

SOUTH FLORIDA

# Ex-officer who testified suffers own trials



HAMES

■ After testifying about his and others' roles in a coverup, William Hames lost an eye in a suicide try and his pension.

BY DAN CHRISTENSEN  
dchristensen@MiamiHerald.com

After retired police officer William Hames finally came clean about the gun-planting coverup that rocked Miami this decade — and helped federal prosecutors convict seven fellow dirty officers — he sought to pick up

the pieces of his life.

Instead, they fell apart. Two city pension funds voted to strip Hames of retirement benefits, citing his 2004 felony convictions in a case in which his cooperation spared him from prison. They demanded Hames, 60, repay the \$548,000 he had

received since leaving the force in 1998 after 25 years.

Hames, stocking shelves full-time at Publix to comply with the terms of his probation, hired an attorney and tried to fight back, but the law was against him.

On Feb. 21, two weeks before a Miami appeals court upheld a city forfeiture order, the Vietnam vet-

\*TURN TO HAMES, 2A

*'He's one of those tragic heroes. He meant to be a good cop, but he fell.'*

— ALLAN KAISER, prosecutor who recruited William Hames to testify and later became his friend

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

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# Cop who crossed 'thin blue line' has own trials

\*HAMES, FROM 1A

eran and recovering alcoholic pointed a 9mm handgun toward his face and pulled the trigger in his Orlando-area home.

The blast blew out his left eye, but Hames lived.

"Hames advised when the gunshot did not kill him, he waited a few hours before finally driving himself to the hospital," says a Volusia County Sheriff's Office report.

Friends say Hames has pulled himself together since, and they view him as a compelling figure in a brutish Miami police scandal that's not quite history.

"He's one of those tragic heroes. He meant to be a good cop, but he fell," said Allan Kaiser, the federal prosecutor who recruited Hames to step across the thin blue line to testify — and later became his friend.

**'TRAGIC FLAW'**

Jon Rosenthal, Hames' Hollywood attorney, said: "Bill's tragic flaw is that he was too loyal. He lied to protect others, and his life was ruined."

Hames, who spent about two weeks recovering in the hospital, declined to be interviewed in person. But in response to questions relayed through attorney Rosenthal, Hames said he shot himself after becoming "completely unglued."

The man who as a Marine pinpointed targets for airstrikes in Vietnam now sees only an uncertain future.

**HAMES' PENSION CASE COULD HURT JENNE**

A recent Miami appeal court's decision to uphold the revocation of former Miami Officer William Hames' pension doesn't bode well for imprisoned former Broward Sheriff Ken Jenne.

Jenne is fighting to keep his \$125,000 Florida Retirement System pension after pleading guilty last year to tax evasion and mail fraud related to payments he took from BSO contractors. A hearing is set for this fall.

"Jenne clearly faces a steep uphill legal battle," said attorney and former Miami police officer William Matthewmen.

— DAN CHRISTENSEN

"I'm a one-eyed man, and I don't know what I'll do." That's exactly what he said," Rosenthal recounted.

**'THROW-DOWN' GUNS**

Hames' crimes involved a deadly encounter with several smash-and-grab robbery suspects known as the "I-395 shootings."

On Nov. 7, 1995, five Miami officers, including Hames, shot and killed Derrick Wiltshire and Antonio Young as they fled the scene. Hames fired the shot that killed Wiltshire, according to his sworn affidavit filed in the pension case.

While the law at the time allowed police to shoot fleeing felons, officers planted so-called "throw-down" guns to make it appear as if the dead men were armed. Hames didn't plant a gun but did participate in the coverup when he later told detectives the victims had been armed.

As he explained last year in the affidavit, "At the time it was [the] city's custom and policy that their police officers observe the police camera-

derie and culture by backing up each others' reports."

**'COULDN'T BE A COP'**

Hames, raised in Homestead, retired in 1998. His resignation followed an ugly incident in which he pulled a gun on a bus driver who had cut him off in traffic. He had been drinking.

"He had no recollection of it the next day," Kaiser said. "He realized then that he couldn't be a cop anymore."

Hames' retirement was turned upside down three years later when the FBI came calling at his North Lauderdale home. Five Miami officers were already under indictment in one alleged throw-down case, and agents were hunting for evidence about a trio of other suspect police shootings between 1995 and 1997.

Hames and another officer, John Mervolion, pleaded guilty and cooperated. Along the way, they faced derision and death threats. But by the time prosecutors were done, seven officers were found guilty of conspiracy, obstruc-

tion of justice or both. Four officers were acquitted.

"He was a very important witness," Kaiser said of Hames, who was sentenced to three years of probation.

The last of the seven convicted officers is due to get out of prison this summer. The projected release date for Arturo Beguiristain, 47, is June 30. For Jesus "Jesse" Agüero, 45, it's Aug. 17.

**'RAW DEAL'**

Kaiser, now a Miami defense lawyer, testified on behalf of Hames at a pension-board hearing last year. He called it "a dog and pony show."

"They didn't want him to have his pension because he was someone who'd cooperated," said Kaiser. "But what else could they do? Hames did the right thing; so on the one hand, it's a raw deal. But on the other hand, he tarnished the badge."

Stuart Kaufman, who represents the city of Miami Police Relief and Pension Fund, said the fund's trustees — who include Chief John Timoney — had no choice.

"It's mandatory under the law to forfeit," Kaufman said. Next up are the pensions of the seven officers convicted at trial.

A forfeiture hearing for Beguiristain and ex-Lt. Israel Gonzalez is set for Sept. 10, Kaufman said.

Despite it all, Hames said he has no regrets about his decision to testify.

"I'm not sorry about what I did. It had to be done," he said through his attorney.