Teen-ager receives life sentence

Attorneys plan to appeal verdict of man convicted of killing Kingwood resident

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — Defense attorneys say they plan to appeal the life sentence jurors have given a 19-year-old man convicted of capital murder in the death of a disabled Kingwood man found shot to death along with his dog.

Jurors in State District Judge John Ackerman's court needed only 45 minutes Tuesday to convict Danny Eugene Reagan of New Caney in the shooting death of Karl D. Nowlin, 44.

Prosecutors did not seek the death penalty, so Ackerman immediately sentenced Reagan to the only other punishment available — life in prison. Reagan must serve at least 35 years of the sentence, meaning he will not become eligible for parole until 2027.

Defense attorneys Kurt Wentz and Katherine Scardino said they would appeal the verdict.

They had hoped to convince jurors their client was guilty only of voluntary manslaughter because they contended Nowlin had raped Reagan, a claim prosecutors called ludicrous.

Nowlin was shot twice in the head in his home April 9. His Shar-pei dog, Missy, was found dead beside him, also shot in the head.Police ultimately learned that Reagan had led a team of eight other teen-agers on a commando-style raid of Nowlin's home that the young men hoped would net them $1,000 each.

But the group ultimately left the home with only $53 stolen from Nowlin, who had tested positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and was crippled by a stroke. Nowlin formerly had been a benefactor of Reagan, who worked for him as a $100-a-day maid.

Reagan's defense lawyers portrayed their client as an abused and neglected teen who turned to Nowlin for support and was betrayed when Nowlin forced him to submit to anal intercourse in the weeks before the killing.

They contended Reagan shot Nowlin in a fit of blind rage because Nowlin denied he had molested him.

Reagan's friends characterized the teen-ager, who had bounced from foster home to foster home, as the ultimate "throwaway" child. His parents legally have severed their ties to the man.

Commission finds energy company rules unviolated in tank explosion

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — An energy company did not violate regulations by having an unlocked hatch on an oil tank that exploded, killing one teen-ager and injuring four others, the Texas Railroad Commission said Wednesday.

Three people remained hospitalized, with one in critical condition, following the blast early Tuesday at a Chevron U.S.A. Inc. tank battery near Sherman.

It was triggered when one teen opened a tank hatch and lit a cigarette lighter during a beer party, authorities said.

A Grayson County sheriff's officer said Jeff Henson, 18, of Pottsboro died instantly in the blast that wakened residents and rattled windows miles away.

Jared Lee Miller, 19, of Sherman remained in critical condition Wednesday afternoon in Wilson N. Jones Memorial Hospital's intensive care unit with multiple trauma and burns, said hospital spokeswoman Judy Gharis. She said Jeff Thompson of Pottsboro and Matt Penton of Sherman, both 19, were in stable condition at the hospital.

Another victim, 18-year-old Che Henderson of Pottsboro, was treated and released Tuesday.

Tank batteries, which hold crude oil from nearby wells, are a familiar sight in rural Texas.

But energy companies, which periodically pump out oil from the tanks for refining, are not required to fence or lock them up, the railroad commission said.

"Nothing in our rules dictate requirements for a six-foot fence around oil leases or anything like that," said Brian Schaible, a commission spokesman in Austin.

"There is no requirement that you have to have a gate or lock," he said.

He said a commission's field inspector made a routine visit to Chevron's L. Jeanes Tank Battery after the explosion, but found no violations.

> **"It was not any kind of activity by the company that was a problem. Fire consumed all the oil in the tank, so there was no pollution problem from the oil"**
>
> *–Brian Schaible, Commission spokesman*

The commission regulates the Texas petroleum industry, including the thousands of tank batteries located at producing leases.

"After talking with an assistant fire chief from Sherman and other authorities, the inspector was told about the activities of the juveniles, one of whom lit a lighter over the opened hatch in the tank,"Schaible said.

"It was not any kind of activity by the company that was a problem. Fire consumed all the oil in the tank, so there was no pollution problem from the oil."

Police action at convention gets attention

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON— A majority of Houston City Council members are questioning an investigation into a confrontation between police and AIDS activists during the GOP convention, while Houston's mayor and police chief stand by the probe.

Ten council members polled by the Houston Chronicle Tuesday said they fault as one-sided Police Chief Sam Nuchia's investigation into a violent clash between police and demonstrators outside the Astrodome Aug. 17.

But Nuchia, Mayor Bob Lanier and two of Houston's 15 City Council members defended the report, saying they saw little need for further investigation.

Two council members could not be reached to include in the survey. The police report relied on videotaped accounts and police statements and commended the officers for the way they handled the incident.

Some demonstrators have said they were brutalized by police. Nuchia explained that he saw no reason to interview marchers at the parade because videotaped versions indicated no excessive use of force.

While many marchers have complained of being assaulted with billy clubs and trampled by police horses, Nuchia said that does not appear to be the case.

"Whether someone had to be struck with a baton in the course of handcuffing that person or arresting that person . . . I don't know if there was or not," Nuchia said. "But I can tell you from the videotapes and the observations that there were no beatings."

Lanier also defended the report to some 25 activists during a public hearing Tuesday.

He said officers responded appropriately because marchers were throwing plastic water bottles, trying to spook horses and burning barricades.

Lawyer defends record of hiring minorities

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — Dallas County District Attorney John Vance has defended his record of hiring and promoting minorities but said he planned to work with commissioners on more aggressive practices.

"I would be very happy to sit down with anyone and talk to them about this," Vance said Tuesday. "We are very conscious of the fact that 65 percent of the people we try are racial minority, and we want more minority lawyers."

Lee Jackson, county judge, and commissioners John Wiley Price and Nancy Judy said Tuesday they want to develop a plan with Vance for hiring and promoting more prosecutors and investigators.

Vance acknowledged that most of his department's employees are white, but said only a small percentage of lawyers in Dallas and across Texas are minorities.

Only about 1 percent of his job applicants usually are minorities, he said.

But the district attorney's office does not try to keep the few minority lawyers it does hire, according to the head of a black lawyers' group.

"I have watched the number of black prosecutors dwindle in the DA's office," said Rick Jordan, president of the J.L. Turner Legal Association and a former prosecutor.

He said many blacks believe the county office's advancement practices are too slow. Price has used his "standing objection" to protest new hirings and promotions that the district attorney's office presents to the commissioners' court for approval every week. The commissioner contends that the district attorney's office lags behind other county departments in affirmative action.

Other commissioners, who control Vance's budget, have not supported Price in his opposition of proposed hirings and promotions.

FBI bargains with friend, officials say

Bank fraudster admits agents made offer

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN ANTONIO— U.S. Rep. Albert Bustamante says federal investigators offered special treatment to a longtime friend indicted on bank fraud charges if he would wear a wiretap to a meeting with the congressman.

Bustamante, D-San Antonio, said FBI agents made the offer to architect John Franklin Williams last week after Williams was arrested. Williams confirmed he was asked to wear a wiretap, but declined to identify the target, the San Antonio Light reported Wednesday.

"I was told that I would not serve any time in prison if I pleaded guilty and helped them with any investigation they may have," Williams said.

He said Assistant U.S. Attorney Margaret Embrey made the offer.

U.S. Attorney Ronald Ederer denied his office asked Williams to entrap Bustamante.

He acknowledged his staff discussed a possible plea bargain with Williams and asked him to become a government witness, which Ederer said "is routine in many of these cases."

Williams, Gary Ted Ballard, Edward B. Matthews and Charles S. Lowrey have been indicted on charges of conspiracy, money laundering and defrauding the Federal Home Loan Bank Board and the Texas Savings and Loan Association.

An unidentified source told The Light the congressman has known Williams for more than 20 years.

The source said Williams did architectural work for the county when Bustamante was Bexar County judge, that Williams once contributed money to a Bustamante campaign and that the two men's wives are friends.

Bustamante told The Light that FBI agents reportedly told Williams: "If you agree to be wired, and we set up a meeting with Albert Bustamante, we'll tell you what to ask, and we'll make you a real good deal."

Ederer has denied his office is involved in that investigation.

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