

2 Panthers' Pleas End Murder Trial

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NEW HAVEN, Conn., Oct. 26—Rory Hithe and Landon Williams, the last of 14 Black Panther defendants in the murder case that involved party chairman Bobby G. Seale, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to murder today.

Their sentencing, set for Nov. 19, will close the file in the two-and-one-half-year-old case of Alex Rackley, an illiterate Panther from New York City who was tortured and killed by fellow Panthers in May 1969.

State's Attorney Arnold Markle, who prosecuted the case, said today's pleas were the result of negotiations with the defendants and their lawyers.

The case, the longest and costliest in Connecticut his-

tory, involved 14 defendants but only two trials. In the first, which attracted thousands of protesters and National Guardsmen, Panther Lonnie McLucas was convicted of conspiracy to murder, but was acquitted of three more serious charges including two that carried the death penalty. He was sentenced to 12 to 15 years.

In the second trial, a jury was unable to reach a verdict against Seale and co-defendant Ericka Huggins. After discharging the jury, Superior Court Judge Harold M. Mulvey said massive publicity made a second fair trial impossible and he dismissed the charges.

Besides McLucas, only two of the original 14 defendants in the case are now in jail. Warren Kimbro, the head of the local Panther chapter who admitted firing the first of two bullets into Rackley, was sentenced to life.

Earlier this month a Connecticut Pardons Board, at Markle's urging, reduced Kimbro's minimum eligibility for parole from 20 to four years. Kimbro could be released early next year.

Markle also said he would ask for a reduction in the life sentence given George Sams Jr., the state's key witness against Seale and the man who admitted supervising Rackley's torture and execution.

Of the other defendants originally charged, four pleaded guilty to reduced charges and were released after awaiting trial for 18 to 20 months; one woman defendant was given immunity from prosecution and freed after testifying against the others; and two teen-age girls had their cases referred to juvenile court where dispositions are kept secret.

Hithe, 20, and Williams, 27, were arrested in Denver, Colo., in June 1969. They successfully fought extradition to Connecticut for 21 months, finally agreeing to return as the Seale-Huggins trial was ending.

Williams was described as an acting Panther field marshal. Hithe bought the gun later identified as the murder weapon.

Like the other defendants, Hithe and Williams also were charged with murder and kidnaping resulting in death, both capital crimes, conspiracy to kidnap and binding with intent to commit a crime.

State's Attorney Markle indicated the other charges would not be prosecuted.