

Taser-gun heist trio sent for trial

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A 22-year-old white woman and two young Hispanic males are being sent for trial in Oklahoma County on charges of stunning a 50-year-old man with an electronic taser gun and then robbing him. During the attack they also beat their victim, kicked him and stabbed him.

At a 13 April preliminary hearing, District Court Judge Gregory J Ryan was told that Crystal Grace Harris had taken their victim back to her motel room after she and their victim had spent the evening together at a local casino.

The middle-aged man, identified only as " Mr Brown" during the hearing, said he had come out of the bathroom to discover Harris putting down her phone. " Two minutes later there was a knock on the door and these two guys came in," Mr Brown told the Court. " That made me nervous because I thought I had been set up." The two men, named as Ricky Lee Meza (22) and Robert E Hill (21), are alleged to have then attacked Mr Brown, beating him up, kicking him and stabbing him before disabling him with a taser-gun shot.

A taser gun, the Court was told, is a hand-held electronic weapon that fires barbs linked by wires to batteries. On touching their target the barbs deliver an electric shock of 50, 000 volts-and-more, causing instant short-term paralysis. After taking their victim's wallet, money and the keys of his truck, Harris and her two accomplices had been able to get away from the motel before reception had been alerted that a robbery had taken place and called the police.

With the incident having occurred in the early evening, there had been witnesses around who were able to say the three had driven off in an old

grey-coloured Chevrolet Caprice. The witnesses were also able to tell police the direction the vehicle had taken.

As a result of a chance encounter on the road, Harris and the two men were picked up and stopped by County police within 10 minutes of their getaway. A police car heading for the motel in response to the robbery call saw a grey Caprice with three occupants going in the opposite direction that matched the description of the getaway car, turned and stopped it after a short and uneventful chase.

Identifying Hill as the driver of the car he had stopped, with Harris and Meza as the other people in the car with him, County Police Officer Chris Spillman told the Court that after he had arrested them he had found them to be in possession of Mr Brown's wallet with his driving license, credit cards and other identifying documents, together with the \$1, 095 that Mr Brown had reported stolen, and Mr Brown's truck keys.

After Mr Brown had also positively identified Harris, Hill and Meza as the group who had attacked and robbed him, Judge Ryan said he was satisfied he had heard enough evidence to justify sending all three of them for trial on a count of robbery with a dangerous weapon and a second count of stealing Mr Brown's wallet, money and car keys. It is understood that at the full jury trial they will also be charged with assault-and-battery arising out of having shot Mr Brown with the taser gun.

Bail for Crystal Harris was set at \$27, 000, with \$5, 000 for Hill and \$3, 000 for Meza. The case has been listed for jury trial on 2 May.

Commentary from Our Court Correspondent

Oklahoma's State Constitution provides for a preliminary Court hearing before a Judge to establish whether enough sound, prima facie evidence exists to justify a case being referred for full jury trial. Only at a full jury trial will the alleged offenders be found guilty or not guilty of the charges against them.

This is an historic constitutional safeguard to test whether a State prosecution is warranted as legitimate and whether there is a good factual basis for it.

Very importantly, one purpose of the preliminary-hearing process is to make sure no one sits in jail waiting to be tried without a reason that has been properly tested before a Judge in Court.

Basically, the preliminary hearing seeks to determine two things: one, is to determine that an indictable crime has actually been committed; and, two, is to establish that there is sound evidence that the defendant or defendants did it.

In this case, Mr Brown is alleging that Crystal Harris, Ricky Lee Meza and Robert Hill attacked him, beat him, kicked him, stabbed him, shot a taser weapon at him, took his money and other possessions and fled.

As District Court Judge Gregory J Ryan commented to students after the preliminary hearing: “ I'm not making the final determination. I'm just there to make sure that the allegations that the State is arguing have some merit in them — which, in my opinion, they probably have.

“ Mr Brown is able to identify all three individuals. Then they (the State) put a police officer on the stand who testified that after the victim had gone into the lobby and said he had been robbed, the police put out an immediate description of the grey-coloured Chevy Caprice with two Hispanic males and one white female and the direction they had taken.

“ Then there was the second police officer who testified he had heard that report and he had just started to head in the direction of the motel when he saw the car go by, chased it and stopped it.

“ And he found those three people in the car and after he had arrested them he found the victim’s wallet, victim’s driver’s license and credit cards and another ID in it. And the \$1, 095 in the wallet that Mr Brown had said was in the wallet, as well as his car key.”

As Judge Ryan said: “ I’m not making the final determination. I’m just there to make sure that the allegations that the State is arguing have some merit in them — which, in my opinion, they probably have.”