

Cope reaches plea deal for 2006 shootings; faces life in prison

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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LAKEPORT ‐ A Clearlake man pleaded guilty on Monday to charges of second-degree murder and second-degree attempted murder for a 2006 shooting rampage in which a woman died and three others were injured.

Wilbur Home Cope III, 38, was facing trial for first-degree murder, first-degree attempted murder and several other allegations, but reached a plea agreement with prosecutors that reduced the charges, the District Attorney's Office reported.

With the plea agreement, Cope will spend the rest of his life in prison, but the deal will give him better circumstances in the prison system, according to his defense attorney, Stephen Carter.

Cope entered the guilty plea in the 2006 murder of ex-girlfriend Kristin Lori Raviotta and the attempted murder of Terry Lee Cain, the husband of Cope's ex-wife, Michelle, according to the District Attorney's Office.

He also admitted to two special allegations relating to the use of a firearm in Raviotta's death and Cain's shooting, said prosecutor John Langan.

Superior Court Judge Richard Martin presided over the Monday proceedings in his Department 2 courtroom, Langan reported.

Cope's case now goes to the Lake County Probation Department for a report and sentencing recommendation to the court. Langan said Cope will be sentenced by Judge Arthur Mann on Oct. 27. Whether or not Mr. Cope will testify at the hearing is undecided at this point, said Carter.

On Sept. 10, 2006, Cope was alleged to have shot Raviotta during a domestic dispute that occurred inside his automobile, according to the District Attorney's Office.

Raviotta was on her cell phone at approximately 3:10 a.m. with a 911 dispatcher reporting that Cope had just struck her, when he shot her once in the head. The prosecution said the sound of the gunshot was captured on the audio-recorded 911 telephone call.

Following Raviotta's shooting, Cope sped to the home of his ex-wife, Michelle Ann Cain, with Raviotta's body still in the car's front seat. He reportedly crashed the car into a telephone pole just north of the residence Michelle Cain shared with her husband, Terry.

Hearing the crash, several neighbors, including Sharon Kay England, came outside to help Cope. The District Attorney's Office said that Cope responded by firing several gunshots at England, striking her once.

Cope then took a shotgun from the trunk of his car and walked to the Cain residence, yelling for the couple to come to the door. Langan said the Cains, asleep at the time, awoke and came to the sliding glass door. From just feet away, Cope fired three blasts from the shotgun directly at them, striking both of them.

Terry Cain, who took the full force of the blasts, was severely and permanently injured, and today has a paralyzed arm, said Langan.

The District Attorney's Office originally charged Cope with first-degree murder and multiple counts of attempted first-degree murder, mayhem with great bodily injury and various firearm enhancements.

Carter said the plea agreement worked out with the District Attorney's Office reduced the charges from first- to second-degree murder and from first-degree attempted murder to second-degree attempted murder.

Langan said the additional charges of attempted murder and aggravated mayhem were dismissed by a Harvey waiver, which allows the court to consider the facts of the charges in its judgment.

All of the charges and special allegations amount to a maximum sentence of 74 years to life, said Carter, with the firearm use lengthening the prison term considerably.

Langan said Cope would have to serve 72 years before becoming eligible for parole ‐ which would make him 110. “He's going to spend the rest of his life in prison, which is basically what we were looking for.”

At the Oct. 27 sentencing, Carter said he'll delve into the evidence about Cope's physical and mental condition at the time of the shootings.

Cope, Carter explained, was working as a volunteer firefighter when, in 2001, he was injured fighting a fire in Clearlake. Carter said Cope fell through the floor of a building, causing major injuries to his back.

The accident ended Cope's career as a fireman and left him disabled, said Carter.

Cope was regularly taking pain medications for his injury; in addition, Cope suffers by bipolar disorder, which he was not being treated for at the time, Carter said.

The mix of painkillers and alcohol interfered with Cope's ability to control his emotions and triggered an anger event, which resulted in what Carter called “a tragic mistake.”

“It's not the first time I've seen violence at or around this level with that kind of mixture,” said Carter.

During evaluations of Cope, psychiatrists found that he was sane at the time of the shootings, which didn't favor an initial plea of not guilty by reason of insanity, the defense and prosecution said.

Even though the plea deal essentially results in life in prison, Carter said Cope “has an exceptionally high level of remorse” and didn't want to put the victims through a trial. “He wants to take responsibility for what he did.”

Carter said the plea bargain also will help Cope obtain a better placement within the state prison system, since he will not be in prison for first-degree murder.

Cope is now being treated with medication for his depression and is a different person; Carter said speaking with Cope today, it's hard to imagine him committing such acts.

“I'm hopeful that the rest of his life will be humane and in a placement that's appropriate for him,” said Carter.

Langan said the Cains and will be at the Oct. 27 sentencing, and he's also spoken with Raviotta's mother about attending. He said he'll give the victims an opportunity to tell the court exactly how the shootings impacted them physically and emotionally.

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