

DALLAS POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer gets \$315,000 in retaliation lawsuit

He said he was punished for raising Love Field concerns

By TANYA EISERER
Staff Writer
telserer@dallasnews.com

A jury on Thursday awarded a Dallas police sergeant about \$315,000 after finding that police commanders retaliated against him when he was transferred from his Love Field post and later fired after complaining about alleged security flaws and overtime abuse at the airport.

Sgt. Robert Crider sued the city in February 2006. The trial began last Monday.

"I'm pleased," Sgt. Crider said after the verdict. "I hope that this will help other officers in the department down the line."

The jury awarded him \$65,680 in lost wages and \$250,000 for past and future emotional pain.

In closing statements Wednesday, Assistant City Attorney Jason McClain painted Sgt. Crider as a disgruntled employee who came forward with a laundry list of complaints about the Love Field unit only because he was angry that he had been moved to another shift.

Shirley Gray, an assistant chief at the Police Department until her 2006 retirement, had

testified that she transferred Sgt. Crider from the Love Field unit to the jail in November 2005 because he couldn't get along with his supervisor, the late Lt. E.W. Smith.

"This case isn't about retaliation," said Mr. McClain. "It was about making the right management decision."

Mr. McClain also tried to lessen some of the damage done when many of the details to which Mrs. Gray testified in an earlier deposition proved to be inaccurate. For example, she had stated during that deposition that Sgt. Crider's move to the jail was a temporary special assignment, when it was actually an involuntary transfer. Mrs. Gray's memory lapses can be attributed to her having gone from "assistant chief mode" to "grandmother mode," Mr. McClain said.

But Sgt. Crider's attorney, Don Tittle, said Mrs. Gray's changing testimony was indicative of someone who wasn't telling the truth.

He reminded jurors that witnesses, including a retired deputy chief, had testified that transfers to posts such as those at the jail, the police property room and communications often are considered punishment.

Mr. McClain countered that one of Sgt. Crider's own witnesses, Capt. Jack Bragg, also had said that he deeply respect-

ed Mrs. Gray and did not think she would do such a thing.

Another point of contention was the motive behind Sgt. Crider's firing in June 2006.

Mr. Tittle accused Dallas Police Chief David Kunkle of firing Sgt. Crider in part because the department was embarrassed by a television news story critical of Love Field's operations. Chief Kunkle denied that, saying that he fired Sgt. Crider because he didn't tell his supervisor that another officer had threatened to post information on the Internet about the TV reporter's underage daughter.

Sgt. Crider, who heard about the threatening comments from another officer, did report the comments to the reporter. Mr. Tittle also noted that Sgt. Crider was fired even before the department took an internal statement from the reporter.

Sgt. Crider was subsequently reinstated.

Sgt. Crider's original complaint alleged that police officers at Love Field failed to properly carry out random ID checks, billed the airport for needless overtime and left important security posts unmanned, all which the city denies.

Sgt. Crider currently is assigned as a supervisor in the central business district. He is on restricted duty after a June arrest in which he was accused of driving while intoxicated.