

# Man convicted of killing Jacksonville Navy chief in front of 3-year-old daughter

Posted: February 10, 2011 - 3:15pm



DON BURK/The Times-Union

Deangelo Thomas hangs his head after the verdict of guilty was read Thursday at the Duval County Courthouse. The jury found Thomas guilty of murdering David Gilbert, a Navy chief petty officer.

By [David Hunt](#)

Deangelo Thomas' lawyers told the Jacksonville jury they weren't contesting that he killed a well-liked Navy man during a botched burglary in April 2010.

But they now are fighting for his life.

Thomas, 30, faces a possible death penalty after he was found guilty of first-degree murder, armed burglary and a weapons charge. A five-man, seven-woman jury deliberated for about two hours and 15 minutes Thursday. The jury will reconvene to recommend a sentence for Thomas next week.

The conviction holds Thomas accountable for the April 16, 2010, murder of David Gilbert, 40, a chief petty officer who was shot to death in the doorway of his Roosevelt Boulevard apartment near Jacksonville Naval Air Station.

Two of Thomas' family members started to cry and had to leave the courtroom as the verdict was read. Thomas did not break a stone glare as the clerk read the jury's findings.

Prosecutors stressed that Gilbert was killed in front of his girlfriend and 3-year-old daughter and that Thomas broke into the apartment by mistake while trying to rob a drug dealer.

The girlfriend, Stacy Hass, had no comment as she cried and hugged other supporters outside Circuit Judge Jeff Morrow's courtroom. Gilbert's uncle, Roy Dickey, said his nephew was taken from the family too quickly, but he credited police and prosecutors for their work.

Thomas' defense lawyers cross-examined witnesses sparingly during the trial and did not call any of their own to the stand. During her closing argument, Assistant Public Defender Debra Billard said the tactic was not to insult anyone's intelligence.

Investigators had nailed Thomas with [DNA evidence](#). They found his gun in a potted plant. They found the jeans he tried to ditch outside the apartment. The jeans were covered in Gilbert's blood.

However, Billard said, the crime did not rise to the level of first-degree murder. She said it was a fight-or-flight response triggered as the 6-foot-3 Navy chief locked up with Thomas in a struggle near the doorway.

"There was no premeditation," Billard said. "He just wanted to get out of there."

Gilbert was returning home from a day out with his daughter and girlfriend when Thomas tried to flee the apartment. A neighbor had called 911 moments before because she'd seen Thomas climb in through a window. She testified that she'd tried to get outside to alert Gilbert, but was just moments too late.

In a recorded telephone call from jail, which jurors were played, Thomas explains that he was there to rob "the dope man," but he got the wrong apartment while prowling through the complex.

He blamed his cousin, Edgar Allen, for bad directions to the apartment. Allen is charged and awaiting trial. Thomas also said during the call that he should have just stopped and taken a breaking-and-entering charge rather than shoot his way out.

State Attorney Angela Corey said Thomas made a conscious decision to shoot Gilbert, a man who had every right to defend his home. She stressed that the .40-caliber Glock pistol did not have a hair trigger and would have had to be fired, with moments for Thomas to think, as eight bullets ripped into Gilbert.

"Rather than go back out the window, he chose to kill the only person standing between him and the door," Corey said. "That was David Gilbert."

Gilbert joined the Navy in 1987 and was most recently assigned to the Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 202. He served around the world as a supervisor on construction projects - including two tours in Iraq.

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