

LOCAL

Fitch found guilty on all counts in officer's murder



Photo Gallery - Jury finds Brian Fitch guilty

By **MATT MCKINNEY**, STAR TRIBUNE
February 02, 2015 - 11:29 PM

ST. CLOUD - A Stearns County Jury convicted Brian G. Fitch, Sr., on all counts involving the murder of Mendota Heights police officer Scott Patrick, who was shot July 30 during a routine traffic stop on a busy West St. Paul street.

The jury of seven men and five women also convicted him of attempted first-degree murder for shooting at three St. Paul police officers who captured him after a shootout.

Fitch yelled profanities at the judge after the verdicts were read. "You threw this whole case from the beginning! Everything that came up, you overruled every single one of them," he said.

Applause broke out as Fitch was led from the courtroom.

Fitch, 40 years old and a career criminal, did not take the stand during his two-week trial. He will be sentenced automatically to life in prison without the possibility of parole. His sentencing hearing will be held Wednesday in Dakota County District Court. His trial was held here due to pretrial publicity.



Patrick, 47, was married and a father of two. He was the longest serving member of the Mendota Heights force and its only officer ever to be killed in the line of duty. Thousands of people, including 4,000 members of law enforcement, attended his funeral in August.

Addressing the media for the first time, Patrick's widow, Michelle, said after the verdicts, "God bless Fitch." Speaking slowly and between sobs, she continued: "I hope he can come to a realization of what he has done. He has taken so much from us. He didn't need to. I just want to bless him and hope that he realizes what he has done. Amen to him."

The state called 55 witnesses and used 136 pieces of evidence to present its case. The defense called no witnesses. Fitch's lawyers had jurors listen to an audiotape of the arrest, trying to emphasize how quickly the standoff ended.

The jury got the case shortly before noon Monday. About three hours later they asked to see the gun prosecutors said killed Patrick that was found with Fitch. They reached a verdict shortly before 9:30 p.m., after taking a late dinner break.

In his closing arguments prosecutor Phillip Prokopowicz, standing at a lectern facing the jury, said "the time has come" for justice. He acknowledged the weakest point in the state's case: No one saw Fitch at the scene of Patrick's shooting, and witnesses to the crime gave conflicting testimony about who was driving the Pontiac Grand Am that Patrick had pulled over.



But there were other facts, Prokopowicz said, that the jury should use to convict Fitch: Fitch owned the Grand Am; the site of the shooting was on a route that Fitch was likely taking that morning; and the gun that firearms analysis says was used in the shooting was found with Fitch later that day.

Fitch's ex-girlfriend said he threatened to kill a police officer if he was pulled over. And people who saw Fitch after the shooting said he tried to hide the Grand Am seen in police videos and wanted to flee the state. He threatened to kill a man's family if that man told anyone where Fitch had gone, according to court testimony.

Dakota County and Ramsey County jointly prosecuted the case. "We are pleased to have brought Brian Fitch to justice for this senseless and violent crime that took the life of Officer Scott Patrick and endangering the lives of other officers," Dakota County attorney James Backstrom said in a statement.

"We are grateful for the jury's guilty verdict but unfortunately for all of us this does not bring back a dedicated peace officer, a father, a husband and someone who meant so many other things to our entire community," Ramsey County Attorney John Choi said.

Fitch was also found guilty of three counts of second degree assault involving the shootout and one count each of illegally possessing a firearm and intentional discharge of a firearm.

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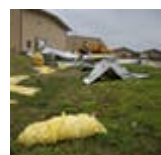
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