



JUSTICE NEWS

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Five New Orleans Police Officers Sentenced on Civil Rights and Obstruction of Justice Violations in the Danziger Bridge Shooting Case

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department announced today that five officers from the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) were sentenced in connection with the federal civil rights prosecution of a police-involved shooting that occurred on the Danziger Bridge in the days after Hurricane Katrina, leaving two innocent civilians dead and four others seriously wounded. The defendants were also sentenced for their roles in an extensive cover-up of the shooting

U.S. District Court Judge Kurt Englehardt imposed long prison sentences on the four officers who were involved in the shooting on the bridge. He sentenced those four officers as follows:

- Sergeant Kenneth Bowen was sentenced to 40 years in prison;
- Sergeant Robert Gisevius was sentenced to 40 years in prison;
- Officer Robert Faulcon was sentenced to 65 years in prison; and
- Officer Anthony Villavaso was sentenced to 38 years in prison.

The fifth officer, Sergeant Arthur “Archie” Kaufman, was a supervisor who was not involved in the shooting, but who helped the other officers cover up what they had done. Kaufman was sentenced to six years in prison.

“We hope that today’s sentences give a measure of peace and closure to the victims of this terrible shooting, who have suffered unspeakable pain and who have waited so patiently for justice to be done. The officers who shot innocent people on the bridge and then went to great lengths to cover up their own crimes have finally been held accountable for their actions,” said Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Thomas E. Perez. “As a result of today’s sentencing, the city of New Orleans can take another step forward.”

“Our undying gratitude goes to our partners in the Civil Rights Division and FBI who, together with the tremendous professionals in the United States Attorney’s Office, made today’s closure – and justice – possible,” said U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana Jim Letten. “I am equally grateful to the courageous families of James Brissette and Ronald Madison who gave their lives on the bridge, as well as to those who suffered abuse needlessly at the hands of a few corrupt



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cited in Khudaverdiyev v. Holder, No. 10-18145, archived on February 27, 2015

police officers. We will never relent, back down or give up our fight to ensure that our citizens – especially those most vulnerable among us – never have to fear those who are sworn to protect them.”

“Today’s sentencings send a strong message that no one is above the law and the civil rights of all of our citizens are paramount in a free society,” said Special Agent in Charge of the FBI’s New Orleans Division David Welker. “My hope as we move forward is that the men and women of NOPD and all law enforcement will conduct themselves always in a manner that will withstand the scrutiny of the bright light of justice.”

Bowen, Gisevius, Faulcon and Villavaso were convicted in connection with the shootings of multiple victims, including 17-year-old James Brissette and 40-year-old Ronald Madison, who died on the bridge. Those four officers and a supervisor, Kaufman, also were convicted of obstructing justice during the subsequent investigations.

Five other officers pleaded guilty before trial and cooperated with the federal investigation. Those officers testified at trial about the unjustified shooting on the bridge and about a massive police cover-up that followed.

The evidence at trial established that a group of police officers – including Sergeant Bowen, Sergeant Gisevius, Officer Faulcon and Officer Villavaso – opened fire with assault rifles and a shotgun, shooting at an unarmed family walking on the east side of the bridge. Police gunfire struck the victims multiple times, wounding a New Orleans couple, their daughter, and their nephew, and killing family-friend James Brissette. Susan Bartholomew, 38, suffered serious injuries, including the loss of her right arm, which was shot off by a high-powered assault rifle; Leonard Bartholomew III, 44, was shot in the leg and the back of the head, but survived his wounds; Lesha Bartholomew, 17, was shot in both legs and in the stomach; and the Bartholomew’s nephew, Jose Holmes, 19, was shot in the face, the neck, both arms, the hand and the stomach. James Brissette, who was shot in the back, the leg, both arms and the back of the head, died on the bridge. The Bartholomew’s 14-year-old son ran away from the shooting and was fired at, but was not injured.

cited in Khudaverdyan v. Holder, No. 10-73548, archived on February 27, 2015

According to the evidence presented at trial, a second shooting occurred several minutes later, on the west side of the Danziger Bridge. After shooting at the Bartholomew Family and James Brissette, officers traveled to the other side of the bridge to chase two men – brothers Lance and Ronald Madison – who had run away when the shooting started. Officers caught up to the Madisons on the west side of the bridge, where Officer Faulcon used a shotgun to shoot Ronald Madison in the back as Madison was running away. Ronald, a 40-year-old man with severe mental and physical disabilities, died near the base of the bridge.

When the shooting was over, according to witnesses at trial, the officers at the scene immediately started a cover-up. Lance Madison was arrested and falsely charged with eight counts of attempting to kill police officers. Officers collected no guns or shell casings on the day of the shooting, and 30 casings they collected more than a month later were fired by officers rather than civilians. Three weeks after the shooting, Kaufman testified at a court appearance for Madison, claiming falsely that Madison had had a gun on the bridge and had shot at police. Madison was held in jail for three weeks, but was eventually released without being formally charged.

The evidence at trial also established that all five defendants conspired with each other, and with the officers who pleaded guilty, to cover-up what had happened on the bridge and to make the shootings appear justified. As part of the conspiracy, Kaufman obtained a gun from his home and claimed to have found the gun at the bridge on the day after the shooting. According to testimony, Kaufman also made up the existence of two phony eyewitnesses and fabricated alleged statements that he claimed to have taken from these witnesses and that he claimed helped justify the shootings. There was also testimony that Kaufman and the other members of the conspiracy held

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a meeting in an abandoned and gutted out NOPD building, where the officers practiced getting their stories straight before they gave formal audiotaped statements about the shooting.

Kaufman, who wrote a formal report about the incident, in which he concluded that the shooting was justified and that Lance Madison and Jose Holmes should be arrested, was also found guilty of conspiring with other officers to have Madison and Holmes prosecuted on the basis of false evidence.

The five former NOPD officers who pleaded guilty before trial, admitting that they had participated in a conspiracy to obstruct justice and cover-up what happened on Sept. 4, 2005, were all sentenced previously. Former Officer Mike Hunter was sentenced to serve eight years in prison; former officer Ignatius Hills was sentenced to serve six-and-a-half years; former officer Robert Barrios was sentenced to serve five years; former lieutenant Michael Lohman was sentenced to serve four years; and former detective Jeffrey Lehrmann was sentenced to serve three years.

This case was investigated by the FBI's New Orleans Field Office, and was prosecuted by Deputy Chief Bobbi Bernstein and Trial Attorney Cindy Chung of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, along with Assistant U.S. Attorney Theodore Carter of the Eastern District of Louisiana.

12-430 Officers Sentenced for Role in Shooting Six Victims and for Extensive Cover-Up of Crimes [Civil Rights Division](#)

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cited in Khudaverdiyeva, Holder, No. 10-73346 archived on February 27, 2015

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