

SCRANTON, Pa. (AP) - A northeastern Pennsylvania prison inmate pleaded guilty Thursday to attempted murder in the near-fatal beating of another inmate, whom police say he knocked to the floor and stomped on his head at least 15 times "with all his might."

Michael Simonson, 33, faces up to 40 years behind bars for the attack of Nicholas Pinto at the Lackawanna County Prison on Aug. 8.

Pinto was awaiting sentencing on a federal child pornography charge when he was ambushed. Simonson has been sentenced to life without parole after pleading guilty to second-degree murder in an unrelated case.

Pinto, 29, was left with permanent brain damage, his attorney, Patrick Rogan, has said. After the beating, Simonson returned to his cell and used a cloth to wipe evidence from his sneakers, according to a police affidavit.

Pinto was being kept in protective custody at the time of the attack. Simonson, classified as a dangerous "administrative custody" inmate, was supposed to be locked in his cell as Pinto returned to the block from a recreation area but was not.

The vicious attack sparked investigations and questions about prison security that led to the resignation of the prison warden. Three prison guards and a supervisor who were on duty during the attack also face discipline.