

Douglas rancher found dead

Hanigan was accused in aliens' torture

By JOHN WOESTENDIEK
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DOUGLAS — George T. Hanigan, a prominent southeastern Arizona businessman accused in the desert torture of three illegal aliens, was found dead of a heart attack in his home early yesterday.

Hanigan, 67, a rancher who held the franchises on most of the Dairy Queens in Arizona, was found in his bed about 8 a.m. by one of his two sons.

He and his sons were indicted Aug. 27 in the alleged kidnaping, assault and robbery of three Mexicans.

An autopsy performed yesterday afternoon in Tucson showed that Hanigan died of a heart attack, said Doug Krapp, chief deputy of the Cochise County Sheriff's Dept. The autopsy was requested by the county medical examiner and the county attorney's office.

Hanigan's wife and daughter were out of town at the time of his death, Krapp said.

Hanigan and his sons, Patrick, 23, and Thomas, 19, were arrested several days after the alleged beatings. Shortly after they were charged, the Sheriff's Dept. reported, a shot was fired through a window at their home. No one was injured.

They were indicted on 14 counts each, including three charges of kidnaping, conspiracy to kidnap, assault with a deadly weapon, conspiracy to assault with a deadly weapon and two counts of robbery.

In December the indictments were nullified by Pima County Superior Court Judge J. Richard Hannah on the ground that the interpreter for the grand jury hearing was unauthorized.

One week later, after a second grand jury hearing, the men were indicted again on the same counts.

Hannah is reviewing a motion from the prosecution to move the trial out of Cochise County because of what the prosecutor says is a prejudice against the aliens and an undeserved sympathy for the defendants.

The trial is scheduled to begin Tuesday. The Hanigans have been free on their own recognizance.

The three Mexicans, Eleazar Zavala, 24, Manuel Loya, 25, and Bernabe Mata, 21, all of Chihuahua, told officials they were forced into a camper by someone they thought was a law enforcement official.

They were driven into the desert where three men stripped them of their clothes and bound them with rope, they said, and cut their hair with knives. One of the men said a rope was tied around his neck and thrown over a tree limb. Their feet were burned with hot poker and they were dragged across the desert, kicked and stabbed, they told deputies.

The aliens told deputies they were then untied and told to run away. As they ran, two of the men were hit with bird shot. The men crossed the border to Agua Prieta, where they were hospitalized.

The Hanigan home is in an area frequently hit by burglaries believed to be committed by Mexicans who illegally enter the country. The Hanigan home has been burglarized several times.

Hanigan was active in county and state politics and was sometimes called "Mr. Republican of Cochise County." He held the franchise on most Dairy Queen ice cream stores in Arizona except those in Maricopa County.

Also a rancher, he was born and lived all his life on the land west of Douglas, his father homesteaded in 1888. In 1929 he took over his father's dairy operation, and his was the last of about 20 small dairies in the Douglas area. It closed in 1948.

After selling off his dairy stock, Hanigan began accumulating beef cattle and eventually acquired a fairly large herd.

Active in civic affairs, Hanigan was a member of the local Kiwanis and Elks clubs, the Fraternal Order of Police and the Douglas Chamber of Commerce.

He was a past member of the Cochise County Milk Producers Assn., the Douglas Golf and Social Club, and was past chairman of the Cochise County Republican Central Committee. In 1966, he served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention.

He was also the organizer of Americans for Constitutional Action, and the Goldwater for President Club both in Douglas.

He is survived by his wife, two sons and two daughters.