

# Boy held for murder in dad's hunt death

## Father's body found on third day of search

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MCKNIGHT CANYON, N.M. (KRQE) - The stories 16-year-old Thomas Manning told about killing his father in a hunting accident just didn't add up, a Grant County sheriff's investigator said Tuesday shortly after search teams located the body.

Even before the body of Jeffery Manning, 43, was found, his son had been charged with an open count of murder with prosecutors seeking an adult sentence if he is convicted, according to court records.

News 13 has learned that Thomas Manning was charged with bringing a deadly weapon to school in January. He was also on probation with CYFD after officials say he attacked his father in August.

He was charged with aggravated battery for the attack, ordered to go to therapy, and attend class as Freedom High. That's an alternative school in Albuquerque.

Border Patrol agents working with a cadaver dog found a body believed to be Jeff Manning's in McKnight Canyon on the eastern side of the Gila National Forest at about 11 a.m. Tuesday. The search began Sunday after Thomas Manning showed up at Bryan's Pit BBQ restaurant in Mimbres and asked to use the phone.

The owners of the barbecue restaurant told the Silver City Sun-News that Thomas Manning came in Sunday evening and said his father had been shot. When they asked if he needed first aid, they said Thomas replied, "There's nothing left."

With the remaining daylight deputies attempted to find the body.

"Initially we brought the 16 year old out here because he was going to be the one that knew where the body was located," Grant County sheriff's Lt. Fermín Lopez said. "It was dark. The terrain is difficult."

The boy told deputies he'd accidentally shot his father while they were hunting and left the body in the forest. But conflicting stories raised investigators' suspicions, Lopez continued.

"He had spoke to witnesses that he first reported it to, and upon talking to him and with what the witnesses told us, it just didn't match," he said.

The search for the body extended into Monday, and New Mexico State Police mobilized its search-and-rescue teams bringing volunteer teams in from Grant County and Las Cruces along with local and federal officers. By Tuesday two dozen searchers were working the western face of the Black Range.

The Border Patrol agents had started near the top of McKnight Canyon and were working their way down when the dog picked up the scent leading to the body.

Investigators had told searchers to consider the area around the body to be an active crime scene and warned them not to disturb any potential evidence. The body was turned over to the state Office of the Medical Investigator to confirm officially its identity and determine the cause of death.

Late Tuesday investigators were still processing the scene of the shooting about 35 miles northeast of Silver City.

"At this point we know what happened," Lopez said. "Now I think the focus of the investigation is to find why, and I guess that will be determined later."

Court documents filed Tuesday morning indicate prosecutors intend to try Thomas Manning as a "serious youthful offender" subject to an adult sentence if convicted. He is being held in the Luna County Juvenile Detention Center in Deming.

The boy is a 10th grader at Freedom High School, according to the Albuquerque Public Schools district, and apparently lives with his mother in Albuquerque.

According to records of the Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention Center in Albuquerque Thomas Manning was booked and released in January for bringing a deadly weapon--likely a small knife--to Del Norte High School where he was a ninth grader at the time. He also was booked and released on a shoplifting charge in September.