

11-15-78 *Gun Shot*
Crime and criminals

Murder charges against Soquel teenagers dropped

Murder charges were dropped Monday in Juvenile Court against five teenage boys charged in the fatal shooting of a man at a marijuana plantation in October.

In a pre-hearing agreement between the boys' private attorneys and the district attorney, the youths had agreed to admit their guilt to remaining charges of armed robbery and being accessories after the killing of Dennis Johnson, 30.

The youths were accused of having "harbored and aided" a companion, Norman Dillon, 17, to avoid his detection and arrest for the murder.

Dillon is said to have pumped nine bullets from a .22 caliber rifle into Johnson when Johnson came upon the youths hiding in the brush on his property.

In return for the admissions of guilt, District Attorney Art Danner and his two assistants, Ralph Boroff and Steve Muni agreed to dismiss the murder charges.

Danner said in a press release after Monday's hearing that "within the limits of the law each minor is technically guilty of the felony-murder."

"But," Danner said, "I feel a distinction must be made in this instance between these minors and the individual who actually shot and killed the victim."

After "carefully analyzing their respective roles of participation in these offenses," Danner said, "I feel their pleas . . . appropriately reflect their responsibility in the death of Dennis Johnson."

This morning Judge Donald May took the pleas from the five boys individually and informed them of their rights as they stood before him with their lawyers and agreed to give up their right to trial.

Their parents watched from spectators seats in the superior court courtroom.

The parents and the boys themselves seemed more relaxed than they were in the initial hearings in Juvenile Court when it was decided the boys would remain in custody, pending their trials.

The boys, clad in blue jeans, short sleeved sweatshirts and tennis shoes, uniforms of the day at Juvenile Hall, greeted their parents with smiles as they came into the courtroom, but their mood was somber as they listened to proceedings.

Again in each case a brief outline of the circumstances that led to Johnson's death was given by Muni and Boroff.

The district attorneys told the judge that the raid on the marijuana patch was planned by the boys at a meeting on Oct. 13; four days later the boys, armed with a shotgun and a rifle, went to Johnson's property.

Some of the boys did not engage in the planning but went along at the last minute, the lawyers said. There was no indication in the lawyers' statements that the boys had set out to kill Johnson.

Muni said at one point, "They were going to tie people up on the property and take the marijuana."

In his press release Danner said, though, "It is my hope that this tragedy and the example of where group action can lead will cause reflection and thought before actions are undertaken that lead to irreversible results."

Monday the boys and their parents were told by Judge May that the youths can face a four-year sentence on the armed robbery charges and three years on the accessory charges.

It also is possible that they may be confined in a California Youth Authority facility until they reach the age of 23, the judge said.

Two of the boys, Steven Wentworth and Vincent Todd Tenwolde, are 15. Edward L. Pullen, Todd Vogler and Anthony Vincent Gullo are 16.

Judge May has the option to recommend to the CYA authorities that the sentences be served consecutively or concurrently, but it is CYA authorities make the final determination about what will be done with the youths.

Today Judge May set hearings on Nov. 27 for the disposition of the cases, except for that of Wentworth

whose hearing will be held on Nov. 29.

Meanwhile the boys are to remain in custody at Juvenile Hall.

The decision whether Dillon will be remanded for trial as an adult has been continued until Nov. 20 for a hearing in Juvenile Court.

A seventh youth, Daniel Pierce, 18, also faced murder, robbery and being an accessory after the murder charges. He is at liberty on bail and his preliminary hearing is set in municipal court on Dec. 6.

Pierce is accused of having been armed with a loaded shotgun during the incident.

George Sherinian said of the district attorney's decision regarding the five defendants, "I think it is a good one." He said all of the defense attorneys and Danner, Muni and Boroff had met on Thursday for a long meeting.

"We all agreed the boys would accept equal responsibility," Sherinian said, "and there was no agreement about what the disposition would be."

Driver sentenced

Robert Marion Thomsen, 35, of 2500 Soquel Drive, Apt. J-14, was fined \$375 on a drunken charge Friday afternoon in Santa Cruz Municipal Court.



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