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NO cop says he burned body after Katrina

Said he didn't want to let the corpse rot in Hurricane Katrina's aftermath

By Michael Kunzelman
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A New Orleans police officer on trial for burning the body of a man who was fatally shot by a different officer testified Monday that he set the fire because he didn't want to let another corpse rot in Hurricane Katrina's aftermath.

"I was exposed to so much death, so many bodies," said Officer Gregory McRae, one of two officers charged with burning the body of 31-year-old Henry Glover in the back seat of a car on Sept. 2, 2005.

McRae said nobody ordered him to torch the car or Glover's body, and he denied setting the fire to cover up a police shooting. McRae said his decision was influenced by having seen other bodies floating in the flood waters that inundated New Orleans.

"I had seen enough bodies. I had seen enough rot," McRae said, choking up.

McRae says he now knows he has "done a wrong."

"If you had to do it again today, would you do it?" asked his attorney, Frank DeSalvo.

"No, sir," said McRae, one of five current or former officers on trial in federal court.

McRae and Lt. Dwayne Scheuermann are charged with burning Glover's body after David Warren, now a former officer, shot Glover outside a strip mall. McRae and Scheuermann also are charged with beating persons who, seeking help for Glover, drove him in a car to a school that police were using as a makeshift headquarters. McRae denied beating anyone at the school.

McRae said one of his superiors told him to move the Chevy Malibu containing Glover's body away from the school, but he testified the fire was his idea.

After driving the car over a nearby Mississippi River levee and into a wooded area, McRae said he tossed a flare into the car and started to walk away. Not seeing any flames, McRae said he shot out the rear window of the car to ventilate it. Only then did the car start to burn, he said.

McRae said Scheuermann had followed him to the levee in a truck but didn't know he would burn the car.

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Scheuermann asked him why he had set the car on fire, McRae said. He recalled saying something like, "I wasn't going to let it rot."

"He seemed shocked," McRae said of Scheuermann, who hasn't testified.

U.S. District Judge Lance Africk pressed McRae to explain his actions.

"I had reached a point, your honor, where I was tired of smelling putrid human rotten flesh," he said.

Another officer, Lt. Joseph Meisch, has testified that he saw McRae laughing after he burned the car — a claim McRae denied.

During a prosecutor's cross-examination, McRae said he knows burning a body can hamper a homicide investigation. But he insisted that that wasn't on his mind when he burned Glover's. His cross-examination is expected to resume Tuesday.

Warren is charged with shooting Glover without justification. Former Lt. Robert Italiano and Lt. Travis McCabe are charged with obstructing the Justice Department's probe of his death. All five of the current and former officers have pleaded not guilty to the charges.

In other testimony Monday, a defense expert said Warren was justified in shooting Glover.

"He believed that his life was going to end right there," said Alan Baxter, who testified as an expert in police procedures for Warren's defense.

Last week, Warren testified he was guarding a police substation at the mall when two men pulled up in what appeared to be a stolen truck. Warren, who was standing on a second-floor balcony, said he ordered the men to stop as they ran toward a gate that would have given them access to the building, but he said they didn't comply.


Warren testified that Glover appeared to have a gun in his hand when he shot him. Prosecutors, however, say Glover wasn't armed and didn't pose a threat to the officer or his partner that day.

Bernard Calloway, the other man with Glover at the mall, testified Glover was leaning against the truck and lighting a cigarette, with his back facing the strip mall, just before he was shot. When a prosecutor asked him about Calloway's testimony, Baxter said, "It didn't happen that way at all."

"Were you there?" Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Magner asked.

"No, of course not," responded Baxter, who said he based his conclusion that the shooting was justified on his interview with Warren.

"I formed the professional opinion that he was telling the truth," he said.

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