

ATTORNEY: SGT. HARRIS HAD NO PLACE TO TURN

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Sgt. **James Harris** was just a goodcop in a tough spot, his attorney argued Tuesday.

With the police chief he trusted out of office, Harris had no one to tell about the men who offered him cash to guard drugs and money, attorney Thomas Wilhelm said, summing up his defense of Harris in federal court in Detroit.

"He finds himself in a situation in which he does not know what to do," Wilhelm told the jurors. "Jimmy may have made a mistake. But appreciate the jam he was in."

Harris and seven others -- five of them current and former police officers -- are charged with protecting shipments of drugs and cash going through Metro and City airports. The purported drug dealers turned out to be undercover FBI agents running a sting operation to ferret out suspected police corruption.

Wilhelm argued that Harris at first didn't know all that was going on when he joined officers who accompanied two undercover agents driving a suitcase of cash from Metro Airport to a Troy bank in January 1991.

When he found out the truth, Wilhelm said, Harris -- who Wilhelm suggested worked directly for former Chief William Hart under "deep cover" -- had no one to tell after Hart stepped down.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee Janice, during the prosecution's rebuttal period, said Harris' defense was false. Why else, he argued, would Harris offer use of a police van, give one of the men a police radio, and accept \$50,000 in a transaction captured on videotape?

"No investigation could be so secret that the money given out by the agents, a portion of it, is found days later in Harris' wallet," said Janice.

Janice also attacked what he termed the "I didn't hear" defense -- statements by other defendants that they didn't learn in secretly taped hotel and restaurant meetings that it was drugs and drug money they were being hired to guard.

He ticked off the statements: One was eating, another talking to someone else, another stepped outside, one might not have known "100 keys" from Miami meant 100 kilos of cocaine.

"Put together, they sound absurd," said Janice. "And if they sound absurd to you, it's because they are."

U.S. District Judge Barbara Hackett is to instruct the jurors this morning. After that, they are to begin deliberating.

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