

Walunga Found Guilty of First Degree Murder

By MARGIE BAUMAN
KTVE/KFRB

FAIRBANKS — A Fairbanks Superior Court Judge has found Allen Riley Walunga guilty of first degree murder in the death of Jody Rae Stambaugh and of assault with attempt to kill her roommate, Debby Dimond.

Judge Gerald Van Hoomissen handed down the verdict Monday and set sentencing for Thursday afternoon, on a defense request to direct the sentence with speed.

Defense attorney Dave Backstrum said Walunga had been locked up for six months and needed mental health treatment without further delay.

Backstrum also added hastily that since the court accepted arguments that Walunga was an anti-social personality that he be lodged in the state jail at Nome, so his family could visit him.

Walunga, 22, of Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, was charged last December with the strangulation-rape of Jody Stambaugh, while both were students at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks.

Authorities said he killed her, then attempted to kill her roommate when she returned to the room early on the morning of Dec. 10.

Walunga testified that the voice of an evil spirit had commanded him in the Yupik Eskimo tongue to "take her" and that he fought a mental struggle with the spirit to no avail before taking her life.

Walunga, the grandson of a shaman on St. Lawrence Island, said he had inherited the powers of a shaman and in his life had

(Continued on page 5)

Walunga Is Guilty...

(continued from Page 1)

heard the voices of seven spirits, four good and three bad, giving him various commands.

In fact, Walunga's arguments that he was a shaman was a key issue in the case. The defense cited that belief as evidence of schizophrenia, especially since Walunga said he really heard the voices and was not hallucinating.

Van Hooymissen said Walunga's own description of shamanism showed it to be a practice primarily beneficial to the Yupik Eskimo.

He said he found no evidence, other than that offered by one of Walunga's own relatives, that the practice of shamanism would require a human sacrifice.

Rather, said the judge, Walunga appeared to be obsessed with a fear of the victim and was also sexually attracted to her.

As for a defense plea linking shamanism with schizophrenia, the judge said there was no evidence of any schizophrenia in the Walunga family, with the possible exception of the defendant.

Van Hooymissen also discounted Walunga's testimony that he inherited the powers of a shaman, on grounds the powers, if they in fact existed, were given through selection rather than inheritance.

"There is no evidence of insanity. I think Riley is in poor mental health and there may be psychotic overtones, but he knew what he was doing, has known what he was doing and is accountable for his act," the judge said.

"Shamanism had nothing to do with this," he said.