

Rahway man sentenced to 20 years for causing fatal collision following police pursuit



Edward G. Coleman, Jr.

A Rahway man has been sentenced to 20 years in state prison for leading police on a vehicle pursuit that ended in a fatal crash in Elizabeth in 2015, acting Union County Prosecutor Thomas K. Isenhour announced Tuesday.

Surpris Ophilien Jr., 32, must serve at least 85 percent of that term before the possibility of parole under the terms set down Monday by state Superior Court Judge Stuart Peim.

At approximately 2:30 a.m. on Saturday, July 18, 2015, Elizabeth Police Department patrol units were called to the Allstar Nightclub on 3rd Street in Elizabeth on a report of an altercation, according to Union County Homicide Task Force Supervisor Michael Henn and Assistant Prosecutor Armando Suarez, who prosecuted the case. On their way to the scene, two Elizabeth police officers in a patrol vehicle spotted a green GMC pickup truck being driven by Ophilien travel through a red light at a high rate of speed, Henn and Suarez said.

Ophilien subsequently led the officers on a vehicle pursuit, but once the pickup truck started traveling the wrong way down a one-way street, the pursuit was terminated. Moments later, a head-on collision took place a short distance away, on an overpass for a ramp leading to North Avenue East in Elizabeth.

Ophilien, who was found to be in possession of a loaded .45-caliber handgun, climbed out of the wrecked pickup and ran a short distance, leaping from the overpass to the roadway below before being arrested. The critically injured driver of the vehicle Ophilien had struck, 25-year-old Edward G. Coleman Jr. of East Orange – a United States Navy veteran and father of three – was rushed to University Hospital in Newark, where he was pronounced dead several hours later.

Ophilien pleaded guilty to first-degree aggravated manslaughter and second-degree certain persons not to own a weapon in June 2017. On Monday Ophilien's attorney requested a shorter sentence on the grounds that the 20-year term would cause his family hardship, but Peim denied the request, citing his prior criminal record and the fact that he had been less than two months into a five-year probationary term for heroin possession with the intent to distribute when he killed Coleman.