

Teen-ager pleads guilty in Vannoy murder Trades testimony for lesser charge

By Doug Murphy Staff Writer

Charged with first-degree murder, 16-year-old Dale Eddie Whitman changed his plea Tuesday from innocent to guilty in Maricopa County Superior Court.

Whitman has admitted to being the first to stab Larry Vannoy last November during an Ahwatukee Foothills vehicle theft that turned into murder. Two other defendants will go on trial for the same crime in February and face the possibility of death by lethal injection.

As part of the plea agreement between Whitman and the Maricopa County Attorney's office, he escaped the possibility of life in prison but will face a sentence of at least 16 years without the possibility of probation, according to portions of the plea agreement that were read in court by Judge James Padish.

Because of his age Whitman was never eligible for the death penalty.

In return for the reduced sentence, Whitman agreed to testify honestly and accurately against fellow defendant Kenrick Vincent, 26. Whitman does not have to testify against the third defendant, James Cooper, 22, who is a cousin. All three are members of the Gila River Indian Community.

According to police and court documents, the trio came to Ahwatukee Foothills intending to steal a vehicle Nov. 18, 2000. They saw Vannoy's prized pickup truck sitting in his driveway in the 4600 block of East Walatowa Street and Cooper hot-wired the vehicle.

As the three were driving away, Vannoy came out of the house and jumped in the back, trying to stop the theft, according to police documents.

Whitman's attorney, Richard Miller, told Padish on Tuesday that "Mr. Vannoy was banging and yelling to passersby to call the police" as the three drove east on Interstate 10 heading to the Gila River Indian Community.

Miller said Whitman has admitted he opened the window in the back of the cab and reached out, stabbing Vannoy non-fatally, as the truck headed east.

When the truck stopped, according to what Whitman has told investigators, it was Vincent who then used a home-made cleaver to hack Vannoy to death.

Miller said Whitman has also admitted to stabbing Vannoy once in the heart, as he lay on the ground, before he died.

As part of the plea agreement, Whitman's first-degree murder charge was reduced to second-degree murder and two other charges, kidnapping and robbery, were dropped according to Deputy County Attorney Noel Levy.

Padish accepted Whitman's plea and set sentencing for Feb. 27.

Cooper and Vincent are scheduled to go on trial Feb. 14 for first-degree murder, kidnapping and robbery.

Nancy Vannoy, who has attended all the court proceedings sat stoically as Whitman admitted his role in her husband's death. Afterward she declined to speak with the press.

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