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Detective testifies of talk with defendant

By Randall Beach, Register Staff

NEW HAVEN — A New Haven detective testified Wednesday that murder suspect John Jackson was “nervous and shaking,” and using a false name, when he was interviewed at a hospital two days after the crime.

Herbert Johnson III, lead detective in the investigation of Desti Parnell’s slaying, noted Jackson at the time was being treated at a New York City hospital because he had leapt from a hotel window in a suicide attempt.

Jackson had checked into the Carter Hotel in midtown Manhattan under the name “Sean Stokes,” according to testimony Tuesday by hotel cashier Cham Thi Nguyen. She said he registered at 2:10 a.m. July 21, 2004, the day after Parnell was killed in her apartment on Legion Avenue, New Haven.

Although Jackson jumped from a sixth-floor window, he landed on a third-floor roof and survived. He fractured his leg, broke his arm and jaw and suffered a concussion, according to court testimony. Jackson, now 36, is on trial facing a murder charge.

Johnson said he went to the hospital to see if “Sean Stokes” might be Jackson. The detective said Jackson was seriously injured and bandaged, but a nurse said it was OK to speak with him. Johnson said Jackson was “alert.”

Johnson said after he introduced himself and Sgt. Peter Moller as New Haven detectives, Jackson “appeared to be nervous and shaking. ... His heart monitor sped up on him.”

When Johnson asked Jackson why he had tried to kill himself, Johnson recalled, “He said, ‘I wanted to die. If I have the chance, I’ll do it again. I won’t fail.’”

“I asked him why he wanted to kill himself and he said, ‘No one cares,’” Johnson testified.

According to Johnson, Jackson continued to maintain his name was “Sean Stokes,” but eventually acknowledged his real name.

Johnson said he read Jackson his Miranda rights, though he was not legally obligated to do this, as Jackson was not under arrest. “I asked him if he knew about Desti and he said he did not,” Johnson testified. “I told him she was murdered. He said, ‘Murdered? She was murdered?’” Johnson said Jackson did not become overly emotional, nor did he ask about their 6-year-old son.

Johnson also testified Jackson told him the last time he had seen Parnell was two days before her death. This contradicts a neighbor’s testimony that she saw him entering Parnell’s apartment shortly before the slaying.

Under cross-examination by defense attorney Walter Bansley III, Johnson said he did not tape record his conversation with Jackson because “we were in the hospital. I decided at that time there was no need to take a statement.”

“But you knew he was a suspect in a homicide?” Bansley asked. Johnson confirmed that, but said he had decided to just take notes of the conversation.

Johnson also said Lawrence Jackson (no relation to the defendant) had not told him he was romantically involved with Parnell when Johnson took a taped statement from him the day of the crime.

In addition, Johnson told Bansley he didn’t know if detectives dusted Parnell’s unlocked first-floor window for fingerprints.

In other testimony Wednesday, detective Michael Supple of the state forensic science laboratory said the knife and hammer police believe were used to kill Parnell had no fingerprints. He said he also couldn’t find prints on the PlayStation video game console cable wire used to tie her up.