

BY TIM SLOAN—THE WASHINGTON POST

Florida Riley, left, and James Strickland, center, thank defense attorney Michael Blumenthal following a verdict in the murder trial of their son. Donovan Shawn Strickland was found guilty on two lesser charges.

Md. Jury Deadlocks on Murder Charge In Slaying of Off-Duty District Officer

By Ruben Castaneda
Washington Post Staff Writer

A Prince George's County jury declared itself "hopelessly deadlocked" yesterday on a murder charge against a man on trial in the slaying of an off-duty D.C. police officer but convicted him of armed robbery and another crime.

After questioning the jury foreman, Prince George's Circuit Court Judge Richard H. Sothoron Jr. declared a hung jury on the felony murder count against Donovan Shawn Strickland, 29, in the slaying of Officer Oliver Wendell Smith Jr., 28, in February.

Sothoron, over defense objections, then accepted a partial verdict from the jury on the two other counts Strickland faced.

The jury, which deliberated for more than nine hours over two days, found Strickland guilty of armed robbery and the use of a handgun in

the commission of a felony. Prosecutors said they will retry Strickland on the murder charge.

"I'm very disappointed," Prince George's County State's Attorney Jack B. Johnson said. "We will aggressively prosecute the felony murder charge again. Strickland deserves to be convicted of this heinous crime."

Strickland was one of three men accused of robbing Smith, but he did not shoot him. Under Maryland law, however, anyone involved in committing a felony, such as armed robbery, may also be convicted of a murder that occurred during the crime. A defendant may also be convicted of felony murder if he tried to escape the "immediate scene" of a robbery that results in murder.

Strickland could have been sentenced to life in prison without parole if he had been convicted

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of felony murder. He can be sentenced to a maximum of 20 years in prison on each of the two charges of which he was convicted.

"Obviously, we're pleased," defense attorney Michael Blumenthal said. "I don't think there was an attorney within 300 miles of here who didn't think it would be a guilty verdict within 10 minutes."

Jury foreman Victor Laczko said the final vote on the murder charge was 7 to 5 for conviction. The jurors who voted for acquittal said the robbery was separate from the shooting, Laczko said.

Taking the stand in his own defense, Strickland had tearfully described Smith's slaying as "senseless."

"He died for no good reason," Strickland testified.

On the stand, he admitted that he and two co-defendants robbed Smith on Feb. 26 in the parking lot of the Forestville apartment complex where the young officer lived with his wife and two children.

In his testimony, he blamed co-de-

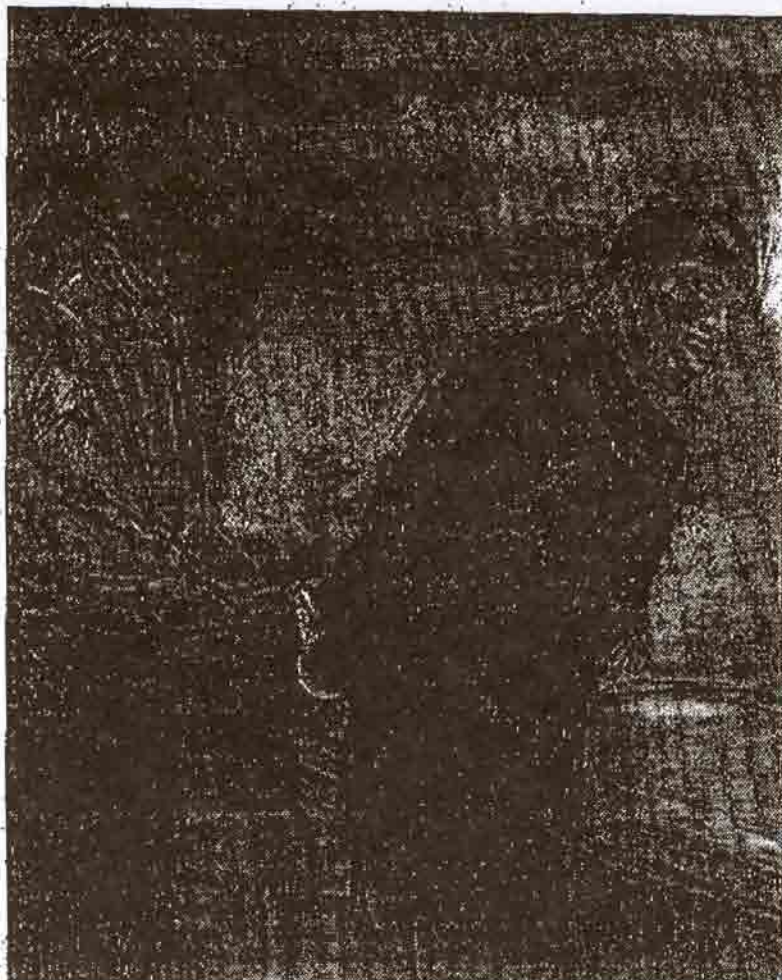
fendant Antwan Delonta Brown, 24, for the slaying.

Strickland testified that he held a gun on Smith, made him lie face down on the ground, and took his wallet and badge. Strickland testified that he left Smith unharmed on the ground and as he rounded the corner of a building, ran into co-defendant Brown, the accused triggerman. When Brown asked for his gun back, he gave it to him, Strickland testified.

Strickland testified that he got into the getaway car, then heard three gunshots. Smith was shot three times in the back of the head.

Blumenthal argued that Strickland should not be held accountable for Brown's actions. Brown is to go on trial in March. Anthony Allen Crawley, 39, pleaded guilty to felony murder in September and awaits sentencing.

At the trial's outset, Chandra Smith, the victim's widow, bolted from her seat, leaned over a wooden barrier and screamed at Strickland, "You killed my husband! You killed my husband!" She was escorted out and banned from the courtroom for the rest of the trial.



Donovan Shaw Strickland is handcuffed before being led from a courtroom. The jury that deadlocked on murder charge convicted him on two other crimes.