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September 18, 2005

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Trial focuses on identity of defendant

Suspect out on bond at time of robbery

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Testimony given by a defendant's sister caused confusion in a robbery trial this week.

But after a lengthy deliberation, the jury brought back a guilty sentence, according to Chief Assistant District Attorney Bill Filmore.

Talia Johnson, 22, was found guilty Thursday for the strong-armed robbery of an Ozark woman in the Grocery Outlet parking lot in January.

She will remain in jail until her sentencing hearing next month.

Johnson was out on bond at the time of the incident after being arrested for the 2004 stabbing death of an Ozark man. She was placed back in the Dale County Jail after being charged with robbery.

Her sister, 22-year-old Chana Johnson, was also arrested for the same murder. Like her sister, she was put back in jail for another charge, second-degree assault.

The murder trial is expected to be held in November.

See **ROBBERY, 10A**

Robbery

continued from 1A

Chana, who was transported from the county jail to speak on her sister's behalf, testified that Talia could not have done the robbery because she was not present when it occurred.

Chana would know, she claimed, because she was there at the time with a man from out of town.

His intention, she said, was

to "boost" merchandise from the grocery story. Although she did not witness the robbery, she claimed the man must have done it, with her driving the getaway vehicle.

The victim, however, identified the defendant twice from photos and a witness at the Grocery Outlet also placed the defendant at the scene of the crime.

"There was conflicting testimony, and the jury had to decide who was telling the truth," Filmore said Friday. "The jury didn't believe her (Chana), obviously."

Talia attempted to establish an alibi. She claimed she'd been at a hotel drinking and playing cards the day of the robbery.

Filmore gave the following account for the January robbery: The victim, Sandy Melanson, was counting cash in her vehicle when Talia attempted to snatch the \$320 from her hands.

Melanson, however, was not so willing to forego her hard-earned money and bit down on the wad of cash. Although Talia was biting the victim's finger and pulling on the

money, jerking it so hard the victim's front tooth came out. Melanson ultimately conceded when she began to taste blood and when she could no longer hear her children in the backseat. They had gone inside the store to call for help.

"This was a pretty violent crime for broad daylight and for Ozark, Alabama," said Filmore, who prosecuted the case. "She (the victim) had promised herself while in the hospital for the injuries she received during the struggle that she was going to see this case through to the end."