

KING, ERNIE (MURDER)

# Eyewitness describes Summit Road killing

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SANTA CRUZ — Robert Spedding shouted at Ernie King when King held out an empty wallet. Then Spedding forcefully pointed out the back of the fast-moving pickup truck and King leaped to his death, a witness testified Thursday.

The witness, David Reveles, told a jury in Spedding's murder trial that he was in a car following the truck down Summit Road on June 24, 1988.

Reveles, a friend of Spedding's, said he put his head down and exclaimed profanely when he saw King put one leg over the back of the truck.

When Reveles looked up, he said he saw King cartwheeling along the shoulder of the road.

Reveles said his buddy, Spedding, gave a victory-style salute with a clenched fist.

Reveles was choked with emotion as he testified.

Spedding sat quietly at the defense table as the jury listened to some of the most graphic testimony of the week-long trial.

Assistant District Attorney Christine McGuire has charged Spedding with first-degree murder, contending that Spedding ordered King to his death during the commission of a robbery.

Reveles testified that Spedding had ordered King into the back of the truck after he and another construction buddy, Gregory Kern, had beaten King in a park-and-ride lot on Summit Road near Highway 17.

King's wife, Nancy, testified earlier in the trial that her husband

suffered from tunnel vision and was unable to drive. She said he was to call her for a ride home from the lot, but sometimes he relied on others who might happen to be there. A fellow student who lives at the summit took him the first part of his way, Mrs. King said.

Mrs. King smiled as she touched her husband's jacket and his pack of books that she was asked to identify in court.

But she broke down in tears when McGuire handed her King's broken sunglasses. "I haven't seen these in a long time," she said, explaining she did not know they had been found. "He wore these everywhere," she said.

Reveles said that after Spedding and Kern punched and kicked King, one of them stomped on King's glasses. Then Spedding told King: "Get in the truck; get in the (expletive) truck."

He said King was not wearing his glasses when he went out of the truck.

Just before the truck left the park-and-ride lot, Spedding loudly demanded money from King, Reveles said.

Reveles said that he and another friend, Albert Eslit, followed behind the truck in Eslit's car.

In a video-taped interview with investigators following his surrender, Spedding said he would have taken money if King had offered it. But, he said, he would not have forcibly taken the money or thrown King out of the truck if he had none.

Spedding said he and King just sat across from each other in silence after King held out his

empty wallet. It was more than a mile later that King jumped, he said.

Spedding said he was shocked.

He said he hadn't threatened King or gestured at him. He said he would have tried to grab King to keep him from jumping if he had had a chance.

But Reveles testified Thursday that Spedding appeared angry at the empty wallet. He said Spedding picked up a bar stool that was between Spedding and King and threw it against the cab of the truck.

Then, Reveles said, Spedding pointed three or four times past King to the shoulder of the road. Spedding, he said, appeared to be shouting.

He said Spedding reached out toward King as King put a leg over the back of the truck and jumped.

Attorney Mitchell Page's had only just begun to cross-examine Reveles, when the questioning was postponed to accommodate another witness.

Dr. Richard Mason, the county's forensic pathologist, testified that King died of massive head injuries.

He said that King apparently went out of the truck backwards, striking his head and sliding along the roadway on his back.

Mason told Page that the medical evidence was consistent with Reveles' testimony. Mason said he did not believe King cartwheelled, but explained that it is very difficult for a witness to process such a split-second event accurately.

The trial will resume with Reveles' cross-examination Monday. McGuire is expected to rest her case sometime that day.