

Bar owner charged with Wayne Mills' death released from jail

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The Nashville bar owner charged in the fatal shooting of a country musician was given a lower bond and released from jail Monday to await his next court date.

Police say Chris Ferrell fatally shot musician Wayne Mills at Ferrell's downtown bar, Pit and Barrel, on Nov. 23. Indicted on a charge of second-degree murder, Ferrell has been jailed since Dec. 6.

Ferrell, 45, has maintained that he shot the 44-year-old Mills in self-defense after an argument. Lawyers and acquaintances said the men were friends.

Monday's 90-minute bond hearing — unusually long — provided new details about the early-morning shooting, its aftermath, and the police investigation.

Among revelations were that police failed to notice a bullet lodged into the wall of the bar that was later found by private investigators hired by defense attorney David Raybin on Ferrell's behalf, and that Ferrell has received at least a dozen death threats since the fatal altercation.

Ferrell appeared in court in a yellow jail jumpsuit that signifies he's in protective custody at the jail. During almost 25 minutes on the witness stand, he testified about threats sent by text message, social media and voicemail. He said he took to wearing a bulletproof vest for safety before being arrested.

Raybin called Ferrell's original \$300,000 bond "extraordinarily high" and asked for a reduction to \$25,000, stating that he acted in self-defense and took the initiative to call 911.

"He could have run for tall weeds. He didn't," Raybin said.

Assistant District Attorney Rachel Sobrero asked that the higher bond remain in place, citing Ferrell's history of prior arrests. Ferrell's family ties in multiple states also could make him a flight risk, she said. Charges of domestic assault and interfering with an emergency call were dismissed this year and he awaits a hearing on a vandalism charge.

Judge Steve Dozier cut the bond to \$150,000 and set rules for Ferrell, including where he'll live and how regularly he must check in with a bail bondsman. He was ordered to give up his collection of more than a dozen guns. Ferrell was released at 6:54 p.m., according to jail records.

Police find bloody scene

Ferrell testified that he posed for a group photo at 4:08 a.m. alongside Mills, musician Shooter Jennings, and others. The crowd had dissipated by the time he called 911 to report the shooting at 4:56 a.m.

When police arrived at the bar minutes later, Ferrell told officers that Mills tried to rob and kill him and that

he “had to do it,” an officer testified. Police have said that the men argued over Mills smoking in the bar.

Police found a trail of blood from the parking lot to just inside the front door, where Mills lay, breathing but unconscious. He was surrounded by broken glass. A dog was running loose. An empty revolver and a semi-automatic handgun were on nearby tables.

Before Ferrell was indicted, Raybin hired former city homicide detective Larry Flair to investigate. Flair found a bullet lodged in the wall of the bar, and told police. But a meeting scheduled with detectives to discuss that finding never took place. Mills was indicted first.

“This man, and his lawyer, and those investigators talked to detectives about this case and provided them with information about extra bullets that we’re finding,” Raybin told the judge. “We stand prepared to do that. There are not that many clients that I have that I make an offer like that.”

According to court testimony, Ferrell first moved to Nashville 20 years ago for music, and has worked in construction and classic car restorations.

Mills played football at the University of Alabama before becoming a well-known “outlaw” country musician. His surviving wife, Carol Mills, [said he was a giving man and an organ donor](#). He is survived by a 7-year-old son.

Ferrell’s bar is being liquidated.

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