

Ambush Update

died en route to an Oceanside hospital after being shot in the back with a .22 caliber rifle.

Also wounded in the senseless surprise attack were farmworkers Raoul Mejia and Pablo Martinez. Martinez sustained bullet wounds to his neck and abdomen, while Mejia was wounded in the leg. Since their recovery, authorities have kept secret their whereabouts for fear they might be harmed prior to trial.

The four farmworkers were strolling toward a convenience store on a misty Saturday evening about nightfall, when, as they tried to cross the San Luis Rey River, hidden gunmen opened fire without warning. Mejia testified during the June preliminary hearings that as a bullet tore through his leg, he saw his companions fall bloody and wounded in the riverbed.

Police first surmised that the shootings were "drive-by style," but later tossed that theory as evidence became available. Police spokesman Sgt. Bill Krunglevich initially said detectives were baffled as to a motive, calling the ambush "strange."

But evidence introduced during the two teenagers' preliminary hearing revealed that Oryall and Crenshaw planned to rob the defenseless, Spanish-speaking workers in order to help pay off a \$500 bill owed by Crenshaw for vandalizing a golf course.

It was a confidential informer who eventually led police to the two juveniles, both with extensive histories of brushes

with the law.

According to court records, "... the Oceanside police obtained information from an informant that defendant Oryall had stated some days after the killings took place words to the effect 'Did you see me waste those guys?'"

Additionally, a letter purportedly written by Crenshaw from his cell in Juvenile Hall and introduced into evidence during the June hearings contained the ominous passage: 'I killed somebody.'

It is those admissions of guilt that defense attorneys seek to quash before trial begins Sept. 26, as well as a request that prosecutors identify who it was that tipped police to Oryall's and Crenshaw's alleged participation in the fatal ambush.

It will be up to the trial judge to make a ruling on the admissibility of the confessions. By then another judge will have ruled in Superior Court on the other issue.

Defense attorneys argue that without any information on the informer, it is impossible to tell whether police obtained the search warrants that revealed the murder weapon and other evidence based on standards of reliability for informants required by California law.

But prosecutors maintain that state law is clear: when the public interest is served by protecting the identity of confidential informants, especially when that interest outweighs any benefit to the defendant, the identity of informers can be withheld legally.

The issue is crucial to the case, for if prosecutors refuse to identify the police informer after a judge has told them that in this case the exemption does not apply, the warrants used to seize key incriminating evidence could be quashed and along with them, much chance for a conviction of either Oryall or Crenshaw.

We do know, however, that the informer, also a juvenile, according to prosecutors, has a "fear of reprisal by the defendants."

A third teenager, 15-year-old Brian Spotts, faces trial in Juvenile Court on murder charges in connection with the same ambush. It was Spotts' 11-year-old brother who shocked observers when he testified in the Oryall/Crenshaw preliminary hearing June 6 that he watched as the ambush took place.

Marlin Spotts, an Oceanside 6th grader, was called at the last minute as a surprise prosecution witness. He told Judge Runston Maino that his brother was crouched beside a car as Oryall and Crenshaw opened fire on four men as they walked near a tomato field.

And despite police and prosecution denials that the ambush was racially motivated, court records reveal that the defendants displayed clear hatred when they referred to the wounded Mexicans as "them wetbacks" when questioned by police after their arrests.

Bob McPhail has been a crime reporter for the Oceanside BLADE-TRIBUNE for about a year. He has been following this tragic story since it first broke in February.

The Whole Damn Pie Shop

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