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Inmates awarded \$740,000 in suit alleging abuse by sheriff's deputies

Jurors still have to decide whether to award additional damages to L.A. County jail inmates who accused officers of beating them.

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By James Barragan and Jill Cowan
November 8, 2013

A federal jury Thursday awarded \$740,000 to five inmates who alleged they were beaten by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department deputies.

The beatings, which resulted in the inmates sustaining broken bones, were in retaliation for the August 2008 death of Deputy Juan Escalante, who was shot by gang members outside his parents' home in Cypress Park, according to a lawsuit filed on behalf of the inmates in U.S. District Court.

Attorney Ron Kaye, who represented the inmates, said they were abused by deputies who had no regard for civil rights.

"Their argument was that these people are the worst of the worst and didn't deserve any type of protection or civil rights," he said. "In our country that's not how it works, and this jury has proven them wrong."

Jurors still have to decide whether to award additional punitive damages.

Steve Whitmore, spokesman for the Sheriff's Department, declined to comment because the trial is still underway.

David Lawrence, an attorney who represents most of the defendants, said deputies used appropriate force after a number of inmates refused to leave their cells.

Video footage was a key piece of evidence, Kaye said. Throughout the trial, the jury was shown grainy, smoke-obscured videos. In some of the clips, the sound of Tasers could be heard over the moans of inmates. Deputies testified that they were forced to strike and Taser the inmates because they refused to obey commands to leave their cells and resisted being handcuffed.

Kaye said the inmates will receive between \$90,000 and \$200,000 each.

The award comes three weeks after a federal jury in a separate case found Sheriff Lee Baca personally liable in the abuse of a 23-year-old county jail inmate in 2009. It was the first time a jury has held Baca personally at fault in a deputy use-of-force case. The department said it would appeal.

james.barragan@latimes.com

jill.cowan@latimes.com

Times staff writers Matt Hamilton and Robert J. Lopez contributed to this report.

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Personally, I think we can learn from Russia on how to run a smooth prison. I suggest you (the general population) watch Russian prison documentaries, and learn how they operate there. No prison violence, no riots, and NO ESCAPES.

sayitainto1 at 4:03 AM November 09, 2013

Civilrights, you appear to be the only one with an unhealthy obsession with Bob Olmsted. He is not the subject of controversies, lawsuits, unethical lapses, and corruption. That distinction belongs to both the incompetent sheriff, Leroy Baca, and his corrupt undersheriff, Paul Tanaka.

In fact, numerous postings by a lot of individuals point to that fact. Are you getting lonely on your quest to prop up an unqualified candidate and divert support for Olmsted, the real deal? This is getting old, why don't you just turn in your cigar coin and give up?

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-The award comes three weeks after a federal jury in a separate case found Sheriff Lee Baca personally liable in the abuse of a 23-year-old county jail inmate in 2009. It was the first time a jury has held Baca personally at fault in a deputy use-of-force case.-

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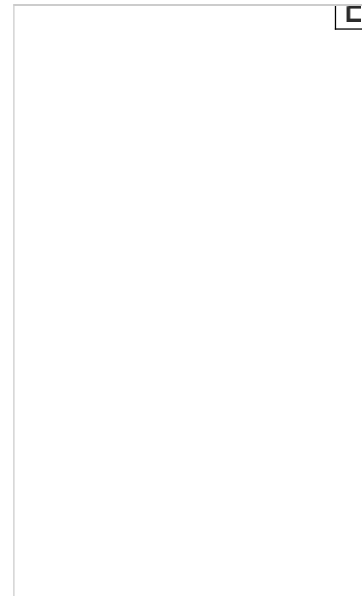
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