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Jury Rejects Story of Sudden Stabbing

By Dave Racher

A 35-year-old SEPTA employee has been acquitted of stabbing an off-duty police officer in the next inside a Mayfair nightclub in 1985.

A Common Pleas jury yesterday apparently didn't believe the testimony of the officer and two persons who said they witnessed Michael Selvato commit the offense inside the club on May 17, 1985.

Police Sgt. Stephen Gwiazdowski testified that he was having a dispute with a patron when Selvato walked over and plunged a knife into his throat, saying, "nobody is going to talk to my buddy like that."

The officer said he was in critical condition after the incident and thought he was going to die.

Defense attorney A. Charles Peruto Jr. produced two witnesses who said Selvato had left the club before the stabbing. Peruto contended the officer and the other prosecution witnesses were mistaken.

"He [Gwiazdowski] was cut by a broken bar stool," Peruto said, contending the incident occurred during a brawl.

Selvato, who works in the radio room for SEPTA, did not testify. He was all smiles after the verdict, shaking hands with Peruto, whom he had once openly despised.

In 1981, Selvato had cursed Peruto for winning an acquittal for rape defendant charged with attacking one of Selvato's relatives.

"I have to admit that when he first called to hire me for this case, I thought it was a joke," said Peruto.