

The Salinas **Californian**

Lawyer: Salinas man in shooting complied with police

The Salinas Californian - Salinas, Calif.

Author: SUNITA VIJAYAN

Date: Dec 21, 2010

Start Page: n/a

Section: NEWS

Text Word Count: 368

Document Text

svijayan@thecalifornian.com

A simple errand turned into a shootout after Salinas police pulled over a car on Dec. 11, according to a statement released today by an attorney for a man arrested but then released in connection to the incident.

The statement comes less than a day after Juan Anthony Ortiz was released from jail. The Monterey County District Attorney's Office decided on Monday not to file criminal charges against Ortiz because officials said they lacked evidence in the case.

Ortiz was a passenger in a blue Honda that two county gang task force officers pulled over on Dec. 11 at East Laurel Drive and North Sanborn Road, police have said.

Police said the officers pulled over the two because they believed the passengers in the car were suspects in a recent homicide.

Police said the driver - Nicholas Ruelas Martinez -- pulled out a handgun and began firing at the two officers.

The officers returned fire, striking Martinez several times.

Tom Worthington, Ortiz's attorney, said in the statement his client had spent nine days behind bars without being charged with a crime.

In the one-page statement, Worthington said Ortiz had been on his way to help another friend move some appliances and run errands.

Because his wife was using their car, Ortiz asked Martinez for a ride, the statement said.

"Mr. Ortiz does not know of any driving infraction or other reason that the car in which he was riding was detained by the gang task force, but when a GTF officer approached their car, he and Mr. Martinez complied with all their directives," said Worthington in the statement.

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"Mr. Martinez was ultimately ordered out of the car. Within seconds, Mr. Ortiz heard gunshots and was hit in the back of the head with one bullet. He ducked down until the firing stopped and then put his hands out the window to show that he had no weapon. At some point, he was hit by two bullets."

Worthington said that though his client has had problems with the law, he has been living the life of a law-abiding citizen for the past four years.

Ortiz is married and has a three-year-old child, he said.