

Four deputies indicted for violating Mississippi inmates' civil rights

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

WASHINGTON - A federal grand jury in Jackson, Miss., returned a five-count criminal superseding indictment against four former deputies with the Harrison County Sheriff's Department for conspiring to violate the civil rights of inmates at the Harrison County Adult Detention Center, Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, and Dunn Lampton, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, announced today. The Department alleges that the four former deputies' actions resulted in injury to the inmates and resulted in the death of inmate Jessie Lee Williams Jr. on Feb. 6, 2006.

The superseding indictment, unsealed today, charges four former deputies - - Ryan Michael Teel, James Ricky Gaston, Daniel Evans, and Karl W. Stolze -- with conspiracy to deprive inmates of their civil rights. Count one alleges that these four deputies conspired with other correctional officers to intentionally use excessive force to punish, intimidate, injure, oppress, threaten and retaliate against inmates at the jail between Feb. 8, 2005, and March 8, 2006. Count two of the indictment charges Teel with depriving Williams of his civil rights in the alleged Feb. 4, 2006, assault. Count three charges Teel with allegedly falsifying an official report with intent to obstruct an investigation into the assault on Williams. Count four charges Teel and Gaston with violating the civil rights of a pre-trial detainee during an alleged assault on Aug. 9, 2005. Count five charges Gaston with violating the civil rights of a pre-trial detainee in an alleged assault on Oct. 10, 2005.

Counts one and two each carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Count three carries a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment and a fine of \$250,000. Counts four and five each carry a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment and a fine of \$250,000.

An indictment is merely an accusation and the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

Since Williams' death, five additional former Harrison County Sheriff's Department deputies have pleaded guilty to federal criminal civil rights crimes committed at the jail. Four of the former deputies pleaded guilty to conspiracy to deprive inmates of their civil rights. The fifth deputy pleaded guilty to deprivation of rights in connection with the Williams incident. The five defendants still are awaiting sentencing.

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