

Vagos member testifies about beating in motorcycle gang melee at Nevada casino

Written by Administrator
Tuesday, 30 July 2013 22:00 -

RENO, Nev. — A Vagos motorcycle gang member testified Tuesday that he thought he was going to be killed by Hells Angels leaders who kicked him in the head and pointed a gun at him before one of the rivals was fatally shot in a 2011 melee at a Nevada casino.

"I was scared to death. I thought I was going to be killed. As a matter of fact, I'm lucky to be alive today," said Robert Wiggins, the vice president of the Vagos chapter in Orange County, Calif.

Wiggins told a Washoe District Court jury at the murder trial for a fellow Vagos that he didn't know until days later that Hells Angels' San Jose boss Jeffrey "Jethro" Pettigrew had been killed during the shootout on the floor of a busy Sparks casino about 11:30 p.m. Sept. 23, 2011.

Wiggins, under sometimes combative questioning from the prosecutor, said he "played possum," trying to pretend he was dead during the beating and never saw Pettigrew get shot.

Ernesto Gonzalez, then the president of the Vagos chapter in Nicaragua, is accused of killing Pettigrew.

Prosecutors say it was an organized assassination approved by the Vagos international president after Pettigrew punched another Vagos, Los Angeles chapter vice president Gary "Jabbers" Rudnick, who had been trying to pick a fight.

Gonzalez claims it was self-defense. His lawyer, David Houston, said Gonzalez will testify that he shot Pettigrew to save Wiggins' life.

Rudnick has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in a plea deal with prosecutors and also is expected to testify at the trial.

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Wiggins said he had just ordered dinner with friends in Rosie's cafe just off the casino floor at John Ascuaga's Nugget when they heard "a lot of noise, a lot of ruckus." He said they joined a crowd rushing to the door leading to the casino floor.

The scene was "chaotic — women screaming, people yelling and shouting," he said. "I could hear glass breaking everywhere. It was crazy."

Wiggins was moving with a wave of people into the casino when he said he was accidentally pushed from behind, his bad knee buckled and he fell to the ground between rows of slot machines.

Next, he saw two Hells Angels approaching with guns — Pettigrew and Caesar Villagrana, who has pleaded guilty to shooting at least one Vagos that night.

But Wiggins acknowledged during his testimony that surveillance video showed only Villagrana holding a gun at that point.

The two began "kicking the (crap) out of me," he said, including blows to his throat, chest and back of the head.

"I saw the big guy (Villagrana) was standing over the top of me unloading a gun into the crowd." Wiggins said, estimating eight or nine shots were fired.

"It seemed like it went on forever," he said. "It was an automatic gun and he emptied the magazine."

Asked if Villagrana shot him, Wiggins said, "He was going to."

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Hall questioned why Gonzalez shot Pettigrew if Villagrana was the one holding the gun. Wiggins said he didn't know: "I didn't see anybody shoot anybody."

Wiggins denied suggestions by Washoe County Chief Deputy District Attorney Karl Hall that he was leading a pack of Vagos chasing another Hells Angel when he was pushed to the ground.

"I'm too fat and old to chase people," the stocky longtime construction worker, who appeared to be middle-aged, said. "I've got bad knees, a bad hip and a bad back."

At one point, Wiggins said Hall had asked him the same question five times.

"Are you trying to get a rise out of me?" he asked.

"I'm trying to get the truth out of you," Hall answered.

Wiggins replied, "I told you the truth."

Later, over the objections of the defense, Judge Connie Steinheimer granted Hall's request to treat Wiggins as a "hostile" witness, placing more stringent restrictions on the way defense counsel could cross examine him.

Out of the presence of the jury, Hall said Wiggins "obviously was trying to be deceptive," had rehearsed his testimony with his legal counsel, was "clearly biased" in favor of Gonzalez and is "at the heart of their defense."

Steinheimer agreed Wiggins was "not forthcoming" during much of his testimony.

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The trial is expected to continue into next week.

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