

Soering guilty in Haysom murder trial

*Former U.Va. scholar convicted;
jury recommends two life terms*

From staff and wire reports

After less than four hours of deliberation, a Bedford County jury on June 21 convicted former U.Va. Jefferson and Echols Scholar Jens Soering of the first-degree murders of his former girlfriend's parents.

The jury recommended that Soering be sentenced to two life terms in prison for the March 30, 1985 stabbings of Derek and Nancy Haysom.

Soering, the son of a West German diplomat, will be sentenced on Aug. 29 by Bedford County Circuit Court Judge William Sweeney. He would be eligible for parole in 20 years if the jury's recommendation is followed.

The 23-year-old Soering, who had pleaded not guilty, showed no emotion as a court clerk read the verdict. When Sweeney asked Soering if there was any reason not to pass judgment immediately, Soering responded, "I'm innocent."

Defense attorney Richard Neaton said Soering has not decided whether to appeal.

The six-man, six-woman jury began deliberating about 3 p.m. on June 21 after viewing nearly 400 pieces of evidence during the course of the two-week trial. After the Soering verdict was rendered, jurors told the Richmond News Leader that there was little doubt about Soering's guilt.

"We didn't have anyone make any statement about his being not guilty," said juror W. Shelton Adams. He also said that physical evidence at the murder site, including blood and a sock print, pointed to Soering as the killer.

Another juror said there was a six-six split over Soering's guilt when deliberations began. But juror Jake Bibb said the physical evidence in the Haysom home ultimately convinced him and his colleagues of Soering's guilt.

"What he wrote didn't convict him [and] what people said didn't convict him," Bibb told the Daily Progress. "It was what he left behind."

"If it had not been for that [sock] print, I would have had him innocent," Bibb said.

The defense claimed that Soering admitted to the murders only to protect his girlfriend, and Soering told the jury that he regretted taking the blame.