

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: 11:02 a.m. - 11:13 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 JOSEPH D HEER

PAGES 1-18

APPEARANCE:

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

JULIA 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 JOSEPH D HEER

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 Joseph Heer.

Q We are here in two court case matters but
only one police case number. So our court case
numbers are 21-01099 CF, 21-01513 CF.

My name is Julia Seifer-Smith, together with
Margaret Russell and Lamark McGreen. We're assistant
public defenders. We represent Mr. Whitfield.
Present for the state are Tony Bradlow and Tom
Koskinas.

So we had a brief conversation off the
record. You do have your report in front of you.

A Yes.

Q You had an opportunity to review it?

A Yes.

Q Okay. And you are ready to go forward with

1 the deposition?

2 A Yes.

3 Q Okay. Can you just give me kind of a broad
4 overview of your time with the department, and tell me
5 what kind of jobs you've had, including what your job
6 was in 2021?

7 A Okay. I have been with the St. Petersburg
8 Police Department as a sworn officer since March of
9 2005, so just over 20 years of sworn service with the
10 agency. I did several years in patrol, approximately
11 eight years in our Street Crimes Unit. I did a couple
12 of years in the Pinellas County Violent Crimes Task
13 Force. Since August of 2018 I've been permanently
14 assigned to our Training Division teaching high
15 liability topics in inservice. I've also been on our
16 agency S.W.A.T. team since March of 2006, so a little
17 over 19 years for that.

18 Q Can you tell me how you got involved in this
19 case?

20 A As a member of the S.W.A.T. team we had
21 actually been finishing up training I believe that
22 day. We were actually training that week, when we got
23 a page that there was a homicide suspect at a house
24 that apparently just shot three family members. He
25 was still inside the house. And there were I think

1 unknown victims at the time inside. Like we weren't
2 sure if there was anybody still alive or anybody
3 inside who hadn't been shot.

4 Q Okay.

5 A So we all responded to the scene and set up
6 to handle it.

7 Q So you were given a specific address to go
8 to, 2968 Emerson Avenue South. Is that address
9 familiar to you for any reason?

10 A Not that I recall specifically from any other
11 incidents.

12 Q And the name Cornelius Whitfield, was that
13 name familiar to you?

14 A Yes.

15 Q Tell me why?

16 A They had been looking for him in relation to
17 another homicide, an attempt homicide, that occurred I
18 think a couple of weeks before that, if I remember
19 correctly.

20 Q Do you know much about that investigation?

21 A No. I mean, other than like just randomly
22 what I heard. But I had no actual involvement with
23 that.

24 Q Okay, so no involvement in that initial
25 investigation or the search for him?

1 A No. I just knew that he was wanted for
2 homicide, that was it.

3 Q So when you hear that me's involved in this
4 particular S.W.A.T. call out, that's just what you
5 thought, oh, this is the same guy?

6 A Yes. I was told it was the same suspect and
7 that he apparently, alledgedly just shot three more
8 people.

9 Q Once you received that information what did
10 you all do?

11 A We responded to the command post at the
12 location and we were provided assignments by the
13 S.W.A.T. commander.

14 Q Was there any additional information like
15 about the incident that you received once you got to
16 the scene?

17 A I don't recall anything specific being added
18 to the initial information, other than the fact that
19 he was allegedly still inside the house. There were
20 at least three victims that had allegedly been shot,
21 and there may still be other people inside. That's
22 really all I knew.

23 Q And you said you received assignments at that
24 point.

25 A Yes.

1 Q What was your assignment?

2 A I was tasked to be part of the rescue team.
3 I'm an assistant team leader. I was placed under Team
4 Leader Sergeant Brian Burton. And me and the other
5 guys assigned to that rescue team were moved up to the
6 house in preparation for going inside and trying to
7 secure any innocent victims.

8 Q And when you said you went up to the house,
9 where did you go?

10 A We were actually driven up by I believe it
11 was the Rook, which is like an armored -- it's almost
12 like a small bulldozer kind of in a way but it has
13 armor plating on it. So we hitched a ride down the
14 alleyway because we were over a block away. They
15 drove up on that and then we took position in the
16 front yard of the residence hiding behind vehicles for
17 a short period of time until they brought up the
18 BearCat, which is our armored rescue vehicle. They
19 brought up and then we all staged behind that.

20 Q Okay. During the time that you kind of get
21 up to that house itself, were you able to observe the
22 house?

23 A I could see the house from the exterior, but
24 I did not see any people or any movement.

25 Q Did you hear anything from the exterior?

1 A No, I couldn't hear anything.

2 Q Okay. And you said at a certain point you
3 moved from vehicles that were in the yard to behind
4 the BearCat.

5 A Yeah. I recall there was like some kind of
6 like a white sedan or something that was parked out
7 front. I took position behind that initially looking
8 south straight towards the front of the residence.
9 And I was there for, I don't know, maybe a minute or
10 so until the BearCat came up and then I moved behind
11 the BearCat.

12 Q Once you were behind the BearCat were you
13 still able to observe the house?

14 A Yeah. I mean, if I looked over, which I did
15 occasionally, I could still see the front of the
16 house.

17 Q Did you observe any movement?

18 A Not until the suspect came out.

19 Q And did you hear anything from the house
20 before the suspect came out?

21 A Other than them kind of demolishing the front
22 of the house, no.

23 Q Did you hear anybody from the police like
24 making any kind of commands?

25 A The BearCat at one point. I know the

1 BearCat, they used the PA system trying to address the
2 house and get him to come out and give himself up. If
3 I'm not mistaken, I believe that's what prompted him
4 to come out.

5 Q Did you observe him come out?

6 A Yes.

7 Q Can you describe that for me, please?

8 A He just started walking out from deeper
9 inside the residence. The front of the residence,
10 they had removed the front wall using the Rook to
11 allow us access inside. So he started stepping out
12 like over debris and stuff like that. If I remember
13 correctly he didn't have a shirt on. He just had like
14 jeans with a belt kind of hanging, slugging (sic) a
15 little bit low. And he had like one of those Covid
16 masks on I think.

17 Q Were you able to see anymore of his face,
18 like his eyes, things like that?

19 A Not from my initial position, no.

20 Q Were you able to see inside the home?

21 A No. It was kind of dark in the interior,
22 other than once he kind of came out into the light.
23 Like I couldn't really see anything past that.

24 Q Did you hear him say anything?

25 A No. He actually said nothing.

1 Q Did he appear to be following instructions?

2 A Yeah, he followed our commands. He was a
3 little slow about it but he followed commands.

4 Q What were the commands that were given?

5 A He was-- I can't give it to you verbatim.
6 But he was basically directed to come out to the front
7 yard. We directed him down in front of the BearCat to
8 a position of disadvantage and we secured him in
9 handcuffs. That was it.

10 Q Were you involved in securing him in
11 handcuffs?

12 A I just provided cover on him while he was
13 secured in handcuffs.

14 Q So you actually observed him being detained?

15 A Yes.

16 Q Can you describe that for me?

17 A He was ordered to get down on the ground.
18 Proned him out. I positioned myself so I could cover
19 him with my rifle. And I think it was Detective Bauer
20 that came up and just placed him in handcuffs.

21 Q Did he resist in any way, like move around in
22 any way?

23 A No.

24 Q Did you ever hear anything come out of him,
25 like any noises, any words?

1 A No. He did not make any statements or
2 anything.

3 Q Okay. And was he searched at any point?

4 A They pulled him back behind of BearCat. I'm
5 sure he was searched but I had nothing to do with it.

6 Q And you didn't observe it--

7 A No. Once he was secured and they pulled him
8 back I shifted my focus back to the front of the
9 house.

10 Q And when you shifted your focus back to the
11 front of the house what did you do?

12 A I stood by until they had the rescue teams
13 move up. My job was simply to sit there and cover the
14 front of the house at that time.

15 Q Did you ever observe Mr. Whitfield's like
16 full face?

17 A No.

18 Q So just like just his eyes and everything
19 above the mask?

20 A Yeah.

21 Q In terms of what you did observe, like can
22 you describe his appearance, his demeanor, like his
23 expression?

24 A Very cold.

25 Q Why would you say cold?

1 A If I'm not mistaken, I remember I think it
2 was Sergeant Burton asked him to look away, and you
3 could tell, like he just stared up at us and you could
4 tell -- I mean, he had the mask on like partially on.
5 It wasn't all the way on. But you could tell he just
6 smiled. Like he just looked up and smiled at us and
7 that was it.

8 Q I'm a little confused. So look away like to
9 not look at you all?

10 A Yeah, because he was down on the ground and
11 he was starting to look back at us.

12 Q Okay.

13 A And when he went to look-- before he turned
14 his head back down he just looked back at us. You
15 could tell. Like you could see because the mask was
16 partially down. You could see like the corners of his
17 mouth. He smiled and looked at us for a second and
18 put his head back down.

19 Q Anything else that you recall notable in
20 terms of like your observations of him?

21 A No.

22 Q Did you hear anything about like any
23 observations or behaviors that Mr. Whitfield engaged
24 in while he was in police custody?

25 A No.

1 Q And it sounds like this was the first that
2 you ever had contact with him?

3 A Yes. To my knowledge, that's my only
4 interaction with him ever.

5 Q Did you ever go into the home?

6 A I went up at one point and kind of like
7 looked inside and yelled something to one of the team
8 members. I was just checking on the guys. But I
9 never went in. I never saw any of the victims. I
10 have no idea where anybody else was at inside.

11 Q Did you observe any injuries to Mr.
12 Whitfield?

13 A None that I saw.

14 Q Did you ever see any kind of weapons?

15 A No, I did not see anything.

16 Q Any further involvement on scene?

17 A No. Shortly after I think they ended up
18 bringing the child out. They found a child inside.
19 And they called medics and stuff in to check on the
20 people that were inside that appeared deceased. That
21 was all relayed over the radio. I had no involvement
22 with it.

23 Yeah, after that they basically had us, they
24 turned the scene over to detectives and we regrouped
25 back over for a debrief.

1 Q Do you remember the debrief?

2 A Not particularly, no.

3 Q What's the purpose of a debrief like that?

4 A Just to see if anybody had anything in
5 particular they needed to cover or go over, making
6 sure that everything went fine. Basically, everything
7 is good. Get your gear squared away. That kind of
8 thing.

9 Q Was there anything in particular that needed
10 to be discussed, like any kind of concerns about
11 any --

12 A No.

13 Q Okay. And do you remember if there was
14 anybody who was particularly affected by their work
15 that day?

16 A Not that I'm aware of.

17 Q Okay. Any further conversations like at the
18 station? I know that like everybody on your team
19 obviously like has other jobs within the department.

20 A Uh-huh.

21 Q And this seems like a pretty big case that
22 involved like two homicide investigations.

23 Any further conversations about Mr.
24 Whitfield, about the investigations that you recall?

25 A No, not that I recall.

1 Q Okay. Did you ever hear anything about -- I
2 don't know that he's a sergeant anymore, but Sergeant
3 Elizondo having conversations with Mr. Whitfield's
4 mother before this incident --

5 A No.

6 Q -- but after the first homicide?

7 A No.

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

9 MS. SIEFER-SMITH: Anybody else.

10 MR. KOSKINAS: That's it.

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

13 (DEPOSITION CONCLUDED AT 11:13 A.M.)

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CERTIFICATE OF OATH

STATE OF FLORIDA)
COUNTY OF PINELLAS)

I, the undersigned authority, certify that
OFFICER JOSEPH HEER, personally appeared before me and
was duly sworn.

WITNESS my hand and official seal this 15
day of JUNE, 2025.

Sharon Allbritton
Sharon K. Allbritton
Notary Public
State of Florida
Commission# HH307873
Expires: January 1, 2027

I have read the foregoing pages, numbered 1 through 15, inclusive, and herewith subscribe to same as a correct transcription of the answers made by me to the questions herein recorded, subject to corrections below.

OFFICER JOSEPH HEER

Date: _____

CORRECTIONS

PAGE / LINE#

COMMENTS

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 JOSEPH HEER; 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 15 day of JUNE, 2025.

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15
16 *Sharon Allbritton*

17 _____
SHARON K. ALLBRITTON
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