

IN THE COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS OF TENNESSEE
AT NASHVILLE

Assigned on Briefs June 16, 2026

FILED

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Clerk of the
Appellate Courts

STATE OF TENNESSEE v. HORACE PALMER WILLIAMSON, III

**Appeal from the Criminal Court for Davidson County
No. 2018-C-2127 Khadija Lanice Babb, Judge**

No. M2024-01445-CCA-R3-CD

The defendant, Horace Palmer Williamson, III, was convicted of two counts of first-degree felony murder, two counts of first-degree premeditated murder,¹ two counts of especially aggravated robbery, two counts of aggravated robbery, two counts of especially aggravated kidnapping, two counts of aggravated sexual battery, and one count of felon in possession of a weapon. The jury imposed a sentence of life without the possibility of parole on the murder counts, and the trial court imposed an effective sentence of twenty-five years on the remaining counts. On appeal, the defendant challenges the sufficiency of the convicting evidence and the imposition of a life sentence without the possibility of parole. Following our review of the record, the parties' briefs, and applicable law, we affirm the judgments of the trial court.

Tenn. R. App. P. 3 Appeal as of Right; Judgments of the Criminal Court Affirmed

J. ROSS DYER, J., delivered the opinion of the court, in which ROBERT L. HOLLOWAY, JR., and MATTHEW J. WILSON, JJ., joined.

Matthew J. Crigger, Franklin, Tennessee (on appeal), and Michael L. Freeman, Nashville, Tennessee (at trial), for the appellant, Horace Palmer Williamson, III.

Jonathan Skrmetti, Attorney General and Reporter; Benjamin A. Ball, Senior Assistant Attorney General; Glenn R. Funk, District Attorney General; and Roger Moore and Megan M. King, Assistant District Attorneys General, for the appellee, State of Tennessee.

OPINION

Facts and Procedural History

¹ Each felony murder conviction merged with its respective first-degree murder conviction.

This case arises out of a robbery and shooting that occurred during the early morning hours of August 17, 2018, in the parking lot of the Cobra bar (“Cobra”) in East Nashville. There were four victims involved: Brandon Teal, Jaime Sarrantonio, Amy Cothorn, and Steven Harrington. Mr. Teal and Ms. Sarrantonio died from gunshot wounds sustained during the encounter, and Ms. Sarrantonio and Ms. Cothorn were sexually assaulted. As a result of his involvement, the defendant was indicted for two counts of first-degree felony murder, two counts of first-degree premeditated murder, two counts of especially aggravated robbery, two counts of aggravated robbery, two counts of especially aggravated kidnapping, two counts of aggravated sexual battery, and one count of felon in possession of a weapon.

The State’s theory at trial was that the defendant and co-defendant Demontrey Logsdon (“Logsdon”) embarked on a crime spree in early August 2018 that included the theft of three vehicles and several firearms and culminated with the defendant’s and Logsdon’s commission of the instant offenses. A man named Lacory Lytle was believed to have some involvement in the crime spree as well. Twenty-eight witnesses were presented by the State at the defendant’s trial to circumstantially establish the defendant’s guilt.

Preceding Offenses

On the morning of August 3, 2018, Lisa Alexander discovered that her black Ford Explorer Sport Trac was missing from the driveway of her home on Woodland Star Way in Nashville where she had parked it the night before. Ms. Alexander had not given anyone permission to take her vehicle, and she reported the theft to the police. There were no rifles in her vehicle when it was stolen. Ms. Alexander did not know the defendant, Logsdon, or Mr. Lytle.

Jonathan Lloid returned to his home on Knight Drive in Nashville around 3:30 or 4:00 a.m. on August 7, 2018, after finishing his shift at UPS to discover that someone had broken into his home and stolen seven rifles. Among the rifles stolen were a Winchester .22 bolt action rifle; a .223 New England break action rifle; a Mosin-Nagant bolt action rifle with an ammunition holder containing lead-tipped bullets; and a Savage Arms .22 semi-automatic rifle loaded with subsonic ammunition. Mr. Lloid contacted the police and reported the rifles stolen. Mr. Lloid did not know the defendant, Logsdon, or Mr. Lytle.

On August 9, 2018, Jonathan Burgard left his dark blue Chevrolet Cruze parked in front of his home on Timberline Place in Clarksville. When he went to leave the next morning, he discovered his car was missing. Mr. Burgard’s child’s medical insurance card was in the glovebox of the car when it was stolen. Mr. Burgard did not give anyone

permission to take his vehicle and did not know the defendant, Logsdon, or Mr. Lytle. Mr. Burgard reported the theft of his car to the police.

Around 2:00 a.m. on August 12, 2018, Dyllan Brown was robbed at gunpoint by two men who took his Dodge Journey on Bellevue Road in Nashville. The men arrived in a Chevrolet Cruze and approached Mr. Brown, one carrying “an old revolutionary style leather kind of bolt action long rifle” that he later identified as the Mosin-Nagant rifle stolen from Mr. Lloid. While one man held Mr. Brown at gunpoint, the other held his arms behind his back. Mr. Brown begged the men not to kill him, and the man holding his arms said they were not “taking any lives tonight as long as [he] compl[ied].” One of the men left in the Chevrolet Cruze and the other left in Mr. Brown’s Dodge Journey. Mr. Brown stated that a live round, three boxes of Remington rounds, and a subpoena for Logsdon that were later found in his vehicle and that they had not been there before it was stolen.

Present Offenses

On the night of August 16, 2018, Andrea Cothorn was spending time with her friend, Jaime Sarrantonio. The two attended a show at a music venue and then met up with some friends at a tiki bar. While at the tiki bar, they received an invitation from their friend, Steven Harrington, to stop by the restaurant he operated—Cobra, which was nearby. They arrived at Cobra around 2:00 a.m. on the 17th and spent time with Mr. Harrington and his roommate, Brandon Teal. It was Mr. Teal’s birthday, and the group made plans to continue the celebration by going swimming at another friend’s house once the bar closed.

Around 3:00 a.m., the group walked to a Speedway gas station nearby to buy cigarettes and then returned to Cobra to allow Mr. Harrington to finish closing the restaurant. The group waited inside for Mr. Harrington to complete his duties and then proceeded to the parking lot. The parking lot was equipped with a surveillance camera. The surveillance footage showed that shortly before the group approached Mr. Teal’s car, a dark blue Chevrolet Cruze backed into an alley with a direct view of the parking lot.

As the group of friends approached Mr. Teal’s car and started to get in, the Chevrolet Cruze pulled up behind them. Two African-American men got out of the car – one with a long gun and one with a handgun – and demanded their belongings. The man with the long gun was wearing a red bandana covering his face from the nose down, had long hair possibly in dreadlocks, and was wearing a “beanie” winter hat. He was shorter than both Ms. Cothorn and Mr. Harrington, who were 6’1” and 6’2” respectively, and average build. The man with the handgun was shorter than his partner and “[n]ot as athletic of a build,” and wore a blue bandana covering his face from the nose down.

Apparently not noticing that the men were armed because he was in the act of getting into the car, Mr. Teal told the men that he did not “have anything.” The man with the long gun responded, “I bet you do N word,” and shot Mr. Teal in the back. Mr. Teal fell to the ground.

After seeing Mr. Teal fall, Mr. Harrington threw his wallet on the ground but kept his phone in his pocket. The man with the handgun went over to Mr. Harrington and demanded his belongings. Mr. Harrington indicated that his wallet was on the ground, and the man with the handgun retrieved the wallet and also took Mr. Harrington’s satchel. The man with the long gun moved Ms. Sarrantonio to the area behind Mr. Teal’s car and had her lie on the pavement. The man with the handgun approached Ms. Sarrantonio, reached down her shirt, and “fondle[d] her breasts deliberately, slowly.”

The man with the handgun then pulled Ms. Cothorn out of the car, demanded her purse, and ordered her to the ground. Her purse contained her wallet, credit cards, debit card, identification, passport card, cigarette case, keys, and other personal items. While Ms. Cothorn was crouched on the ground, the man held his gun to the back of her head and “rubb[ed] all over” her body. He reached up Ms. Cothorn’s skirt and penetrated her with his fingers. The man said to her, “ooh, you feel nice, we will probably take you with us.”

The men returned to the Chevrolet Cruze and appeared to be preparing to leave. Mr. Harrington noticed that the men’s masks had fallen down, so he looked away because he was concerned they would shoot him if he saw their faces. Ms. Cothorn started to get up, but Mr. Harrington warned her that the men were coming back and to stay down. The men returned to Mr. Teal’s car for a few minutes and then finally left. Mr. Harrington heard a second gunshot as the men were leaving.

Once the men were gone, Mr. Harrington rushed to check on Mr. Teal and called 911. He instructed Ms. Cothorn to go inside the bar for help where one of the bartenders also called 911. A patron came out of the bar and checked on Ms. Sarrantonio, discovering that she had been shot. The police arrived within two to three minutes of the 911 calls. Once the police arrived, Ms. Cothorn went back outside and saw Ms. Sarrantonio lying on the ground at the back of Mr. Teal’s car and held her hand until the police separated them. Ms. Sarrantonio was taken to the hospital where she succumbed to the gunshot she sustained to the torso. Likewise, Mr. Teal did not survive his injuries, having sustained a gunshot to the posterior torso. Both deaths were ruled homicides.

Initial Investigation

Officer Eric Hall with the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (“MNPd”) arrived on the scene around 3:30 a.m., within minutes of the shooting. Coincidentally,

Officer Hall had seen the victims earlier when they were at the Speedway gas station and recognized them immediately. Officer Hall and his trainee secured the crime scene.

Investigator Jessie Holt with the MNPd arrived on the scene approximately twenty minutes later. Investigator Holt spoke with Officer Hall and learned that there were two eyewitnesses to the crime and that surveillance footage captured the incident. Investigator Holt reviewed the footage and then interviewed the two surviving victims. The investigator obtained Ms. Cothorn's Apple ID and password to utilize the Track My iPhone feature to learn the phone's location, somewhere between 23rd Avenue North and Heiman Street. Patrol officers were dispatched to the location of 1408 23rd Avenue North to search for anything related to the incident.

Investigator Holt met patrol officers at the 23rd Avenue North location around 6:00 a.m. and joined in the search of the area. The officers discovered Ms. Cothorn's phone in a wooded area behind an alley, and a wallet containing Ms. Cothorn's health insurance card and a metal cigarette case were found in the alley. Ms. Cothorn's purse, Ms. Sarrantonio's purse, and Mr. Harrington's satchel were found inside a trashcan next to the alley. They also found an OSHA card with Mr. Teal's name on it and a phone case loose inside the trashcan. Crime scene investigators processed the area and the evidence found at the location. Fingerprints were lifted from Ms. Cothorn's phone and the metal cigarette case, as well as the trashcan where the purses and satchel were found and sent to the crime laboratory for examination. Jessica Davis, a latent print examiner for the MNPd, determined that fingerprints found on the front of Ms. Cothorn's cellphone matched the defendant. A fingerprint found on the metal cigarette case matched Logsdon.

Per a request from the police, Ms. Cothorn did not cancel her stolen credit or debit cards in an effort to track the perpetrators. At 5:36 a.m., approximately two hours after the robbery / shooting, Ms. Cothorn's debit card was used at a McDonald's at 801 Vantage Way. Then, at 6:25 a.m., her debit card was used at a Z-Mart at 2610 Clarksville Pike. Ultimately, twenty-two charges were made to Ms. Cothorn's debit card.

Claire Vondohlen, a civilian crime scene investigator, responded to the scene at Cobra shortly after 4:00 a.m. on August 17th. A .22 caliber fired cartridge casing and an unfired .22 caliber live bullet were found at the scene.

The Defendant's Arrest and Subsequent Investigation

On August 17, 2018, William Duggan, a civilian helicopter pilot for the MNPd aviation unit, assisted in locating two vehicles, a gray Dodge Journey and a black Ford Sport Trac, believed to have been involved in a kidnapping. The helicopter departed around 4:00 p.m., piloted by Officer Ben Miller and with Mr. Duggan serving as the tactical

flight officer or observer. Mr. Duggan located the cars exiting an apartment complex near 39th Avenue North and Alameda Street. The helicopter followed the Dodge but lost sight of it when it turned down an alley.

Meanwhile, ground units picked up the Ford Sport Trac and sent the location to the helicopter. The helicopter located the truck and followed it into East Nashville. The truck stopped around Fatherland Street and South Fourth, where a woman exited the truck. The truck continued to flee, and the helicopter followed it into North Nashville. The driver “bailed from the vehicle” and ground units were able to apprehend him after a foot chase.

MNPD Officer Ryan Finnegan was involved with the attempted traffic stop of the black Ford Sport Trac from the ground as the vehicle was being tracked by the helicopter. While patrolling the area in an unmarked car, Officer Finnegan saw the Sport Trac pull over and let a woman out. At that point, Officer Finnegan pulled up to the driver’s side of the truck and activated his blue lights. Officer Finnegan got out of his vehicle, but the Sport Trac sped away. The truck’s passenger door was still open, and a long gun slid out into the roadway when the truck turned left.

Officer Finnegan attended to the woman who exited the truck, Kaylee Mitchell. Ms. Mitchell was holding two backpacks – a multicolored one and a dark gray one. Ms. Mitchell indicated that the gray backpack did not belong to her. The gray backpack contained a knife, as well as an ID and social security card for Logsdon and a letter addressed to Logsdon from the social security administration. A debit card in Logsdon’s name was on the sidewalk and “appeared like it had just fallen there.” After attending to Ms. Mitchell, Officer Finnegan confirmed that the item that had fallen from the truck was a rifle, specifically a “pretty unique” Mosin-Nagant with ammunition attached to the side.

MNPD Officer Andrew Grega picked up pursuit of the black Ford Sport Trac after it sped away from Officer Finnegan. Officer Grega spotted the vehicle in the North Nashville area and tracked it until it eventually stopped in an alley near New Bell and 23rd Avenue. The driver, identified as the defendant, emerged from the truck and ran. Officer Grega intercepted him and took him into custody. When the defendant was taken into custody, he had a health insurance card belonging to Dillon Burgard – the child of the owner of the stolen Chevrolet Cruze, a black hat, a red bandana, and a pair of binoculars in his possession.

Crime scene investigators responded to the scene where the black Ford Sport Trac had been abandoned by the suspect. Two rifles, the Winchester and New England rifles stolen from Mr. Lloid, and two magazines were found in the truck. Twenty-nine fingerprint cards were lifted off the vehicle. On the Ford Sport Trac, a fingerprint below the door handle on the exterior of the driver’s side rear door was identified as the defendant’s.

Meanwhile, MNPD Officer Cameron Brown located the Dodge Journey on Alameda Street near 21st Avenue North in the late afternoon hours of August 17, 2018. There was no one in or near the vehicle when he found it. Officer Charles Linville, a crime scene investigator with the MNPD, processed the Dodge Journey at the crime lab. Of note, three boxes of cartridges, a live cartridge, and a subpoena for Logsdon were found in the vehicle. The defendant's fingerprints were found on the exterior of the vehicle as well as on the subpoena for Logsdon and a Panera card found inside the vehicle. Logsdon's fingerprints were found on the exterior and on items inside the interior of vehicle as well.

MNPD Officer Benjamin Froehlich assisted in recovering the Chevrolet Cruze late in the afternoon on August 17, 2018. No one was in the vehicle, and it was towed to the impound lot. Officer Douglas Belcher, a crime scene investigator with the MNPD, processed the Chevrolet Cruze and lifted a number of fingerprints that were sent for comparison. Notably, a .22 caliber magazine was found within the trunk in the spare tire compartment. Fingerprint analysis identified the defendant's fingerprints on the interior rear driver's side door and trunk of the vehicle.

DNA Evidence

Rachel Mack, a forensic scientist in the forensic biology unit of the MNPD crime laboratory, performed DNA comparisons to swabs taken from the vehicles and other evidence involved in the case. Swabs taken from the interior front and rear passenger door handles, as well as the exterior rear passenger door handle, of the Dodge Journey matched Ms. Mitchell's DNA. A swab from the interior rear driver's side door returned mixed DNA results bearing the presence of two contributors with Logsdon included as a possible contributor. A swab from the Chevrolet Cruze was consistent with Ms. Mitchell's DNA profile. Ms. Mack requested that some evidence be sent to Cybergenetics for further analysis because the company had software that could analyze samples that were too complex or too limited for a typical lab to do a comparison.

Jennifer Bracamontes, a DNA analyst at Cybergenetics, used the company's True Allele software to analyze the samples provided by the MNPD. Notably, Ms. Bracamontes determined that DNA found on the Dodge Journey's steering wheel matched Logsdon 239 quadrillion times more probable than a coincidence. She also determined that DNA on the front driver's door handle belonged to Logsdon 52.3 quadrillion times more probable than a coincidental match, and DNA found on the rear driver's side door handle matched Logsdon 774 septillion times more probable than a coincidental match. Ms. Bracamontes determined that DNA found on the front passenger door handle matched the defendant 277 times more probable than a match to an unrelated person. She elaborated that the comparison to the defendant was a minor contributor to the DNA swab "[s]o there was less

DNA . . . present.” DNA found on the grip of the Mosin-Nagant rifle matched Logsdon 2.46 thousand times more probable than a coincidental match. DNA found on the right hip coin pocket of Mr. Teal’s jeans was a match to Logsdon 21.2 thousand times more probable than a coincidental match.

Ballistics Evidence

Ryan Kent, supervisor and technical leader of the MNPD firearm and toolmark identification unit, performed ballistics testing on the Mosin-Nagant and Winchester rifles recovered during the investigation. Mr. Kent determined that the cartridge recovered from the Dodge Journey and the bullet recovered during Ms. Sarrantonio’s autopsy were of consistent caliber and design to a cartridge from the ammunition holder on the stock of the Mosin-Nagant rifle. However, due to damage to the bullet recovered during Ms. Sarrantonio’s autopsy, Mr. Kent was unable to conclusively match the recovered bullet to the specific Mosin-Nagant rifle. The bullet recovered during Mr. Teal’s autopsy was .22 caliber, could not have been fired from the Mosin-Nagant rifle, and was eliminated as having been fired from the recovered Winchester rifle. Upon questioning, Mr. Kent said that the damaged bullet recovered during Mr. Teal’s autopsy and a cartridge case recovered from the scene at Cobra could have been fired from the Savage Arms .22 caliber rifle that was stolen from Mr. Lloid and yet to be recovered.

Cellphone Data Evidence

Detective Joseph Chadwick High with the MNPD surveillance and investigative support unit performed cellphone data analysis for the defendant’s and Logsdon’s phone records, as well as Mr. Lytle’s and other interested parties. The records indicated that on August 2, 2018, the night the Ford Sport Trac was stolen, the defendant and Logsdon were both near 3909 Alameda Street, the defendant’s residence, from around 2:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m. However, around 3:40 a.m., both phones were near the Woodland Star Way address where the Sport Trac was stolen. By around 4:30 a.m., both phones were back in the vicinity of the Alameda Street address.

The phone records indicated that on August 6, 2018, the night Mr. Lloid’s rifles were stolen from his home on Knight Drive, the defendant’s and Logsdon’s phones were in the area of the Alameda Street address at 11:30 p.m. However, around 12:45 a.m. on the 7th, both devices were in the vicinity of Mr. Lloid’s home. Both the defendant and Logsdon were in communication with Mr. Lytle at various times throughout the night.

The phone records indicated that between 10:00 p.m. on August 9 and 7:00 a.m. on August 10, 2018, the time during which the Chevrolet Cruze was stolen from the Timberline Place address in Clarksville, the defendant’s device was consistent with being

in that area from shortly before 11:00 p.m. to just past midnight. There was no activity for Logsdon's or Mr. Lytle's devices during that time.

The phone records indicated that at the time the Dodge Journey was stolen from the Bellevue Road address at 2:30 a.m. on August 12, 2018, the defendant's device was in the area of the Alameda Street address shortly after 2:00 a.m. but then in the vicinity of the Bellevue Road incident at 2:45 a.m. Logsdon's device showed activity in the Bellevue Road vicinity at 2:55 a.m. By 3:20 a.m., the defendant's device was in the vicinity of downtown Nashville.

With regard to the timeframe of the murders at Cobra, approximately 3:30 a.m. on August 17, 2018, the phone records indicated no cell tower activity from 2:19 a.m. to 5:09 a.m. for the defendant's phone and no activity for Logsdon's phone from 11:11 p.m. on August 16 to 6:00 a.m. on August 17. Mr. Lytle's phone also showed no activity from 2:19 a.m., when it was in the vicinity of the Alameda Street address, to 8:10 a.m. The defendant's device was in the area of an Exxon gas station at 2001 Eighth Avenue South at 5:00 a.m. and the area of a McDonald's on Vantage Way at 5:30 a.m. Around 6:15 a.m., Logsdon's phone was in the area of 2300 Heiman Street, where Ms. Cothorn's purse, Ms. Sarrantonio's purse, and Mr. Harrington's satchel were recovered.

Detective Chad Gish with the MNPD surveillance and investigative support unit extracted data from the defendant's and Logsdon's cellphones, as well as Mr. Lytle's. A "selfie" on the defendant's cellphone taken on August 2, 2018, showed him wearing a red bandana on his head. The defendant's phone revealed that there were eighty phone calls and fourteen text messages between the defendant and Logsdon from August 13 to August 16, 2018. However, Logsdon's phone revealed that there were 378 phone calls and forty-four text messages between the two, suggesting that the defendant had deleted entries or possibly used a different SIM card. At the time of the murders at Cobra, there were no phone communications logged between the defendant and Logsdon. However, during that timeframe, the defendant's phone was connected to a vehicle via Bluetooth, and Logsdon had connected to that same vehicle on a different day.

The extracted cellphone data showed that the defendant viewed a story on the website for News Channel 5 about the shooting outside Cobra just hours after the incident. The defendant's search history contained no pattern of checking news stories on his phone before this time. Around the same time, the defendant performed a Google search for "Cobra." The defendant's phone also contained a photograph of a long rifle with a scope in the back seat of a car. The photograph was taken on August 7, 2018, at 8:14 a.m., hours after Mr. Lloid's rifles were stolen. The defendant had texted someone called "Pat Jam" saying that he had a rifle for sale, and when the person asked what kind of rifle it was, the defendant responded with the photo. The defendant had numerous phone calls and text

messages with Mr. Lytle in the days leading up to the murders. Detective Gish noted there was no location data on the defendant's phone after August 1, 2018, indicating that location services had been turned off.

Turning to information extracted from Logsdon's phone, approximately seven hours after the incident at Cobra, Logsdon texted someone named "Tee Tee," saying, "I just need to know if you can tell me if I have a warrant for my arrest." The next day, Logsdon sent a Facebook message to another user saying, "had to get low, I be gone a while . . . I did some sh*t[.]" Following the murders, Logsdon watched a video of MNPD Commander Imhof giving an interview about the murders, although he had not been in the habit of accessing news on his phone prior to that time. About fourteen hours after the murders, Logsdon had a Facebook conversation with another user during which he said, "I'm running from the police. I'm at my home boy house about to go to Chicago." Logsdon was also in frequent communication with Mr. Lytle via phone call and text in the days surrounding the murders.

Detective Kish was able to recover location data from Logsdon's Google account, which placed him on Woodland Star Way at 3:35 a.m. on August 3, 2018, when the Ford Sport Trac was stolen. Location data also put Logsdon's phone at the time and location where the Chevrolet Cruze was stolen on August 10, 2018.

Using Google location data for the morning of the murders, Detective Kish determined that at 3:16 a.m. on August 17, 2018, approximately seven minutes before the incident, Logsdon's phone was just six or seven blocks north of Cobra. At 3:34 a.m., Logsdon's phone was at a location just south of Cobra. Then, at 4:10 a.m., Logsdon's phone was at the site where Ms. Cothorn's purse, Ms. Sarrantonio's purse, and Mr. Harrington's satchel were recovered. Later in the morning, Logsdon's phone was at an Exxon on Eighth Street South, a McDonald's on Vantage Way, and a Z-Mart on Clarksville Pike. After this, Logsdon's phone returned to the site where evidence had been "dumped" earlier.

Detective Kish also extracted information from Mr. Lytle's phone and found no information indicating he was one of the two men who killed Ms. Sarrantonio and Mr. Teal. Location data pulled from the records corroborated that opinion.

Additional Video Evidence and Investigation

MNPD Detective William Ashworth served as the lead detective on the case. Detective Ashworth detailed the steps taken in his investigation, starting with reviewing the surveillance footage from Cobra and putting out a BOLO on the dark colored Chevrolet Cruze. In addition, Detective Ashworth learned of the unauthorized transactions on Ms.

Cothorn's debit card and acquired surveillance footage from various locations where her card was used. Footage from a Kroger showed Mr. Lytle using the card, and footage from Z-Mart showed a Ford Sport Trac and a Dodge Journey together at the gas pumps at the time Ms. Cothorn's card was used at the location. Around the time officers saw the footage showing the Sport Trac and Journey together, a call came in over the police radio "regarding a potential kidnapping where the two suspect vehicles were listed as a Ford Sport Trac and a Dodge Journey." Shortly thereafter, the defendant was taken into custody, and Ms. Mitchell, who had gotten out of the Sport Trac during the pursuit, was brought in for questioning. Logsdon was eventually apprehended as well.

Detective Ashworth presented a summation of all the surveillance footage obtained in the case to the jury. Notably, footage from the Z-Mart on Clarksville Pike around 2:50 a.m. on August 10, 2018, showed Logsdon in a Chevrolet Cruze shortly after Mr. Burgard's Cruze was stolen. Footage from the same Z-Mart on August 12, 2018, at 12:03 a.m. showed a Ford Sport Trac pulling up to a gas pump, and the defendant getting out of the passenger side. Footage from the same Z-Mart about three and a half hours later showed Logsdon in the Ford Sport Trac and the defendant in the Chevrolet Cruze. Footage from a fast-food restaurant on August 16, 2018, showed Mr. Lytle exiting the passenger side of a Ford Sport Trac. According to Detective Ashworth, there was no evidence Mr. Lytle participated in the murders at Cobra, only that he was involved in credit card fraud after the fact.

Surveillance footage from the House of God church near where Ms. Cothorn's cellphone and the various other stolen personal items were discovered showed a Dodge Journey in the area at 4:47 a.m.² and a Chevrolet Cruze at 5:09 a.m. The Cruze stopped near the trashcan where the purses and satchel were found and loitered in the area for a while. Meanwhile, footage from the Exxon gas station where Ms. Cothorn's credit card was used showed a Dodge Journey at 4:54 a.m. and a Chevrolet Cruze arrive and park beside the Journey. The footage showed Logsdon returning from the store, dressed in pants and shoes "consistent with the individual who came out of the passenger seat of the Chevy Cruze during the homicide."

Footage from the McDonald's where Ms. Cothorn's debit card was used showed a Dodge Journey at 5:40 a.m., and footage from the Z-Mart on Clarksville Pike where her card was used showed a Ford Sport Trac and Dodge Journey together at 6:23 a.m. Logsdon was shown getting out of the Journey, and someone believed to be the defendant was shown on the video as well.

² Detective Ashworth testified that the time displayed on the footage was 3:47 a.m. but that the displayed time was an hour behind.

Footage from the House of God church showed a Ford Sport Trac drive into the parking lot at 8:19 a.m., after the police crime scene vehicle left. The Sport Trac left, and the Dodge Journey arrived at 8:22 a.m. The Chevrolet Cruze drove by at 8:26 a.m. At 8:56 a.m., the defendant and Ms. Mitchell were seen in the Dodge Journey in the parking lot of a local high school, and then at 11:49 a.m., Ms. Mitchell was seen in that same parking lot in the Chevrolet Cruze.

Following the conclusion of the proof, the jury convicted the defendant as charged of two counts of first-degree felony murder, two counts of first-degree premeditated murder, two counts of especially aggravated robbery, two counts of aggravated robbery, two counts of especially aggravated kidnapping, two counts of aggravated sexual battery, and one count of felon in possession of a weapon.

Thereafter, a penalty phase hearing was conducted for the jury to consider the State's request for the enhanced punishment of life without the possibility of parole on the first-degree murder convictions. The State elected three statutory aggravating circumstances in support of its request: (1) the defendant was previously convicted of one or more felonies, other than the present charge, whose statutory elements involve the use of violence to the person; (2) the defendant knowingly created a great risk of death to two or more persons, other than the victim of the offense, during the offense; and (3) the offense was knowingly committed, solicited, directed, or aided by the defendant, while the defendant had a substantial role in committing or attempting to commit, or was fleeing after having a substantial role in committing or attempting to commit, any first-degree murder, arson, rape, robbery, burglary, theft, kidnapping, aggravated child abuse, aggravated child neglect, rape of a child, aggravated rape of a child, aircraft piracy, or unlawful throwing, placing, or discharging of a destructive device or bomb. *See* Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-204(i)(2), (3), and (7).

Nicholas Kiefer, an employee of the Davidson County Criminal Court Clerk's Office, maintained the records for the trial courts. Mr. Kiefer stated that court records indicated the defendant was charged with felony murder in Case No. 2010-C-2018 and entered a guilty plea to the amended charge of facilitation of especially aggravated robbery on November 9, 2010, and received a ten-year sentence. The defendant was represented by counsel at the time.

Robin Fisher, Jamie Sarrantonio's mother, testified that Ms. Sarrantonio was very intelligent and outgoing, excelling in sports and academics. She moved from their home in Connecticut to Nashville to attend Vanderbilt University and after graduating, worked in the restaurant industry while trying to break into the music business. Ms. Sarrantonio's murder was traumatic for the entire family and impacted them all emotionally. Jolie

Sarrantonio, Ms. Sarrantonio's sister, also testified about the intense grief she experienced due to the death of her sister.

Teresa Teal, Brandon Teal's stepmother, testified that Mr. Teal "had the kindest, sweetest, most loving heart of anyone I have ever seen," describing him as energetic, fun, and a lover of outdoor activities. Ms. Teal said that Mr. Teal's death had been "Hell" for the family. She found the ordeal so distressing she could not be in a room with a closed door until having four and a half years of counseling, and her husband became depressed and was unable to keep a job. Bartley Teal, Mr. Teal's father, expressed that he had not been in the same mindset since Mr. Teal's death. He experiences night terrors and now takes medication for depression and anxiety.

After hearing the testimony of the witnesses and arguments of both parties, the jury deliberated and returned with the imposition of a sentence of life without the possibility of parole on the murder convictions, finding that the State had proven the three statutory aggravating circumstances beyond a reasonable doubt. Later, the trial court imposed an effective twenty-five-year sentence on the remaining charges following a sentencing hearing. The defendant appealed.

Analysis

On appeal, the defendant challenges the sufficiency of the evidence and the jury's imposition of a life sentence without the possibility of parole. The State responds that viewed in the light most favorable to the State, the evidence was sufficient to establish the defendant's identity as one of the perpetrators, and the jury acted within its discretion in sentencing the defendant. We agree with the State.

I. Sufficiency

The defendant argues that the evidence is insufficient to sustain his convictions. The defendant does not challenge the sufficiency of the elements of any of the offenses, but instead, only challenges the proof establishing his identity as one of the perpetrators.

When the sufficiency of the evidence is challenged, the relevant question of the reviewing court is "whether, after viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, *any* rational trier of fact could have found the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt." *Jackson v. Virginia*, 443 U.S. 307, 319 (1979); *see also* Tenn. R. App. P. 13(e) ("Findings of guilt in criminal actions whether by the trial court or jury shall be set aside if the evidence is insufficient to support the findings by the trier of fact of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt."); *State v. Evans*, 838 S.W.2d 185, 190-92 (Tenn. 1992); *State v. Anderson*, 835 S.W.2d 600, 604 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1992). All questions

involving the credibility of witnesses, the weight and value to be given the evidence, and all factual issues are resolved by the trier of fact. *See State v. Pappas*, 754 S.W.2d 620, 623 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1987). “A guilty verdict by the jury, approved by the trial judge, accredits the testimony of the witnesses for the State and resolves all conflicts in favor of the theory of the State.” *State v. Grace*, 493 S.W.2d 474, 476 (Tenn. 1973). Our Supreme Court has stated the rationale for this rule:

This well-settled rule rests on a sound foundation. The trial judge and the jury see the witnesses face to face, hear their testimony and observe their demeanor on the stand. Thus the trial judge and jury are the primary instrumentality of justice to determine the weight and credibility to be given to the testimony of witnesses. In the trial forum alone is there human atmosphere and the totality of the evidence cannot be reproduced with a written record in this Court.

Bolin v. State, 405 S.W.2d 768, 771 (Tenn. 1966) (citing *Carroll v. State*, 212 Tenn. 464, 370 S.W.2d 523 (1963)). “A jury conviction removes the presumption of innocence with which a defendant is initially cloaked and replaces it with one of guilt, so that on appeal a convicted defendant has the burden of demonstrating that the evidence is insufficient.” *State v. Tuggle*, 639 S.W.2d 913, 914 (Tenn. 1982).

Guilt may be found beyond a reasonable doubt where there is direct evidence, circumstantial evidence, or a combination of the two. *State v. Matthews*, 805 S.W.2d 776, 779 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1990) (citing *State v. Brown*, 551 S.W.2d 329, 331 (Tenn. 1977); *Farmer v. State*, 343 S.W.2d 895, 897 (Tenn. 1961)). The standard of review for sufficiency of the evidence “is the same whether the conviction is based upon direct or circumstantial evidence.” *State v. Dorantes*, 331 S.W.3d 370, 379 (Tenn. 2011) (quoting *State v. Hanson*, 279 S.W.3d 265, 275 (Tenn. 2009)). The jury as the trier of fact must evaluate the credibility of the witnesses, determine the weight given to witnesses’ testimony, and reconcile all conflicts in the evidence. *State v. Campbell*, 245 S.W.3d 331, 335 (Tenn. 2008) (citing *Byrge v. State*, 575 S.W.2d 292, 295 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1978)). Moreover, the jury determines the weight to be given to circumstantial evidence and the inferences to be drawn from this evidence, and the extent to which the circumstances are consistent with guilt and inconsistent with innocence are questions primarily for the jury. *Dorantes*, 331 S.W.3d at 379 (citing *State v. Rice*, 184 S.W.3d 646, 662 (Tenn. 2006)). This Court, when considering the sufficiency of the evidence, shall not reweigh the evidence or substitute its inferences for those drawn by the trier of fact. *Id.*

The identity of the perpetrator “is an essential element of any crime.” *Rice*, 184 S.W.3d at 662 (citing *State v. Thompson*, 519 S.W.2d 789, 793 (Tenn. 1975)). The identification of the defendant as the perpetrator is “a question of fact for the jury upon its

consideration of all competent proof.” *State v. Bell*, 512 S.W.3d 167, 198 (Tenn. 2015) (citing *State v. Thomas*, 158 S.W.3d 361, 388 (Tenn. 2005)). The perpetrator’s identity “may be established solely on the basis of circumstantial evidence.” *State v. Lewter*, 313 S.W.3d 745, 748 (Tenn. 2010).

The defendant asserts there is insufficient proof of his identity as one of the individuals involved in the robbery / murder at Cobra because no eyewitnesses identified him and no direct evidence tied him to the crime. He claims the State’s case “required impermissible stacking of inferences.” However, viewed in the light most favorable to the State, there was sufficient circumstantial evidence from which a rational trier of fact could find that the defendant was one of the perpetrators.

In such light, the evidence first shows that the defendant and Logsdon possessed stolen items that were tied to the incident at Cobra, both before and after the shootings. A Chevrolet Cruze, Dodge Journey, Ford Sport Trac, and several rifles were stolen in the two weeks prior to the incident. Cellphone location data placed the defendant’s phone in the vicinity of each of those thefts, during the timeframe of the respective theft. Surveillance footage from various establishments captured both the defendant and Logsdon in a Cruze, Journey, and Sport Trac at different times. Hours after Mr. Lloid’s rifles were stolen, the defendant texted someone a photo of a rifle offering it for sale. What appeared to be the distinctive Mosin-Nagant rifle stolen from Mr. Lloid was used in the theft of the Dodge Journey, to which crime the robbers arrived in a Chevrolet Cruze. The defendant was driving a Ford Sport Trac at the time of his arrest, and when he fled, a Mosin-Nagant rifle slid out of the vehicle. Winchester and New England rifles, like those stolen from Mr. Lloid, were inside the Sport Trac when it was recovered. Both the defendant’s and Logsdon’s fingerprints were found on the Dodge Journey. In addition, Logsdon’s DNA was found on the Dodge Journey’s steering wheel and other areas of that car, as well as on the grip of the Mosin-Nagant rifle. There was also a probable DNA match to the defendant on the Dodge Journey. A cartridge recovered from the Dodge Journey and the bullet recovered during Ms. Sarrantonio’s autopsy were of consistent caliber and design to a cartridge from the ammunition holder on the stock of the Mosin-Nagant rifle.

The evidence also shows that the defendant and Logsdon were in frequent communication in the days leading up to the Cobra incident. Data extraction of Logsdon’s phone revealed 378 phone calls and forty-four text messages between the two. Cellphone data frequently placed the two devices together at the Alameda Street address where the defendant resided, including just a few hours after the murders. Despite their frequent communications, neither the defendant’s nor Logsdon’s phones logged any activity for the timeframe encompassing the murders. Notably, location tracking data from Logsdon’s Google account placed his phone in the vicinity of Cobra around the time of the shootings.

Seven minutes before the shooting, Logsdon's device was six or seven blocks north of Cobra and minutes after the shooting it was at a location just south of Cobra.

The evidence also connects the defendant and his compatriot to items stolen from the victims during the incident at Cobra. Within hours of the incident, officers tracked Ms. Cothorn's phone and found it in a wooded area near 23rd Avenue North and Heiman Street. The defendant's fingerprints were on the phone. In the area, officers also found Ms. Cothorn's wallet, metal cigarette case, and purse, as well as Ms. Sarrantonio's purse, Mr. Harrington's satchel, and Mr. Teal's OSHA card. Logsdon's fingerprint was found on the metal case. Location data for Logsdon's phone showed that he had been present at the "dump site"³ earlier that morning. In addition, surveillance footage from the "dump site" and establishments where Ms. Cothorn's stolen debit card was used in the hours after the shootings variously showed a Dodge Journey, Ford Sport Trac, or Chevrolet Cruze present. The defendant's cellphone was in the vicinity consistent with at least two of the locations where Ms. Cothorn's stolen debit card was used.

Both the defendant and Logsdon's extracted cellphone data showed that they viewed local news stories about the shootings, despite neither man's search history showing any pattern of checking news stories before that time. The defendant also performed a Google search of "Cobra." Hours after the incident, Logsdon texted someone inquiring if there was a warrant for his arrest and then later sent a Facebook message to someone else saying he "had to get low . . . [because he] did some sh*t."

Further, the jury viewed all the surveillance footage from after the incident and was able to assess whether the individuals depicted were consistent with the perpetrators in the surveillance footage from Cobra, as well as compare those depictions to the defendant's appearance in court.

We reiterate that "[c]ircumstantial evidence alone is sufficient to support a conviction," *State v. Hawkins*, 406 S.W.3d 121, 131 (Tenn. 2013) (citing *State v. Wagner*, 382 S.W.3d 289, 297 (Tenn. 2012); *Dorantes*, 331 S.W.3d at 379-81), and our standard of review for circumstantial evidence is the same as that for direct evidence. *Id.* In the light most favorable to the State, there was sufficient evidence from which the jury could find that the defendant was a perpetrator of the crimes of which he was convicted. The defendant is not entitled to relief.

II. Sentencing

³ Witnesses often referred to the area near the House of God church where Ms. Cothorn's phone, wallet, and purse, as well as Ms. Sarrantonio's purse and Mr. Harrington's satchel were recovered as the "dump site."

The defendant also challenges the jury's imposition of a life sentence without the possibility of parole, disputing all three aggravating circumstances found by the jury.

When a defendant is found guilty of first-degree murder, a sentence of imprisonment for life without the possibility of parole may be imposed upon a unanimous finding by the jury that the State has proven the existence of one or more of the statutory aggravating circumstances beyond a reasonable doubt. *See* Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-204(i). In determining whether the evidence supporting the existence of an aggravating circumstance is sufficient, the proper inquiry for the appellate court is whether, after reviewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the State, a rational trier of fact could have found the existence of the aggravating circumstance beyond a reasonable doubt. *State v. Miller*, 638 S.W.3d 136, 164 (Tenn. 2021) (citing *State v. Clayton*, 535 S.W.3d 829, 850 (Tenn. 2017); *State v. Kiser*, 284 S.W.3d 227, 272 (Tenn. 2009)).

The defendant contends that the jury erred in finding the aggravating circumstance that “[t]he defendant was previously convicted of one (1) or more felonies, other than the present charge, whose statutory elements involve the use of violence to the person[.]” Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-204(i)(2). He asserts that his prior conviction for facilitation of especially aggravated robbery “reflects reduced culpability by statutory definition” and that the record did “not establish that the defendant personally inflicted violence or used a weapon in the prior offense.” Appellate counsel acknowledges there was reference to a stipulation in the record but claims he was unable to locate it.⁴

However, the defendant offers no authority in support of his claim that a facilitation conviction should not be able to prove this aggravating circumstance because it reflects a reduced culpability. The plain requirement of the aggravating circumstance is that the “statutory elements involve the use of violence to the person.” Especially aggravated robbery requires the use of a deadly weapon and serious bodily injury to the victim. Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-403. As this Court has noted, “facilitation of an offense includes the elements of that offense.” *See State v. Nunez*, No. E2023-00193-CCA-R3-CD, 2024 WL 2151651, at *16 (Tenn. Crim. App. May 14, 2024) (citing *State v. Burns*, 6 S.W.3d 453, 470 (Tenn. 1999) and *State v. Hughes*, No. M2015-01688-CCA-R3-CD, No. M2015-01207-CCA-R3-CD, 2016 WL 6956804, at *4 (Tenn. Crim. App. Nov. 19, 2016)

⁴Before witnesses were called at the penalty phase hearing, the State informed the court that it was calling a representative from the court clerk's office “to testify in a little more detail about what you have already heard agreed to by the [d]efendant in the stipulation which was he has been previously convicted of a felony involving violence.” Presumably, the stipulation to which the State referenced was the stipulation read aloud prior to Detective Joseph Chadwick's testimony at trial providing “On November 9th, 2010, the Defendant Horace Palmer Williamson, III was convicted of a felony involving the use or attempted use of force, violence or a deadly weapon.”

(“Because aggravated robbery includes, at a minimum, an element of threatened bodily injury, facilitation of aggravated robbery necessarily includes such an element.”), *perm. app. denied* (Tenn. Feb. 16, 2017)). In fact, in *Nunez*, this Court found no error in the application of the prior violent felony aggravating circumstance where that defendant had a prior facilitation of aggravated robbery conviction. *Nunez*, 2024 WL 2151651, at *15-*16.

The defendant also contends the jury erred in finding the aggravating circumstance that “[t]he defendant knowingly created a great risk of death to two (2) or more persons, other than the victim of the offense, during the offense[.]” Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-204(i)(3). The defendant asserts that this circumstance should not be applicable because “the alleged risk arose from the same conduct underlying the charged offenses.” However, once more, the defendant offers no authority in support of this assertion. In the light most favorable to the State, the evidence shows that Ms. Sarrantonio and Mr. Teal were killed during the incident, but the defendant also created a risk of death to Ms. Cothorn and Mr. Harrington by robbing and kidnapping them at gunpoint during the encounter.

The defendant lastly contends that the jury erred in finding the aggravating circumstance that “[t]he offense was knowingly committed, solicited, directed, or aided by the defendant, while the defendant had a substantial role in committing or attempting to commit, . . . any first[-]degree murder, . . . robbery, burglary, theft, [or] kidnapping” Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-204(i)(7). The defendant asserts that “the same robbery conduct was used to establish guilt of felony murder, with robbery serving as the underlying felony” and “[b]ecause robbery is inherent in felony murder, use of this aggravator did not distinguish this case from the ‘ordinary’ felony-murder case[.]” The defendant relies on *State v. Middlebrooks*, 840 S.W.2d 317, 346 (Tenn. 1992), in support of his position that “aggravating circumstances cannot merely duplicate elements of the offense because doing so fails to narrow the class of eligible defendants.”

The defendant is not entitled to relief based on this assertion for two reasons. First, our supreme court clarified in *State v. Davis* that “[a]lthough this aggravating circumstance may not be applied where it duplicates the felony that serves as the predicate for a felony murder conviction, it may be applied to convictions for premeditated first[-]degree murder[.]” 141 S.W.3d 600, 619 (Tenn. 2004) (citations omitted). Therefore, when a felony murder conviction merges into a premeditated murder conviction and the premeditated murder was committed during commission of one of the enumerated felonies, the evidence is “sufficient to support this aggravating circumstance beyond a reasonable doubt.” *Id.*; see also *State v. Davidson*, 121 S.W.3d 600, 609 n.4 (Tenn. 2003).

Second and most importantly, even if the defendant had only been convicted of felony murder and not also premeditated murder, the law has changed and been clarified

since *Middlebrooks*. Our supreme court explained in *Miller* that the determination in *Middlebrooks* that the (i)(7) aggravating circumstance could not support the death penalty (and by extension life in prison without the possibility of parole) for a defendant convicted solely of felony murder was “because the then-existing aggravating circumstance and felony murder statute contained duplicative language.” *Miller*, 638 S.W.3d at 164 (citing *Middlebrooks*, 840 S.W.2d at 346). Quoting from its earlier opinion in *State v. Banks*, the *Miller* court elucidated:

The Tennessee General Assembly responded to [*Middlebrooks*] in 1995 by amending the aggravating circumstance in Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-204(i)(7) to require that the murder “was *knowingly* committed, solicited, directed, or aided by the defendant, while the defendant had a substantial role in committing or attempting to commit” one of the enumerated felonies. This amendment narrowed the class of offenders to whom the death penalty could be applied sufficiently so as to leave no *State v. Middlebrooks* problem *even in cases where Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-204(i)(7) was the only aggravating circumstance established and the conviction was for felony murder.*

Miller, 638 S.W.3d at 164-65 (quoting *Banks*, 271 S.W.3d 90, 152 (Tenn. 2008) (emphasis added) (footnote omitted)). The jury in this case found the State had proven the (i)(7) aggravating circumstance with the “knowing” requirement beyond a reasonable doubt. The defendant is not entitled to relief.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing authorities and reasoning, we affirm the judgments of the trial court.

s/ J. ROSS DYER

J. ROSS DYER, JUDGE