was said to be "disrespectful" to P-Stones gang members. Two gang members fired multiple gunshots into the person's home. The intended target's father, who was sitting in his living room, was injured in the eye from the shrapnel.

■ In March 2009, Hopson ordered that two rival gang members to be killed for beating up a P-Stones member, with two of his gang members shooting into a home as a result.

■ In June 2009, Hopson ordered the slaying of a rival gang member who "was responsible for the murder of a P-Stone member." Acting on Hopson's order, a P-Stone member shot and wounded that man.

Hopson, now being held at the Western Tidewater Regional Jail, was set to plead guilty on Nov. 22, with the deal allowing him to admit to a racketeering conspiracy count and to be sentenced to

either "30 years or life," his lawyer said. But Hopson told U.S. District Judge Arenda L. Wright Allen that he wanted to go to trial instead, with a five-day jury trial beginning Nov. 29 in U.S. District Court in Norfolk.

"He came to court and said he was going to go ahead and fight for his life," said Hopson's lawyer, Andrew Protogyrou, of Norfolk. "He said, 'If I get life, I'm done.' So we said, 'Fine, this is your call.'"

On the witness stand, Hopson said he was a family man, testifying that as a Denbigh High security guard he sought to get the students motivated "and get them through troubled lives," Protogyrou said. Yet the prosecution's witnesses pinned Hopson as being the P-Stones' leader. "The witnesses were murderers, robbers, gang members, burglars, liars and drug dealers who got together and had the opportunity to focus on Hopson," Protogyrou said.

The trial featured stories about armed young men burglarizing and stealing from homes to support drug purchases, and quickly shooting at rival gang members over turf battles, the lawyer said. "It was very similar to what you would find in the New York mafia," Protogyrou said. "The conduct was very Hollywood. ... It's unbelievable that this was in our backyard. It was the wild, Wild West, man."

On Monday, the jury convicted Hopson of racketeering conspiracy, murder in aid of racketeering, conspiracy to commit murder in

aid of racketeering, aiding and abetting attempted murder in aid of racketeering, and a marijuana distribution charge, while acquitting him of a shooting charge.

He faces a mandatory life term when he's sentenced in March under federal sentencing laws, prosecutors said.

Of the six men initially indicted in the federal case in December 2013, Hopson was the last of the gang members to be found guilty, with five others having previously pleaded out.

■ Crenshaw, 30, of Newport News, pleaded guilty to racketeering conspiracy charges on Nov. 17, with prosecutors agreeing to ask for no more than 40 years.

■ Justin Brown, 25, of Newport News, pleaded guilty in December 2015 to racketeering conspiracy. He will be sentenced in January.

■ Marcellus Williams, 29, of Newport News, pleaded guilty in April 2014 to racketeering conspiracy and using a gun in a violent crime. He was sentenced to 30 years.

■ Enrique Hinton, 29, of Newport News, pleaded guilty in March 2014 to racketeering conspiracy and using a gun in a violent crime. He was sentenced to 21 years.

■ Chadrick Lard, 26, of Newport News, pleaded guilty to interfering with interstate commerce by robbery and using a gun in a violent crime resulting in death. He has not yet been sentenced, with no date set.

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