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One defendant pleads guilty in 3 slayings

WACO, Texas (AP) — A 24-year-old man was sentenced to life imprisonment after he pleaded guilty to murder charges in the deaths of three teenagers found bound, gagged and stabbed to death in a park near Lake Waco.

Anthony Melendez, one of four defendants in the case, was sentenced Thursday to two concurrent life terms by State District Judge George Allen.

Testimony in the trial of another defendant, David Wayne Spence, 25, is scheduled to begin Monday. A jury composed of eight women and four men was picked for Spence's trial Thursday afternoon.

Melendez pleaded guilty to the death of Jill Mon-

gomery, 17, of Waxahachie, and Kenneth Franks, 18.

Court officials said Melendez still faces a capital murder charge in the death of Raylene Rice, 17, of Waxahachie.

McLennan County Justice of the Peace Joe Johnson said the girls' throats had been slashed. Franks had a slash wound to his chest and all three bodies had numerous stab wounds, Johnson said.

The trio disappeared during an outing to the lake and the bodies were discovered by a fisherman.

A Sept. 17 trial date has been set for Muneer Mohammed Deeb, 24, court officials said. No trial date has been set for Gilbert Melendez, 28, Anthony's brother, officials said.

All four defendants were charged with three counts of capital murder.

Melendez, who was arrested last Aug. 17 in Fort Worth on a robbery charge from Corpus Christi, requested an immediate transfer to a Texas Department of Corrections facility following his sentencing.