

## Jury Gives \$90,000 to Man Held Officers; Pr. George's Police Had No Warrant

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Author: Ruben Castaneda

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A federal court jury yesterday awarded \$90,000 to a young man who was picked up by a team of undercover Prince George's County police detectives, taken to another county and questioned for hours about the whereabouts of his girlfriend -- the niece of the police department's deputy chief.

The jury found that Brian Romjue's constitutional rights had been violated when narcotics officers picked up the 19-year-old in an Anne Arundel County trailer park the night of Sept. 4, 1999.

Though they had no arrest warrant, did not suspect Romjue of any crime and were outside their jurisdiction, the officers drove Romjue to an isolated park, the parking lot of a gaming hall and a home in Howard County, according to testimony in the civil trial in U.S. District Court in Greenbelt.

About five hours later, at 1 a.m., the officers dropped Romjue off at the Laurel home of his parents, where Romjue lived.

In his lawsuit and in his testimony, Romjue alleged he was beaten and choked by some of the officers who picked him up. The jury rejected those allegations.

"I feel great. Justice -- that's what I feel," Romjue, now 21, said after the verdict. "I'm just happy."

Terrell N. Roberts III, one of Romjue's attorneys, said, "I'm very pleased with the outcome of this case.

"The jury vindicated Brian. These officers took this boy without a warrant, without probable cause, and held him for five hours."

The four defendants were Lt. Kevin Davis, acting captain of the District III station in Landover; Sgt. Joseph McCann, an investigator in District VI in Beltsville; Cpl. Stephen Piazza, a narcotics detective; and retired captain Harry "Buddy" Robshaw. The defendants, approached after the verdict, declined to comment.

Associate County Attorney Andrew Murray, who defended the officers and the county, said, "We're pleased the jurors were able to see the officers did not use excessive force. We accept the verdict and move on."

Yesterday's verdict marks the second time in 18 months that a federal civil jury has found that county police violated the rights of witnesses they questioned.

In October 2000, a jury in Greenbelt awarded \$319,500 in damages to 12 people who had been rounded up and detained for hours, in some instances overnight, for questioning in the 1995 death of a county police officer.

Romjue was not suspected of any crime. According to testimony, Romjue's girlfriend at the time, Katie Nagel, 17, had argued with her father and left her home against her father's wishes. Nagel left with Romjue and spent five days at the home of Romjue's older brother.

Nagel is the niece of Clark R. "Bud" Price, who was second in command to the chief. After the lawsuit was filed, Price told a reporter he had received approval for the operation from then-chief John S. Farrell. Two days later, Price abruptly retired.

In court, Price testified that he advised Nagel's parents to file a missing persons report, which police classified as "noncritical."

Price said that when he learned from relatives that Romjue had said he would do anything to be with Nagel, he became concerned for her safety and asked Robshaw, a lieutenant in the narcotics section, to put together a team of officers to watch Romjue in hopes he would lead them to the girl.

Price said he told underlings he had changed the missing persons report to critical, though he never revised the

paperwork.

Price and each of the defendants testified that they never read the two-page report, which said Nagel left home of her own accord and did not suggest she was in peril.

Each of the defendants testified they did not write any reports or memos about their surveillance and questioning of Romjue, contrary to the police department's criminal investigations manual.

After Romjue's encounter with police, Nagel returned home. She testified that some of the officers who questioned Romjue told her that if she did not break up with him, they would lock him up. And faced with that choice, Nagel said, she broke up with Romjue.

Davis was named in one other lawsuit that resulted in a jury award for the plaintiff. In 1995, a Prince George's Circuit Court jury awarded \$10,000 to a Hillcrest Heights man who alleged that Davis followed his car, then ordered him to lie facedown on the ground without justification.

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