

Bobby v. Van Hook: A Detailed Overview

The Accused

Robert Van Hook faced charges related to the death of a man he met at a bar in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1985.

The Charges

Aggravated murder with death penalty specifications: charges that could result in execution.

What Happened

Robert Van Hook met a man at a bar in Cincinnati and lured him back to his apartment. Van Hook then stabbed the man to death. Van Hook pleaded guilty to the crime, meaning the trial proceeded directly to the sentencing phase rather than a guilt or innocence phase. During sentencing, the jury decided Van Hook should receive the death penalty.

The Legal Process Before Trial

- **Arrest and Charges (1985):** Van Hook was arrested and charged with aggravated murder with death penalty specifications.
- **Guilty Plea:** Van Hook pleaded guilty to the crime, eliminating the need for a trial on guilt or innocence.
- **Sentencing Phase:** The case moved directly to the sentencing phase, where a jury would decide between life in prison or death.

The Trial: Questions About Legal Representation

- The defense team called Van Hook's mother and a former girlfriend to testify about his background and character.
- The attorneys decided against consulting additional mental health experts who might have provided professional testimony about Van Hook's mental state or psychological condition.
- The attorneys presented information about Van Hook's military service and his history of emotional struggles. They also described his difficult childhood in general terms to help the jury understand his life circumstances.
- The defense team focused their efforts on the facts they believed were most likely to convince the jury to choose life in prison instead of death.
- The defense team chose not to conduct a broader investigation into Van Hook's family history, which might have revealed additional information about his background and circumstances.
- The defense team deliberately chose not to present certain personal details about Van Hook because they worried these details might damage his image with the jury. This meant some information about his life was kept hidden.
- Years later, Van Hook argued that these decisions showed his attorneys did not work hard enough on his case. He claimed they made choices that limited his defense.

Trial Results

The jury sentenced Van Hook to death.