

# • Plea deals reached in cases linked to '97 robbery-slaying

By JASON TRAHAN

Staff Writer

[jtrahan@dallasnews.com](mailto:jtrahan@dallasnews.com)

Published: 07 March 2012 11:20 PM

A man whose confession to a 1997 murder set two other men free pleaded guilty this week amid allegations that he sought money in exchange for coming forward.

Alonzo Hardy pleaded guilty on Tuesday and received five years in prison for robbing Alfonso Aguilar during a home invasion at a Love Field-area drug house in 1997 that resulted in Aguilar's death. Co-defendant Don Michael Anderson pleaded no contest Tuesday to aggravated robbery in the same attack and also received five years.

Both men had been accused of capital murder in Aguilar's death. The trial for Anderson had already begun Tuesday when he and Hardy decided to accept plea deals for lesser charges. Hardy was not on trial. He is about halfway through serving a 30-year sentence for an unrelated robbery and will soon be eligible for parole.

Two other men, Claude Simmons and Christopher Scott, were originally convicted of killing Aguilar and spent 12 years in prison. They were freed in 2009 after Hardy came forward and said that he and Anderson were the real killers.

Anderson's attorneys, Toby Shook, Chris Knox and Bill Cox, have said for years that Hardy's confession was tainted because he sought money from Simmons' sister in exchange for his confession.

The allegations against Hardy surfaced in 2010 while Dallas County District Attorney Craig Watkins, a Democrat, was running against Republican challenger Danny Clancy. Watkins and his campaign brushed the allegations aside, noting that Shook, who ran against Watkins and lost in 2006, was friends with Clancy. Watkins was re-elected.

On Tuesday, during opening statements in Anderson's capital murder trial, Shook told jurors he would show them letters Hardy wrote from prison to Simmons' family that showed his true motivation.

"Hardy lied and entered into an agreement for money," Shook said.

Hardy's attorney, Gary Unell, said Wednesday that his client did not ask for money because he was lying.

"He was putting himself in harm's way on a capital murder charge," Unell said. "He was asking for help paying for a lawyer to defend this charge."

Before Hardy was called to the witness stand Tuesday, prosecutors offered Anderson and Hardy plea deals.

Jamille Bradfield, a spokeswoman for the district attorney's office, said Wednesday that two of the state's witnesses fell ill, one after the jury had been picked, prompting prosecutors to end the trial and offer the deals.

"These developments were communicated to counsel for Mr. Anderson and a plea bargain agreement was reached in the case," she said in an email Wednesday.

She said that the state's investigation showed that after Simmons and Scott were exonerated, an investigation showed that Anderson and Hardy were "responsible for the death of Alonzo Aguilar."