

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA
CASE NO. 2021-01513 CFANO
2021-01099 CFANO

STATE OF FLORIDA

vs.

CORNELIUS TREVON WHITFIELD

Defendant.

TAKEN BY: Defendant

DATE: June 12, 2025

TIME: 9:38 a.m. - 10:02 a.m.

PLACE: Criminal Justice Center
14250 - 49th Street North
Clearwater, Florida

REPORTED BY: Sharon K. Allbritton
Shorthand Reporter
Notary Public
State of Florida at Large

DEPOSITION OF
OFFICER MICHAEL J GEIL

PAGES 1-28

APPEARANCE:

THOMAS KOSKINAS, ESQ.
ANTHONY BRADLOW, ESQ.
Assistant State Attorney
14250 - 49th Street North
Clearwater, FL 33762

JULIA B SEIFER-SMITH, ESQ.
MARGARET RUSSELL, ESQ.
LAMARK MCGREEN, ESQ.
Assistant Public Defender
14250- 49th Street North
Clearwater, FL 33762

P R O C E E D I N G S

WHEREUPON,

OFFICER MICHAEL J GEIL

the deponent herein, being first duly sworn, was
examined and testified as follows:

DIRECT EXAMINATION

BY MS. SEIFER-SMITH:

Q Can you please state your name for the
record?

A Yeah. First name is Michael. Spell it
M-i-c-h-a-e-l. Last name is Geil. G-e-i-l.

Q We're here on a couple of matters regarding
Cornelius Whitfield. He has two court case numbers
that I think your testimony might bear on. One is
21-01099 CF. The other one, it's different the to St.
Petersburg police report.

A Gotcha.

Q And the other court case number is 21-01513
CF. Everything that you did though I think is
embodied in one police case number, which is
2021-006023. Does that sound about right?

A Yes.

Q Okay. And you have a report that you
authored in connection with that case in front of you?

1 A Correct.

2 Q You also had an opportunity to read that?

3 A I did.

4 Q Was there anything else that you reviewed
5 before being sworn in?

6 A No.

7 Q My name is Julia Seifer-Smith. I'm an
8 assistant public defender, together with Margaret
9 Russell. We represent Mr. Whitfield. We have a
10 couple of folks here from the state. Tony Bradlow and
11 Tom Koskinas.

12 Did you speak with any of your colleagues
13 before coming in for the deposition this morning?

14 A Just briefly just to see if it was gonna be
15 more S.W.A.T. related questions or if it's gonna be
16 more SIU related. But it looks like we're mostly
17 honing in on the S.W.A.T portion to me.

18 Q What is SIU?

19 A Special Investigations. That's what I was
20 part of at the time that this occurred.

21 Q Oh, that's right, because you're in like a
22 particular unit and S.W.A.T. is part time.

23 A Correct.

24 Q I just learned that.

25 A Yeah. Correct.

1 Q And so your involvement in this case, was it
2 S.W.A.T. related or was it SIU?

3 A It's technically both. But I didn't write a
4 report on the SIU portion because we weren't
5 successful. Basically we were given a packet to
6 locate Whitfield by Major Crimes, and we had been
7 looking for him for maybe a week or so.

8 Q What kind of packet were you given?

9 A Just basic information. You know, pictures,
10 where he might possibility be located, family members.
11 Things like that.

12 Q Did you get any other kind of information
13 like, like cellphone data, other location data?

14 A I don't remember if we got anything in
15 particular like that. It's usually pretty brief. If
16 they get stuff like that, that means they're probably
17 looking for like a cellphone wire or something like
18 that. And I don't think we had anything like that
19 going on.

20 Q Do you recall what the packet looked like?

21 A No. I mean, we get, you know, four or five a
22 week at least. It's usually either an email or a
23 printed out sheet. So, yeah, I can't tell you.

24 Q And do you remember anything in terms of like
25 why you would have been looking for Mr. Whitfield?

1 A Well I know he was implicated in a murder and
2 an attempted homicide, from my recollection.

3 Q Any involvement in that part of the
4 investigation?

5 A No, just the attempt to locate portion.

6 Q And do you know who sent you the packet?

7 A I mean, I could guess. Maybe Detective
8 Bilbrey. But I wasn't sure.

9 Q Okay. I'm not very familiar with SIU. Can
10 you tell me a little bit about that unit?

11 A Yeah. So we would do undercover
12 surveillance. We'd operate, you know, unmarked, just
13 a regular civilian type of vehicle. And I'd wear
14 civilian type of clothes. So we would attempt to
15 locate suspects or do active surveillance on suspects
16 who might be implicated in crimes or we think are part
17 of criminal activity or patterns.

18 Q And you said you didn't write a report in
19 connection with the work that you did for SIU on this
20 case.

21 A Correct.

22 Q Can you tell me why that is?

23 A There was nothing to report. I just know
24 that we attempted to locate him and we couldn't find
25 him. So usually when that happens there's nothing to

1 write.

2 Q Do you remember what you did to try to find
3 him?

4 A I remember sitting at the house where this
5 occurred, 2960 Emerson Avenue. I remember we had
6 rotated eyeballs on the house for a period of time.
7 There may have been other locations that we were
8 attempting to find him as well but I don't remember.

9 Q Do you remember any kind of observations that
10 you had at this house?

11 A I just know that we didn't see anybody that
12 looked like Whitfield come or go.

13 Q Do you remember who you saw come or go?

14 A I remember, who I think is his mom, and then
15 an older couple. So maybe an older male and older
16 female.

17 Q And would this have been like rotating
18 throughout the day and the night, like not any
19 specific timeframe?

20 A We do have a dayshift team and a nightshift
21 team as well.

22 Q Which one were you?

23 A I was dayshift. Sometimes we work the same
24 case. Something like this we probably would have
25 given off to evening shift to take over. But, you

1 know, I can't guarantee that that's what happened.

2 Q Was there anything more active involved in
3 that surveillance, like actually talking to neighbors
4 or anybody on the street?

5 A No. We don't interact. We try to be unseen
6 because you never know if somebody's a relative or a
7 friend.

8 Q So when you said that you had some
9 conversations with colleagues about this upcoming
10 depo, was it colleagues in SIU or colleagues in
11 S.W.A.T.?

12 A Both. I just asked to see who was getting
13 deposed, if it was anybody from SIU or anybody from
14 S.W.A.T.

15 Q I think we skipped right over your kind of
16 professional development. So can you tell me when you
17 started with the department, if you have prior law
18 enforcement experience and what positions you've held
19 within the St. Petersburg Police Department?

20 A Sure. 2007 I started. I had no prior law
21 enforcement. I started off in patrol. Went into
22 field training. Started with S.W.A.T. probably about
23 13 years ago. And then SIU I did about eight years.
24 I think I started in 2017. Somewhere in there.

25 Q It sounds like that was in the past.

1 A Yeah. I actually just left SIU in September.
2 Now I'm in DFU, which is Digital Forensics.

3 Q Very different.

4 A Yeah, complete opposite end of the spectrum.
5 I went from, you know, very high anxiety and stressful
6 environment to --

7 Q All field work to writing a desk?

8 A Yes, absolutely. I'm getting close to
9 retirement so I'm trying to, you know, divest.

10 Q And so my understanding is that S.W.A.T. is a
11 part time role. So like as you have your like daily
12 responsibilities, if you get calls out to S.W.A.T.
13 then you respond to those kinds of calls?

14 A Yes, that's correct. So I'm always on call.
15 And we have training usually once a month. And then
16 we have like a week long training once a year.

17 Q So tell me how you got involved in this case?

18 A Well, like I said, initially it was from SIU.
19 I do remember we were told to drop the house because
20 after watching it for some time there was no sign that
21 he was there. And I believe one of the detectives
22 actually talked to maybe the mom at the residence and
23 she had said that he hadn't been at the house. So we
24 had other cases to work. I think we moved on to
25 something else. And this was like right before the

1 incident happened.

2 Q Do you remember what day you were told to
3 drop the house?

4 A No, unfortunately.

5 Q You said it was right before. Do you think
6 it was truly that day or the day before?

7 A It was very close, maybe one or two days.
8 Yeah. I was very surprised when it happened.

9 Q And do you remember how long you were
10 involved in like watching the house or like that kind
11 of general surveillance?

12 A It felt like maybe a week or more.

13 Q So you drop the house presuming no further
14 involved in that particular portion of the
15 investigation.

16 A Correct.

17 Q And then what happened?

18 A So the day that this occurred I was actually
19 at S.W.A.T. training.

20 Q Okay.

21 A And we were notified by our S.W.A.T.
22 commander that we're going out to this house for an
23 active shooter situation.

24 Q Who's the S.W.A.T. commander?

25 A Well currently it is Haemmelmann, Kevin

1 Haemmelmann. But I don't remember if he was -- he
2 transitioned from being the assistant to the commander
3 at some point. So he might have been the assistant
4 commander and acting as the commander for the day, but
5 I'm not sure.

6 Q Okay. I mean, it was quite a few years ago.

7 A Yeah. It came up pretty quick. I can't
8 believe 2021. It feels like it was yesterday.

9 Q It turns out it was four years ago.

10 A Yeah, it's crazy.

11 Q Okay. So what do you recall hearing in terms
12 of like the need to go to do like a S.W.A.T. call?

13 A Well, I heard the name who rung a bell. I
14 was like, okay, well I know what we're working. We
15 were looking for him. And then I heard that his mom
16 had escaped. I don't know if she got shot or where
17 she was shot at, but I remember hearing that she had
18 escaped from, you know, harm basically. And that
19 she -- this is kind of through the grapevine. She saw
20 her son shoot basically everybody that was in the
21 house, and she asked for police to come respond.

22 Q You said that this was grapevine information.
23 So it sounds like it's coming to you, what, like folks
24 are talking about it?

25 A It was active. So I don't know where it was

1 coming from, but it was like people were yelling, get
2 down there, start setting up on the house.

3 Q And it sounds like you and probably a few
4 other members of SIU, if they were on the S.W.A.T.
5 team, were kind of uniquely situated in that you
6 already had some awareness of Cornelius Whitfield,
7 maybe his priors, maybe other information about him.

8 A Yes, that's correct.

9 Q Was there anybody else on S.W.A.T. who had
10 been working in SIU at the time and on the Whitfield
11 case?

12 A Let's see, Brian Burton. He's the sergeant
13 of SIU, or he was at the time. And he was actually my
14 team leader once we set up on the house.

15 Q Okay.

16 A Let's see. Aaron Franklin, he might have
17 been in SIU at the time. I'm not sure.

18 Q And did you know anything about -- did you
19 know anything about Mr. Whitfield besides like, you
20 know, kind of known, what you described earlier, like
21 known associates, kind of generally what he looked
22 like obviously from a photo?

23 A Nothing beyond that.

24 Q Okay. So like no priors, any other
25 descriptions?

1 A Nothing that comes to my recollection. But I
2 remember seeing photographs of his tattoos and things
3 like that, but that goes along with photographs.

4 Q Did you know Sergeant Elizondo? I think he
5 was a sergeant at the time, maybe he's a lieutenant,
6 had spoken with Mr. Whitfield's mother at some point
7 between like the initial homicide and February 16th?

8 A No, I don't remember.

9 Q So you don't know if you were ever told about
10 that conversation?

11 A No.

12 Q Okay. Did you think anything in particular
13 like once you were told that this was like a shooting
14 event involving Mr. Whitfield and the house that you
15 had been set up at?

16 A Can you rephrase the question? I'm not sure
17 what you're asking.

18 Q Sure. I'm just asking like, you know, you
19 receive this information. All of a sudden there's
20 like a S.W.A.T. call out for the same house that you
21 had been watching for a week involving the same person
22 that you had been looking for for about a week.

23 Like what kind of thoughts were going through
24 your head at that point?

25 A I mean, just basic human thoughts, tragedy.

1 You know, the mom presumably had been withholding
2 information that he actually was there, which I felt
3 like was really bad for her. I felt really bad for
4 her because she was trying to do right by her son and
5 now he betrayed the entire family. So that's
6 basically it.

7 Q And it sounds like you're not certain exactly
8 where all this information came from in terms of mom
9 being a victim and whatever descriptions she had made
10 of like what occurred within the home?

11 A No. I'm sure it was extremely fast. So
12 trying to figure out exactly which pipeline all the
13 information came from would be almost impossible.

14 Q Okay. And what did you do once you received
15 all this information?

16 A Basic stuff that we do for S.W.A.T. call ups,
17 you know, gear up, find a staging location, start
18 separating ourselves into teams and formulating a
19 plan.

20 Q What was the plan?

21 A Usually it's for something like this. It's
22 an active shooter, barricaded subject. So we would
23 isolate the location so that way nobody else could get
24 hurt, and maintain scene integrity, and attempt to
25 create communication with the person inside. And I

1 don't know what happens beyond that as far as like the
2 commander level. I mean, I can assume but I'm not
3 gonna speak for them.

4 Q We don't want you to have to do that.

5 A Okay.

6 Q So it looks like you -- well, your sergeant
7 was Burton as the team leader.

8 A Correct.

9 Q And you all went to the front. Were you the
10 team that was like attempting to have like a
11 conversation or contact with Mr. Whitfield?

12 A No. So I remember coming in from the west
13 through an alley on what's called a Rook. And that's
14 like--

15 Q It was just described to us by Geil (sic) as
16 a --

17 A Brandon Bill.

18 Q Oh yeah, sorry. Bill. Like a skid steer.

19 A Yeah. I mean, it has different attachments
20 you can put on the front. I'm not sure what they had
21 on the front at the time. But I remember riding on
22 the back of it, which was kind of scary.

23 Q Had you done that before?

24 A Yeah, in training. But, you know, it was
25 fast passed and we were all just packed on it. And

1 there was wasn't a whole lot of cover on it, so...

2 Q My understanding of skid steers, they're not
3 very big.

4 A Yeah.

5 Q Okay. Was anybody trying to make contact
6 with folks in the home during that time?

7 A Not to my knowledge. It's possible but I
8 don't know.

9 Q So you don't remember hearing anything?

10 A No. All I know is the game plan was to try
11 to get to the front. So I road the Rook from west
12 into the alley towards the front of the house. And I
13 believe at that time our BearCat, which is our armored
14 truck, was positioned in the front of the house. So
15 my team had moved from the Rook to the BearCat. And
16 we were basically facing the front of the house. The
17 BearCat had the PA system, which is like a system to
18 like a loud speaker.

19 Q Right.

20 A And that's usually what we use for
21 communication initially to see if we can get any
22 interaction.

23 Q Do you recall hearing anything from the house
24 or just from the BearCat?

25 A Just from the BearCat.

1 Q And then what happened next once you like
2 transitioned to the BearCat? It sounds like you're
3 kind of behind it still.

4 A I'm behind it still. The Rook was used to
5 create an opening on the front of the house.

6 Q Tear down a portion of the wall?

7 A Correct. Yeah. And at that point I could
8 see the interior of the house.

9 Q What were you able to see?

10 A What was I able to see?

11 Q Yeah.

12 A There was a lot of stuff inside the house. I
13 saw a lot of debris. And I couldn't tell if it was
14 portions of the wall or if it was just stuff that they
15 accumulated had. But I didn't see any people. It was
16 just stuff.

17 Q And what happened next?

18 A Some commands were given to Whitfield to come
19 out. And it wasn't very long before he actually
20 started coming out.

21 Q Who was giving those commands?

22 A I believe it was Cameron Hudson.

23 Q Do you know where officer or Detective Hudson
24 was?

25 A Oh, he was in the BearCat, if it was him.

1 Q Got it. Okay. And what did you do next like
2 after you saw Mr. Whitfield start to come out?

3 A We transitioned from the BearCat giving
4 commands to whoever was closest to him giving him
5 verbal commands.

6 Q Was that you?

7 A No. I mean, I was close but I'd have to
8 guess who it was. Maybe Joe Heer. I don't know.

9 Q But still somebody who was on your team at
10 the front?

11 A Correct.

12 Q Okay. And what did you hear?

13 A I just heard verbal commands for him to come
14 out with his hands up.

15 Q Did he do that?

16 A Yes.

17 Q Can you describe what you saw?

18 A Well, I was able to identify him positively.
19 I saw him walk slowly out from the front of the house
20 with his hands up. I just remember him trying to step
21 over debris to come towards us.

22 Q How were you able to identify him?

23 A His face, his body, his tattoos.

24 Q Were you able to see all of his face?

25 A Yes.

1 Q And it was the same face as like the
2 photographs that you had received in SIU?

3 A That's correct.

4 Q And you said he had his hands up at the time?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Did he have anything on him like a backpack,
7 a bag?

8 A Not that I remember.

9 Q Do you remember what he was wearing?

10 A No.

11 Q Even generally?

12 A No.

13 Q Just clothes?

14 A I mean, I could see his tattoos so I'd have
15 to assume it was short sleeved.

16 Q Was he wearing shoes?

17 A I don't remember.

18 Q And do you remember anything about his face,
19 like any particular expression that he had?

20 A I don't remember seeing any expression. It
21 was just blank.

22 Q And so it seems like he was following the
23 directions, those kind of minimal directions of like
24 coming out, hands up; is that right?

25 A Correct.

1 Q Okay. Do you recall any other directions
2 that were given to him at that time?

3 A No.

4 Q About how far did he get? Because you said
5 he had to step over some debris to get out of the
6 house. Did he come out through that hole?

7 A He did, yeah. I'd say maybe halfway through
8 his front yard.

9 Q And at that point what happened?

10 A At that point the nearest officers went hands
11 on and put him in handcuffs.

12 Q That was not you?

13 A No.

14 Q Did you observe what they were doing?

15 A No. I think at that point we started
16 transitioning to trying to do rescue. So while they
17 were taking him into custody people were giving
18 commands to start clearing the house because I think
19 we knew that there was a child inside.

20 Q So you were part of the team that went into
21 the home, did not stay with Mr. Whitfield?

22 A Correct. I started linking up with the other
23 team that started doing that. I think I was the first
24 to try to get to the front door, or through the front
25 opening, but there was just so much debris it was

1 impossible. I started moving stuff and I couldn't get
2 in. So I told us we just to go through the back.

3 Q Okay.

4 A So I think there was already a team trying to
5 got in through the back and we just linked up with
6 them.

7 Q Did you make it into the home?

8 A I did.

9 Q Can you tell me what you recall observing in
10 the house?

11 A A lot of debris and things that were in the
12 way.

13 Q Just like--

14 A Just like a hoarder house almost.

15 Q So not necessarily debris from the Rook's
16 involvement with the house?

17 A No. No. That was all towards the front. In
18 the back there was just stuff everywhere. It was
19 dressers that were in the way, clothes. And I can't
20 even remember everything. But it was just packed. It
21 was very hard to navigate through.

22 Q So it sounds very very messy. Was it dirty
23 as well would you say?

24 A I don't know, maybe.

25 Q Your impression was so many things that it

1 appeared like a hoarder house?

2 A Correct.

3 Q Any other observations? Did you see any
4 people in the house?

5 A I did. I remember seeing -- I definitely
6 remember seeing a body on the couch and another one.
7 I don't remember where I saw the other body though.
8 But there was, the team that was in front of us was
9 already addressing that situation, so I just kept
10 trying to float through the house. And I didn't see
11 anything else.

12 Q So it sounds like you saw two bodies; is that
13 right?

14 A Yeah.

15 Q Can you describe them for me?

16 A No. I didn't want to keep my attention on
17 them because I already saw other officers addressing
18 them. So if there was anything else I didn't want to
19 defer my attention. It was already being taken care
20 of.

21 Q Okay. So it sounds like, from what you
22 recall in terms of the bodies, that it was just one on
23 the couch. You're not sure so much about where the
24 other one was. Just that's what you recall?

25 A Yes. This is just peripheral memory. So

1 it's not a hundred percent accurate.

2 Q Do you remember seeing anything that you
3 thought might have evidentiary value to the case, like
4 any weapons, any contraband?

5 A No. But I do know somebody told me that
6 there was a stash of weapons that was near the front
7 of the house that part of the house collapsed on. I
8 can't attest to the accuracy of that.

9 Q Okay. So you were told this but you didn't
10 see it yourself?

11 A Correct.

12 Q Okay. Did you see any casings when you were
13 coming through? I know this isn't something you were
14 looking for?

15 A No.

16 Q And did you see any people who were still
17 alive who were in the home?

18 A Well I remember the boy, the child being
19 carried out by John Deluca. I'm not sure where he got
20 him from. But that was the only person that was
21 alive.

22 Q You weren't involved in like taking the child
23 out or --

24 A No. No, I wasn't.

25 Q What else did you do?

1 A Once we determined that there was enough
2 officers inside, we were just cluttering it and there
3 was nothing else to do, so basically for me back, had
4 started pulling back out and making room for the
5 detectives to come in and medics and things like that.
6 So my job was basically done at that point.

7 Q Any further involvement in the case?

8 A No.

9 Q Was there a S.W.A.T. debrief regarding the
10 work?

11 A Yes. We always have a S.W.A.T. debrief after
12 a call up or warrant.

13 Q Do you remember where that was held?

14 A Maybe at our training building.

15 Q Do you remember much about the debrief?

16 A No.

17 Q Do you remember if there were any like points
18 that could be improved on or changed?

19 A Nothing to my knowledge.

20 Q Was there ever like an SIU debrief regarding
21 what happened?

22 A Not that I know of. If there was some kind
23 of debrief it probably would have been done at the
24 supervisor level. I'm just assuming. Because that
25 was all decision making, you know, about as far as how

1 long we would stay there and things like that. But as
2 far as I know I don't think so.

3 Q Do you remember any kind of further contact
4 with any investigators associated with either one of
5 the homicide investigations, either the first one, you
6 know, since SIU was in the middle in the second one?

7 A No, I don't think so.

8 Q I don't think I have any further questions.

9 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Ms. Russell.

10 MS. RUSSELL: No, I do not.

11 MR. KOSKINAS: That's it. Thank you, sir.

12 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: We'll reserve your right
13 to read. Thanks very much.

14 (DEPOSITION CONCLUDED AT 10:02 A.M.)

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CERTIFICATE OF OATH

STATE OF FLORIDA)

COUNTY OF PINELLAS)

I, the undersigned authority, certify that
OFFICER MICHAEL J GEIL, personally appeared before me
and was duly sworn.

WITNESS my hand and official seal this 13
day of JUNE, 2025.

*Sharon Allbritton*Sharon K. Allbritton

Notary Public
State of Florida
Commission# HH307873
Expires: January 1, 2027

1 I have read the foregoing pages, numbered 1
2 through 25, inclusive, and herewith subscribe to same
3 as a correct transcription of the answers made by me
4 to the questions herein recorded, subject to
5 corrections below.

6 OFFICER MICHAEL J GEIL

7 Date: _____

8 *****

9 CORRECTIONS

10 PAGE/LINE#

11 COMMENTS

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1 STATE OF FLORIDA)

2 COUNTY OF PINELLAS)

3 I, SHARON K. ALLBRITTON certify that I was
4 authorized to and did stenographically report the
5 deposition of OFFICER MICHAEL J GEIL; and that the
6 transcript is a true record of the testimony given by
7 the deponent.

8 I further certify that I am not a relative,
9 employee, attorney, or counsel of any of the parties,
10 nor am I a relative or employee of any of the parties'
11 attorney or counsel connected with the action, nor am
12 I financially interested in the action.

13 Dated this 13 day of JUNE, 2025.

14
15
16 *Sharon Allbritton*

17 _____
SHARON K. ALLBRITTON