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DAVIDSON PLEADS GUILTY, FACES DEATH PENALTY FOR MURDER, SEXUAL BATTERY

State Attorney Melissa Nelson announces that Donald Hugh Davidson Jr., of Middleburg, entered a guilty plea to charges of First-Degree Murder, Attempted Sexual Battery (Victim Over 12 Years of Age With Force or Deadly Weapon), four counts of Sexual Battery (Victim Under 12 Years of Age), Lewd or Lascivious Molestation, Kidnapping, and Grand Theft Auto. Davidson faces the possibility of the death penalty for his crimes. Davidson waived his right to a jury trial for the guilt and penalty phases — the Honorable Don Lester will oversee a penalty hearing the week of June 10, 2019.

On Dec. 1, 2014, Davidson entered the victim's Middleburg residence and — in a premeditated fashion — strangled and stabbed the young mother. Davidson rendered her unconscious before stabbing her in the neck several times. Davidson knew the victim's husband since childhood.

The victim's son returned home several hours later, but was locked out and told by Davidson his mother was not home. Davidson told him to go to a friend's house down the street, which he did. Upon returning home, he found his mother murdered on the bathroom floor. His mother's van and his younger sister were missing from the residence.

Law enforcement arrived at the home and spotted the victim's daughter running down a dirt road toward her home. The young female victim told investigators she was home at the time of the crime, but did not realize what was happening. She identified Davidson as emerging partially exposed from her mother's bedroom and approaching her. Davidson sexually battered her in the home before using the family van to kidnap her. He took the girl to several areas in Clay County to perform other sexual acts on her before driving back to the area of the crime and dropping her off.

An extensive manhunt ensued and Davidson was apprehended while driving on Blanding Boulevard. A law enforcement search revealed the knife used in the crime and, post-Miranda, Davidson admitted to planning and attempting to sexually assault the adult victim in her residence.

The case was investigated by Clay County Sheriff's Office and is being prosecuted by Chief Assistant State Attorney L. E. Hutton and State Attorney Melissa Nelson.