

## Former Mecklenburg deputy guilty of child sexual assault

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A former Mecklenburg County Sheriff's deputy is due to be sentenced later this month for felony sexual battery of a child following the outcome of his trial Wednesday in Boydton.

Christopher Dale Smith, 35, of Skipwith was found guilty of aggravated sexual battery of a juvenile under the age of thirteen. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for March 17 at 9:30 a.m.

Initially charged with juvenile rape, on Wednesday Smith entered an Alford plea to the reduced charge of aggravated sexual battery. The Alford plea means that Smith did not admit guilt in the case, but he acknowledged that the prosecution had sufficient evidence to convict him of the alleged crime.

The charge carries a sentence of up to 20 years in prison and a fine of not more than \$100,000. Smith faced the possibility of life in prison had he been convicted of rape.

Smith was arrested on Nov. 16, 2012 and indicted on April 15, 2013 after an investigation by the Virginia State Police uncovered evidence to charge him with rape of a minor. The investigation was conducted by Special Agent D.E. Leslie of the Virginia State Police at the request of Mecklenburg County Sheriff Bobby Hawkins, who sought an independent probe in August 2012 after allegations against a then-unnamed deputy first surfaced.

At the time of his arrest, Smith was a four-year veteran of the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office, serving as a road deputy.

Randy Krantz, Bedford County Commonwealth's Attorney, oversaw the case as special prosecutor after Mecklenburg County Commonwealth's Attorney Nora Miller recused herself due

to conflicts.

Sheriff Hawkins said he was glad to finally see closure in this case, for the victim and for family members.

Smith has been free on a \$100,000 bond since his release from the Pamunkey Jail, where he was taken after his arrest in November 2012.

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