Monfort, sentenced to life for killing SPD officer, says ‘I killed a good man’

Originally published July 30, 2015 at 10:21 am Updated July 30, 2015 at 10:30 am

Cop killer Christopher Monfort was formally sentenced Friday to life in prison for fatally ambushing Seattle police Officer Timothy Brenton on Halloween night 2009.

By Sara Jean Green

Seattle Times staff reporter

Christopher Monfort conceded he “killed a good man” before he was officially sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of release Thursday morning for fatally shooting Seattle police Officer Timothy Brenton during a three-week crime spree in fall 2009.

Speaking before he was sentenced, Monfort said, “I killed a good man. That’s the hardest thing I have ever done, as it should be.”

Monfort then launched into a rant about police brutality, prompting Brenton’s family to leave the courtroom. He said violence was the only language police understand.

During the emotional sentencing, Brenton’s widow, Lisa Brenton, called Monfort a “nonentity.”

“I don’t think about you at all,” she said.

Noting that Monfort took away the father of two young children, she said her slain husband would never know what his son and daughter would look like when they grew up.

After nearly four months of testimony, jurors rejected Monfort’s insanity defense and convicted him June 5 of aggravated first-degree murder for killing Brenton and three other felonies.

One week ago, the same jury deliberated for less than an hour before unanimously agreeing Monfort, 46, should spend the rest of his life in prison instead of being sent to death row for Brenton's killing.

Monfort also was found guilty of first-degree arson for setting a fire and detonating pipe bombs that destroyed a handful of police vehicles at the city's Charles Street maintenance facility nine days before Brenton was fatally shot, as well as two counts of attempted first-degree murder for trying to kill two other Seattle cops, Officer Britt Kelly (nee Sweeney) and Sgt. Gary Nelson.

Kelly, Brenton's then-rookie partner, managed to duck the shots that killed Brenton, her field-training officer, as they sat in their patrol car on a residential street in Seattle's Leschi neighborhood. She returned fire at Monfort's fleeing vehicle, a Datsun 210, and used her police radio to call for help.

Then on Nov. 6, 2009, Nelson and two other homicide investigators were following up on a tip about the Datsun when Monfort pointed a gun at Nelson's head and pulled the trigger outside his Tukwila apartment building. The gun failed to fire because a bullet hadn't been chambered and Monfort was shot twice.

He was shot once in the face, with a second round paralyzing him from the waist down.

Monfort's guilt wasn't debated at trial, with the state presenting overwhelming evidence — including DNA and ballistics — that tied Monfort to all three crime scenes. Instead, his mental state — and differing diagnoses of mental illness — became the crux of the case, with the jury finding he knew right from wrong and so was morally culpable for his crimes but not deserving of a death sentence.

Monfort could be transported to the Washington State Corrections Center in Shelton as early as Friday — provided he signs a waiver to forgo another 30 days in custody at the King County Jail and the state Department of Corrections (DOC) has an appropriate vehicle available in which to move him, said Capt. Troy Bacon of the King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention.

Most inmates are bused down to Shelton by the DOC but in Monfort's case, "it's going to be a medical call" given his paralysis and use of a wheelchair, Bacon said.

All inmates entering the prison system are first taken to the facility in Shelton, where they undergo physical, medical and psychological evaluations as part of the intake process, said Stephen Sinclair, DOC's assistant secretary over prisons. Monfort will likely remain in Shelton for a month or two, he said.

Given that Monfort will be a serving a life sentence without the possibility of release, Sinclair said he will be assigned to either the Clallam Bay Corrections Center or the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla. But Walla Walla may be the better option since the prison has "a pretty robust health care facility" to deal with some of Monfort's chronic health issues, he said.

There are 16,357 inmates housed in 12 prisons across the state, including 1,182 women, according to Sinclair. More than 500 inmates are currently serving life sentences and 139 inmates use wheelchairs, he said, noting Monfort's sentence and medical issues "are not an unusual situation for us."

At a minimum, Monfort will spend the first five years of his sentence in what is known as "close custody," which falls between maximum and medium security levels, Sinclair explained. He will be in general population but will likely be assigned to a single-man cell due to his disabilities, Sinclair said.

Monfort's behavior in prison, including how he interacts with other inmates, will determine his eventual security level, said Sinclair. If he is eventually reclassified as a medium-security inmate — the lowest security level for someone serving a life term — Monfort would be eligible to participate in additional prison programs, including "the opportunity for some level of employment," Sinclair said.

Though there's been plenty of media coverage, both of Brenton's killing and Monfort's arrest and trial, Sinclair doubts Monfort will have any kind of notoriety in prison.

"His crime, as horrific as it was, is not really a standout among the offender population," he said.

Sara Jean Green: 206-515-5654 or sgreen@seattletimes.com