

Sniper gets life plus 60 years

Killed policeman, wounded two others in shoot-out

By THEODORE W. HENDRICKS

John Earl Williams, 19, was sentenced yesterday to a life term plus 60 years after he was found guilty of the bizarre sniper murder of one policeman and the wounding of two others during a 1976 Good Friday shootout on Lombard street.

Williams, a pale, slight youth, wept quietly in Criminal Court just before Judge J. Harold Grady imposed the sentence.

Williams was convicted in June of sending the hail of bullets onto Carey and Lombard streets that killed Officer Jimmy D. Halcomb, 31, cost another patrolman an eye and still another the use of his arm.

"I wish I could bring April 16 back," Williams remarked in making his first court statement in a halting, bewildered tone. "It's hard for me to understand that I killed a man. I am not proud of what I have done.

"Something was tearing me apart. I don't want people to say I don't care about people. It's not that way," he added.

The wife of Officer Halcomb, who had their third child six weeks after her husband was killed, wept briefly as she sat with other policemen in the courtroom during the sentencing hearing.

Judge Grady noted that Williams had "not engaged in a sudden outburst" when he used four guns to shoot into the street from the third floor of his home in the 1300 block of West Lombard street.

"There was a series of firings—you shot at these officers after a substantial interval," the judge noted.

Besides the first-degree murder of Officer Halcomb, Williams was convicted by a jury of assault with intent to murder 12 other officers. The judge imposed concurrent terms on Williams for 10 of these charges.

A maximum of 30-year consecutive terms each were imposed on Williams for the wounding of Officer Arthur Kennell, who lost the sight of an eye, and Officer James Brennan, who was disabled by a bullet in his arm.

Stephen R. Tully, an assistant state's attorney who prosecuted the case, suggested to Judge Grady that Williams "be dealt with harshly" because of the attacks on policemen.

Williams, who was represented by Anton J. S. Keating, a public defender, originally pleaded innocent by reason of insanity. The jury rejected this plea in finding him guilty.

Mr. Keating pleaded yesterday that Williams be sent to Patuxent Institution for evaluation under the new criminal rules. Judge Grady said he would consider this procedure at a later date.

Williams cited his teen-age frustrations in several tapes and statements in which he tried to recall the events which led up to the furious 7 P.M. gun battle. He said he wanted to be killed himself by shooting at policemen.

The youthful defendant, who is legally blind without his thick glasses, said he quarreled with his 15-year-old girl friend, was jobless and felt rejected by his step-parents before planning what he called a spectacular shootout.

"I want to try to stop myself from cracking up, but I can't find words for it," he said. "I'm not sure what people think of me now. I am really sorry this happened." Williams added in his remarks to Judge Grady.