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'I'm looking death in the face'; A PHA officer tells of being gunned down in 2008. His alleged attacker is on trial.

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Full Text (619 words)

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A Philadelphia Housing Authority police officer said yesterday that a shot from a gunman's rifle struck him so hard inside a bulletproof-glass enclosed security booth at a Germantown apartment complex that "it knocked me off my feet."

Testifying in the trial of Zahir Boddy-Johnson, Officer Craig Kelley said he was on duty alone when he heard a knock at the door of a security booth at the entrance of the Queen Lane Apartments, and that when he opened the door he was "staring down the muzzle" of a semiautomatic rifle about six feet away.

"I'm looking death in the face" inside the 16-story apartment building at Queen Lane and Pulaski Avenue, Kelley said. "I was helpless."

Kelley, 50, said the gunman in the attack about 10 p.m. on Feb. 17, 2008, was wearing a scarf over the lower half of his face, and said, "Don't move."

Before Kelley, who has been a PHA officer for 17 years, could close the door, the gunman fired, striking him in the left side of his abdomen, he said.

He said the force of the shot spun him around before knocking him down.

"I'm lying on the ground. I could barely breathe," Kelley said. "He's continuing to fire. There was glass and debris flying around me. I was praying."

Boddy-Johnson, now 18, is charged with attempted murder, aggravated assault, and possession of a firearm on a public street. He could face from 35 to 50 years in prison if convicted of all charges.

The jury trial, which is expected to take about seven days, is being presided over by Common Pleas Court Judge Gwendolyn Bright.

In her opening statement yesterday, Assistant District Attorney Deborah Nixon told the jury that Boddy-Johnson was stopped by police shortly after the shooting on nearby Brighthelm Street.

Nixon said a nylon bag containing 23 bullets was found on the street near where Boddy-Johnson was stopped and that the rifle, which was displayed in court, was found under a van nearby. Nixon described the weapon as an SKS assault rifle.

She said a denim jacket, latex gloves, a bank card, and other evidence linked to Boddy-Johnson were found. She said there was also DNA evidence connecting him to the crime.

Nixon said Boddy-Johnson told police "he bought the gun off the street."

Boddy-Johnson told officers that "his intent was to rob Officer Kelley" of his laptop computer and .40-caliber service weapon, Nixon said.

At Nixon's request, Kelley lifted his shirt and showed the jury a large scar on his abdomen. He testified that the bullet

remains in his abdomen and that because of his injuries, he has only been able to return to desk work.

Kelley also put on the body-armor vest he said he was wearing when he was shot, and he showed the jurors a tear in the lower left side of the garment where he said the bullet penetrated.

The rifle, Kelley's tattered and bloody police shirt, and his undershirt were displayed for the jury. The prosecution also showed the jury a heavily damaged pane of bulletproof glass bearing bullet marks and cracks.

Defense attorney Michael Parkinson told the jurors that Boddy-Johnson was willing to accept responsibility for what he did, but that he did not intend to kill Kelley.

"We concede my client was there. We concede that he had the weapon," Parkinson said. "The point is whether he intended to kill that officer."

"At the end of the trial on the charge of attempted murder," Parkinson said, "you have to find him not guilty."

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Credit: By Vernon Clark INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

[Illustration]

AP

Zahir Boddy-Johnson, 18, is accused of using an assault rifle in the shooting.

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