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INMATES BEATEN, PRISON GUARD SAYS 6 CCI WORKERS STANDING TRIAL

LISA GREENE, Staff Writer

When inmate Sylvester Williams

was involved in a prison disturbance six years ago, prison officials said he had assaulted a guard.

But in court Monday, it was six prison guards who were on trial for attacking Williams -- and Williams who was sitting at the prosecutor's table. Another guard, Sgt. Reginald McNeil, testified Monday that the six guards beat Williams with police clubs after he was handcuffed. McNeil said another inmate, who was not resisting the officers, was beaten until he blacked out with blood flowing from his head.

However, lawyers for the guards said the guards were coming to the aid of another guard, who was injured by the two inmates.

"He went into that room, at great personal risk to himself, to quell the disturbance," **Jack Swerling** said of his client, Preston Belote.

And I.S. Leevy Johnson, lawyer for three of the guards, suggested on cross-examination that McNeil had described a beating because he had left the inmates alone with one guard, allowing the fight to begin, then failed to help control the inmates.

In addition to Belote, the Central Correctional Institution guards charged in the assault are James Woodard, Kenneth J. Brown, Heyward D. Golden, Joseph McBride and Ricky Hales.

Each guard is charged with one count of aggravated assault, a charge with a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, for attacking Williams. The other inmate, Monroe Sligh, decided not to pursue charges.

Williams is serving time for burglary and housebreaking. Prison officials have said he was one of several inmates convicted in 1986 for inciting a riot at Kirkland Correctional Institution.

McNeil said he and another guard were transporting Williams and Sligh from Lieber Correctional Institution to another prison. The men had stopped to use a CCI restroom when McNeil went back to his van to get something. He returned to find a fight in progress.

"I didn't know who was fighting who or how it got started," he said.

McNeil said that when other officers arrived, he went with them to help subdue the inmates, who were in a locked room. Once the door opened, he said, Sligh "threw his hands up, and said, 'No more fighting.' They just commenced beating him."

"Officer Golden hit him on top of the head. The blood gushed out. . . . He went limp," McNeil said.

McNeil said Williams was hiding in the corner, and he went to get him.

"I said, 'I'm going to get you out of here,' and he said, 'No, I'm going to be beaten too,'" McNeil said.

McNeil said he convinced Williams to let Belote handcuff him. He and Belote were leading Williams from the room when McBride and Golden began beating Williams, McNeil said. McNeil said he was knocked to the floor.

Williams was reportedly beaten in the face, head, ribs and arm.

Prosecutor Barbara Heape, assistant attorney general, said her office is handling the case because 5th Circuit Solicitor Dick Harpootlian had a conflict of interest. She said the transfer of the case, as well as a lengthy investigation, delayed charges against the six men.

They were charged two months ago in the 1988 assault, she said.

Belote and Golden were charged with assaulting an inmate in 1990. They were fired after a department investigation, but they were cleared of the criminal charges at a 1992 trial.

