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Split verdict adds to sexual assault victim's hurt

Written By: postbulletin Administrator | 5:00 am, Apr. 26, 1993



LA CROSSE, Wis. -- A 27-year-old woman said she's still stunned by a split verdict in the Wisconsin trial of a Minneapolis police officer charged with sexually assaulting her at a National Guard training session.

"I want to ask them (the jury), 'What didn't you understand? How could you not find him guilty on the felony charges?'" the woman said.

After eight hours of deliberation April 17, a Monroe County Circuit Court jury found Kent Warnberg guilty of fourth-degree sexual assault.

The misdemeanor conviction carries a maximum penalty of nine months in jail and a \$10,000 fine. Sentencing was set for May 3.

Warnberg was acquitted of three felony charges, including two counts of second-degree sexual assault and one count of false imprisonment. Those charges carried a maximum penalty of 22 years in prison.



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Warnberg, also a captain in the Minnesota Army National Guard, and the woman, a private first class in the same unit, were on annual training last July 23 at Fort McCoy when the assault took place.

The woman, a suburban Minneapolis housewife, testified that Warnberg took her away from the base against her will and fondled her.

The woman said she got into Warnberg's vehicle around midnight after an evening of end-of-training celebrations because he insisted he needed to talk with her.

Even when Warnberg drove her off the base against her protests, the woman said she wasn't afraid of him.

"I was scared I'd be in trouble because of the rank structure," she said. "He's a captain and I'm a private and there's the fraternization rule."



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Breaking the rule, which bans socializing between officers and enlisted personnel could have resulted in dishonorable discharge, she said.

The incident has left her disillusioned and distrustful, the woman said. She has been in counseling, but said she was having a tough time coming to grips with her feelings.

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“To go through all that and then have to talk about what happened to me in front of a room full of strangers -- it was the hardest thing I ever had to do,” she said. “And for what?”

Meanwhile, four women's groups and a citizen watchdog group were demanding that the city immediately fire Warnberg.

Sgt. Donald Harris said Sunday a decision had not been made on Warnberg's status.

Warnberg may appeal the conviction, said his lawyer, Howard Bass. @et



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