

Charges stun drug task force

Alleged perjury by deputy leads judge to toss 3 cases.

By **JUSTIN WILLETT**
of the Tribune's staff

A former Cole County deputy and member of the Mid-Missouri Unified Strike Team and Narcotics Group, or MUSTANG, is charged with three counts of perjury after allegedly lying under oath during the jury trials of three men.

In his request for an arrest warrant for former Cole County Sheriff's Department Deputy Michael Isenberg, Cole County Prosecuting Attorney Bill Tackett alleges that Isenberg, 28, told juries in three drug cases that he was present during drug buys when in fact he wasn't present.

The complaint says Isenberg perjured himself on May 7, 2002, Sept. 5, 2002, and April 8, 2003, while testifying in the trials of Quentin R. Williams, Randall A. Robinette and Roy G. Chism, respectively.

All three were convicted.

Tackett said yesterday that his office filed a motion to set aside the convictions, and Williams and Chism were released from prison May 7. He said Robinette remains in prison on an unrelated conviction.

Isenberg's lawyer, former Cole County assistant prosecuting attorney Rob Trowbridge, said his client plans to plead not guilty at his earliest opportunity. The case is still in associate circuit court. A preliminary hearing is set for June 16.

During an arraignment hearing Monday, Cole County Associate Circuit Judge Thomas Sodergren denied a Trowbridge motion that sought to stop Cole County Sheriff John Hemeyer and Tackett from making prejudicial comments about Isenberg.

Trowbridge said this morning that both Cole County officials have made comments about Isenberg's character and guilt to reporters.

Hemeyer said Isenberg resigned in writing on Friday after working for the department for about five years. He said Isenberg started as a jailer and worked his way up to detective, a post he has held for a little more than a year.

Though Isenberg worked for the MUSTANG task force, which routinely operates in Central Missouri, Boone County Prosecuting Attorney Kevin Crane said, "we haven't ever had" Isenberg "in any cases we have had here in Boone County to my knowledge."

Tackett said it appears the wrongdoing was isolated to Isenberg. "It was restricted to one person," he said. "We don't have an epidemic or an agency that's completely run afoul."

Hemeyer said that he first learned of the possible wrongdoing from Tackett's office about two weeks ago. He said Tackett noticed a discrepancy in one particular case in which Isenberg had testified and that subsequent investigation revealed that Isenberg's "testimony did not bear the light of day."

Hemeyer said Tackett is now going through other cases in which Isenberg gave testimony.

As for the cases in question, he said, "In the vast majority of the cases that I am privy to that are in question, drug sales took place. They just didn't take place as he described."

Hemeyer, who has been sheriff since 1986, said this has been a huge blow to his department and has led to changes meant to ensure something like this doesn't happen again.

He said each officer who responds to a call must now write a report and sign it, whereas in the past one officer would write a report and describe the actions of the other officers present.

"What you have to do is eliminate as much possibility as you can of this happening again," he said. This case "casts a shadow of doubt over the whole system and what we have been doing."

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