

Tulsa cop convicted of corruption, another cleared

 deseret.com/2011/8/24/20211525/tulsa-cop-convicted-of-corruption-another-cleared

August 24, 2011



Tulsa Police Chief Chuck Jordan, right, and other officers leave the federal courthouse, Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2011 in Tulsa, Okla. The federal jury found Officer Jeff Henderson guilty six counts of perjury and two counts of violating a person's civil rights, and acquitted him on 45 other counts he faced, including distributing drugs and witness tampering. It acquitted Officer Bill Yelton on all eight counts against him, including witness tampering.

The Tulsa World, Michael Wyke, Associated Press

1 of 5



The defense team of convicted Tulsa Police Dept. officer Jeff Henderson, including lead attorney Robert Wyatt, center, take Henderson's trial clothes and other personal belongings from the federal courthouse, Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2011 in Tulsa, Okla. The federal jury found Officer Jeff Henderson guilty six counts of perjury and two counts of violating a person's civil rights, and acquitted him on 45 other counts he faced, including distributing drugs and witness tampering. It acquitted Officer Bill Yelton on all eight counts against him, including witness tampering.

The Tulsa World, Michael Wyke, Associated Press

2 of 5



Prosecutor Jane Duke speaks to the media after the verdicts were handed down in the Tulsa police corruption trial of Jeff Henderson and Bill Yelton at the federal courthouse, Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2011 in Tulsa, Okla. The federal jury found Officer Jeff Henderson guilty six counts of perjury and two counts of violating a person's civil rights, and acquitted him on 45 other counts he faced, including distributing drugs and witness tampering. It acquitted Officer Bill Yelton on all eight counts against him, including witness tampering.

The Tulsa World, Michael Wyke, Associated Press

3 of 5



Ellen Henderson, left, wife of officer Jeff Henderson, is escorted out of the federal courthouse, Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2011 in Tulsa, Okla. The federal jury found Officer Jeff Henderson guilty six counts of perjury and two counts of violating a person's civil rights, and acquitted him on 45 other counts he faced, including distributing drugs and witness tampering. It acquitted Officer Bill Yelton on all eight counts against him, including witness tampering.

The Tulsa World, Jeff Lautenberger, Associated Press

4 of 5



Family members of convicted police officer Jeff Henderson leave the federal courthouse, Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2011 in Tulsa, Okla. The federal jury found Officer Jeff Henderson guilty six counts of perjury and two counts of violating a person's civil rights, and acquitted him on 45 other counts he faced, including distributing drugs and witness tampering. It acquitted Officer Bill Yelton on all eight counts against him, including witness tampering.

The Tulsa World, Michael Wyke, Associated Press

5 of 5

TULSA, Okla. — A Tulsa police officer was convicted Wednesday of perjury and civil rights violations, but federal jurors acquitted him and another officer of witness tampering and other charges stemming from an investigation of claims of widespread corruption within the city's police department.



For the second time this summer, the government could claim only partial victory in a case that resulted from that investigation. Jurors convicted Officer Jeff Henderson on eight of the 53 counts against him, and cleared Officer William Yelton on the eight charges he faced.



"I'd like to say it takes a courageous man to face the federal government," said Robert Wyatt IV, Henderson's attorney, outside the federal courthouse. "We plan to appeal the few counts where there were convictions."

A special prosecutor said Henderson and Yelton were part of a broader plot in which corrupt officers stole money and drugs, conducted illegal searches and fabricated evidence without fear of getting caught. But since June — in two trials involving five defendants — three officers have walked free.



"I think the jury's verdict speaks for itself," said U.S. Attorney Jane Duke of Little Rock, Ark., who handled the case because federal prosecutors in eastern Oklahoma sometimes work with Tulsa law enforcement. She said it was up to police department leaders to make reforms.



Police Chief Chuck Jordan, who stood at the back of the packed courtroom to hear the verdicts, declined to comment on the outcome. A police department statement said the Internal Affairs Division would investigate whether any officer violated department policy.



At least a dozen Tulsa police officers gathered outside the courtroom to shake hands with the attorneys and talk to family members who had been waiting anxiously since the jury began deliberating on Friday.

Since federal prosecutors began an investigation two years ago, nearly 40 people have had their convictions overturned or been released from prison amid suggestions that the evidence used against them was bogus. In the trial that ended Wednesday, jurors concluded that Henderson lied six times during a federal court case and that he twice violated the civil rights of two citizens during an illegal search. The maximum sentence for each perjury count is five years in prison, and the each civil rights violation carries a penalty of up to a year behind bars.

He was cleared of charges that included witness tampering, drug possession and distribution, weapons violations and additional civil rights charges. Yelton was acquitted on counts that included witness tampering, suborning perjury, conspiring to violate a citizen's civil rights and attempted retaliation against a witness.

U.S. marshals led the men from the courtroom after the verdicts were read. Henderson will remain in custody pending his sentencing hearing, which had not been scheduled. Yelton was being processed out of custody Wednesday afternoon.

"Mr. Yelton is going where he deserves to be — home," lawyer Scott Graham said.

Henderson's attorney argued before U.S. Magistrate T. Lane Wilson that since his client was a non-violent offender who had already been in custody for 16 months, he should be released, but Wilson deferred the decision to U.S. District Judge Bruce Black of New Mexico, who is presiding over the case and was not in Tulsa to receive the verdict.

While the verdicts were read, Henderson's wife sobbed while other family members hung their heads in grief. Henderson and Yelton sat stone-faced as the counts were read.

During the trial, former Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent Brandon McFadden claimed Yelton had threatened him with a gun, an accusation Yelton denied. McFadden has pleaded guilty to lesser charges and could still face prison time. Yelton also denied stealing money or lying about informants, and said he never saw Henderson do anything criminal.

In June, a jury acquitted officers Nick DeBruin and Bruce Bonham of allegations they stole money from suspects and planted drugs on people. At the same trial, jurors convicted retired officer Harold Wells on charges that he engaged in drug trafficking and stole federal money. That trial featured video from an FBI sting that witnesses said appeared to capture the accused officers plotting to split up what they thought to be drug money at a Tulsa motel.

Wells has yet to be sentenced. He had filed a motion for a new trial, but a judge denied that request.

After the indictments last year, Jordan issued a statement saying that the actions of a few "cast doubt on the hardworking, honest men and women" on the Tulsa force.

