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IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF NORTH CAROLINA

No. COA25-1184

Filed 16 September 2026

Cumberland County, No. 23CR403773-250

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

v.

JUSTIN QUAVON SHUMPERT, Defendant.

Appeal by defendant from judgments entered 27 March 2025 by Judge Thomas H. Lock in Cumberland County Superior Court. Heard in the Court of Appeals 27 August 2026.

Attorney General Jeff Jackson, by Special Deputy Attorney General Taylor H. Crabtree, for the State.

Appellate Defender Glenn Gerding, by Assistant Appellate Defender Heidi E. Reiner, for defendant-appellant.

GORE, Judge.

Defendant Justin Quavon Shumpert appeals, pursuant to N.C.G.S. §§ 7A-27(b)(1) and 15A-1444(a), his judgments for voluntary manslaughter and discharging a firearm into an occupied vehicle inflicting serious bodily injury. Defendant was sentenced to a consolidated term of 96 to 128 months' imprisonment. Upon review of the briefs and the record, we discern no error.

I.

On 26 August 2023, Ernest Bullock, the victim, went to Skylite to purchase a t-shirt. Around the same time, defendant along with two friends, Montez Lofton and Jordan Bernal, drove to the Skylite to purchase beer. The evidence at trial suggested Bullock and defendant were coincidentally at the same place. Bullock was in a white Mercedes, and defendant was a passenger in a black Kia. Lofton, who was driving the black Kia, immediately noticed Bullock as they drove into the parking lot and pulled the Kia alongside the Mercedes. Sebastian Bailey was a passenger in the white Mercedes.

Defendant retrieved a firearm from the car when he realized that Bullock was in the white Mercedes. Lofton began shooting at the white Mercedes and defendant simultaneously shot at Bullock. Bullock left his vehicle and walked across the street, holding his stomach, before collapsing in an open field. Lofton drove the black Kia away while the white Mercedes rolled into the street. Bullock was pronounced dead at the scene, and it was later confirmed he died of a single gunshot wound. Bailey was sent to the hospital with a gunshot wound. Detectives later discovered eighteen bullet holes in the white Mercedes and additional projectiles in its interior.

Detectives found defendant, Bernal, and Lofton days later after identifying them through surveillance footage and additional sources. They were residing at the address where the black Kia was registered. The black Kia was parked at the

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residence and had no evidence of bullet damage. Defendant was arrested and charged with the murder of Bullock.

Defendant gave statements to the detectives alleging he acted in self-defense. Defendant told detectives that Lofton and Bullock's brother had a bar fight and afterwards, Bullock's brother and Lofton held animosity towards each other. Due to defendant's association with Lofton, defendant alleged that Bullock threatened him more than once. Defendant previously saw Bullock with a gun and heard of an incident involving Bullock and a shooting. On the night of the shooting, defendant told detectives he stopped at the Skylite for a beer and did not expect Bullock to be there. Once he recognized Bullock, he armed himself with a gun because of the previous threats he experienced and because of his belief Bullock would have a gun. He told detectives he heard gunfire, became shaky, and shot once at the white Mercedes.

Defendant was indicted for first-degree murder, discharging a firearm into occupied property inflicting serious bodily injury, assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill, attempted first-degree murder, and felony conspiracy. After the close of the evidence, defense sought self-defense instructions during the charge conference. The trial court agreed to the self-defense instructions but also included the aggressor doctrine for the charges of first-degree murder and discharging a firearm into occupied property inflicting serious bodily injury. Defendant objected to the trial court's inclusion of the aggressor doctrine. The jury returned guilty verdicts

on discharging a firearm into an occupied vehicle inflicting serious injury and the lesser offense of voluntary manslaughter. The jury expressly found defendant did not act in self-defense for either charge on the special verdict forms. Defendant timely appealed the judgments.

II.

Defendant appeals the trial court's jury instructions regarding self-defense and the aggressor doctrine. Defendant preserved this issue for review by objecting during the charge conference. *See State v. Leaks*, 379 N.C. 57, 61–62 (2021). We review preserved challenges to jury instructions for harmless error. *Id.* at 61. Under harmless error review, the defendant must “show that there is a reasonable possibility that, had the error in question not been committed, a different result would have been reached at the trial out of which the appeal arises.” *Id.* at 62 (cleaned up).

Defendant argues the trial court erred by including instructions on the aggressor doctrine because there was no evidence defendant was the aggressor. We disagree.

“The trial court has a duty to instruct the jury on all substantial features of a case raised by the evidence.” *State v. Fletcher*, 370 N.C. 313, 325 (2017) (cleaned up). “When the evidence is conflicting, it is for the jury to determine whether the defendant was the aggressor.” *State v. Hicks*, 385 N.C. 52, 60 (2023) (citing *State v. Terry*, 329 N.C. 191, 199 (1991)). The trial court should consider whether there is

evidence in the record “from which the jury could infer that the defendant was acting as an aggressor at the time he allegedly acted in self-defense,” to determine whether it should discuss the aggressor doctrine in the self-defense instructions. *State v. Mumma*, 372 N.C. 226, 239 n.2 (2019) (cleaned up).

Upon reviewing the record, there is evidence to support the aggressor doctrine instruction. There was eyewitness testimony that the only shots fired came from the black Kia. There was forensic evidence of eighteen bullet holes in the white Mercedes, no evidence of bullet holes in the black Kia, and there was evidence defendant was seen sitting halfway out of the black Kia firing a gun at the white Mercedes.

Further, despite defendant’s argument the special verdict forms created confusion surrounding the aggressor doctrine, the jury determined defendant did not act in self-defense. The special verdict directed the jury not to consider the question specific to the aggressor doctrine if it answered “no” to the question that defendant acted in self-defense. Thus, the special verdict forms make plain that the jury considered whether defendant was acting in self-defense apart from the aggressor doctrine. Accordingly, a different result would not have occurred at trial without the aggressor doctrine instructions.

III.

For the foregoing reasons, the trial court did not err by including the aggressor doctrine within the jury instructions.

NO ERROR.

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Judges ARROWOOD and FLOOD concur.

Report per Rule 30(e).