

Testimony on officer's use of knee, rope

By Catherine Blalock
Staff Reporter

Narcotics Officer Stephen Schellpeper has been charged with third degree assault involving the arrest of Francisco Renteria. Renteria died the following day at Lincoln General Hospital.



Schellpeper

Schellpeper's trial began last week and is expected to end this week.

On June 27, neighbors and members of the Renteria family testified to whether or not they saw officers put a knee on Francisco Renteria's neck. Stella Ochoa Harris, who watched the struggle from her yard, said she saw officers put a knee on Francisco Renteria's neck.

Renteria's nephew, Jose Cruz Martinez testified that he saw an officer put his knee on his uncle's neck but under cross-examination said it could have been placed on the back.

On June 28, Robert Henderson of the Nebraska State Patrol testified that the force used

by Schellpeper was reasonable up until he used the 6 and 1 rope.

"I believe Officer Schellpeper was only reacting to what he heard on the radio and what he saw," he said.

When questioned about the use of the 6 and 1 rope, Henderson said: "In the way it was used, up to a point, it was appropriate."

Henderson disagreed with the continued use of the rope once Renteria was handcuffed.

There were seven officers and one suspect. They had to fold Renteria to get the rope attached to the handcuffs, making it hard for him to breathe, he said.

On June 29, Alma Alvarez, whose yard the struggle took place in, testified that she saw police do nothing wrong that night and came forward because of the accusations of police brutality.

Dr. Matthias Okoye, who performed the autopsy on Renteria, testified that a knee on his neck or the use of a neck hold could have caused the bruising to Renteria's neck.

Okoye said he took blood and urine samples from Renteria to test for alcohol and drug use. Renteria tested negative for both.

"The body was free of any natural disease and any chemicals that would have caused his death," Okoye said.

Okoye showed slides of Renteria's body,

showing bruises and cuts over the body. Renteria suffered bruises on his arms, legs and hands.

The right side of the neck had extensive bruising which could have been caused by a knee to Renteria's neck.

Okoye said under cross examination that the bruising could have been caused by the use of the Lateral Vascular Neck Restraint.

It has already been determined that Officer Luke Wilke, who has been found not guilty of third-degree assault, attempted to use the LVNR.

Compression of the neck causes aspirations which cause a person to vomit and leads to cardiac arrest. The bruises he suffered were recent.

Okoye classified Renteria's death as accidental.

Dr. Michael Graham, the chief medical examiner for St. Louis, testified for the defense that Renteria died from Sudden Death Syndrome which often occurs in people who have become highly agitated.

On June 30, Officer Brian Jackson testified that Renteria did vomit in the backseat of the cruiser. He also testified that he did not see the 6 and 1 rope applied and is aware of the medical implication of any type of technique used by the police department.

Investigator Greg Sims with the LPD, testified that Schellpeper put his knees on Renteria's

back as a control technique and was the first to mention the use of the 6 and 1 rope.

Under direct examination, Sims said he was not sure where Schellpeper's knees were when Renteria was being handcuffed because he was controlling the left arm.

When he saw Renteria in the cruiser, he was breathing, Sims said.

Officer Michael Schaff of the LPD, testified that Schellpeper was the first to mention the use of the 6 and 1, but Wilke was the first to apply it.

Schaff was the one who released the 6 and 1 after Renteria began to have convulsions. He released the rope so Renteria could breathe more easily.

After the lunch hour recesses, Greg Schatz, the attorney for Schellpeper, began to present his case.

Schatz presented three officers who had interviewed witnesses after the struggle.

Officer Robert Farber of LPD, testified that he never asked Harris if she saw an officer's knees on Renteria's neck.

Prosecutor Robert Bartle asked Farber, "Officer, are you saying you forgot to ask her where the knee was hitting the man?"

He responded, "I don't know if I forgot to ask her. I didn't ask her."

Schellpeper's trial will resume on July 5 and is expected to end July 7.

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