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Witness disputes another's testimony

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The topic turned to the flame, smoke, and debris particles that emerge from a gun along with a bullet, and the marks they make on a human target, as the defense attorney in the Richard Bandler murder trial tried to discredit the county's crime pathologist yesterday.

Assistant District Attorney Gary Fry is trying to prove that Richard Wayne Bandler, a 37-year-old psychotherapist, shot alleged prostitute Corine Christensen point-blank in the face, just to the side of her left nostril, on Nov. 3, 1986, at her condominium in Live Oak.

Earlier testimony from Santa Cruz County forensic pathologist Richard Mason put the distance of the gun from her face when fired at less than one inch, and the angle at which the bullet crossed through her skull at about 50 degrees from horizontal.

But other forensic experts called to testify yesterday by

Bandler's attorney, Gerald Schwartzbach, said that patterns of smoke and debris particles left on Christensen's face revealed that she had been killed by a gun held four to five inches from her face, and that the bullet traveled at a narrower angle than Mason estimated.

The testimony, while it likely cannot prove Bandler's innocence, might plant a "shadow of a doubt" of his guilt in the minds of the jury.

Two men, Bandler and James Marino, the key prosecution witness and a self-described cocaine dealer, were present when Christensen was killed.

Paul Herrmann, a forensic pathologist and director of the Institute of Forensic Sciences in Oakland, testified yesterday that because there were traces of gunpowder on the right side of Christensen's face, as well as the left side where she was shot, "It is very obvious that the gun had to be fired from beyond the tip of her nose."