

KING, Ernie - Murder

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# New conflicts arise in testimony on King death

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SANTA CRUZ — A key prosecution witness backtracked in his testimony Monday, conceding it was "possible" that Robert Spedding did not give a victory salute but rather threw up his hands in surprise when Ernie King jumped to his death from the back of a moving pickup truck.

Rather than acting triumphant as he had first described Spedding's actions, David Reveles testified that Spedding then put his head down between his knees and covered his head with his hands as the truck sped away.

Spedding, 30, is on trial for first-degree murder and attempted robbery in the death of King, a 38-year-old graduate student and father of two small boys.

Reveles, who worked in construction with Spedding, was following behind the truck on Summit Road on June 24, 1988. King was in the back of the truck with Spedding after approaching him for a ride at a commuter lot near Highway 17. Another of Spedding's co-workers was driving the truck.

Reveles also testified Monday that Spedding may have been

reaching toward King to try to grab him when King started to jump.

Defense attorney Mitchell Page contends that King jumped because he became frightened at the way the truck was being driven on the windy mountain road.

Reveles said King went out of the truck as the truck began to accelerate down a hill.

Page also contends that King got into the truck of his free will, even though Spedding and another worker struck and kicked King at the parking area after King approached them for a ride.

Reveles previously testified that

Spedding seemed to order King into the truck, but Monday said Spedding gave King what appeared to be a friendly pat on the back before the two men climbed into the truck.

Reveles also previously testified that Spedding yelled at King and pointed out the back of the truck after King held out an empty wallet once the truck was under way.

Reveles said earlier that Spedding raised his fist as in a victory salute after King jumped.

Assistant District Attorney Christine McGuire contends that Spedding ordered King into the truck and then told him to jump

after attempting to rob King.

When she got to question Reveles again Monday, he stood by his original version, even though he allowed to Page that other interpretations were possible.

In addition to his contradictory testimony, Reveles frequently answered "I don't remember" to questions posed by Page.

McGuire held up volumes of police interviews with Reveles and transcripts of his testimony at prior court proceedings in an attempt to show the jury why Reveles has become confused.

In one area, Reveles never

wavered.

Tears filled his eyes whenever he was asked to describe watching King jump from the back of the truck. He has broken down ever since the incident when asked to recall the moments before King's death.

Reveles was never charged in the case, but he said Monday that he still feels guilty "just for being there."

"I feel responsible and guilty, but I'm dealing with that myself," Reveles said.

Reveles said he also has been afraid of Spedding, a man he de-

scribed as never having lost a fight. He told detectives the day after King's death that he feared Spedding would kill him if he knew Reveles were talking to them.

Reveles said he still gets scared at night when he hears noise around the house, even though, he said, he has talked to Spedding and Spedding didn't hold a grudge about his statements to police.

Reveles said he saw Spedding at a job site and Spedding told him, "Let your life go on."

Reveles said he and Spedding were friends only in the sense that they worked together.