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## Ex-police sergeant sentenced to 440 years for 4 rapes

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — In a meek, nearly inaudible voice, former Bloomington Police Sgt. Jeff Pelo proclaimed his innocence Tuesday as a judge sentenced him to more than four centuries behind bars for a series of brutal rapes.

In all, the veteran officer, who was convicted of repeatedly assaulting four women between 2002 and 2005 and stalking a fifth woman in 2006, was handed 18 terms ranging from three to 35 years apiece. They are to be served consecutively and total 440 years.

When asked by McLean County Associate Judge Robert Freitag whether he wanted to make a statement before the sentences were pronounced, Pelo's voice barely penetrated the packed but silent fifth-floor courtroom.

"I'm innocent. That's all," he said.

Tuesday's hearing was the last major event of a spectacle that has gripped Bloomington-Normal for years.

Among the adjectives used to describe Pelo by his victims, by the prosecution and by the judge: unremorseful, terrifying, deplorable, disturbing, despicable, contemptible, repulsive, a plague.

"The court finds it exceedingly difficult to find words to describe the disturbing nature of this case," Freitag said to Pelo. "You literally went from a protector of our community to a plague on our community."

Pelo, 43, had been with the Bloomington Police Department for 17 years when he was arrested in June 2006 on charges of attempted burglary and stalking. He was found late at night by one of his colleagues, wearing all black outside a woman's home. Pelo claimed he couldn't sleep and was house hunting in the neighborhood for his mother-in-law.

The incident initiated an investigation by detectives in his own department that linked him to four rapes with remarkable, though chilling, similarities. The victims of those crimes described scenarios in which they awoke to find a masked man in their bedrooms who bound them, forced them to perform sex acts at gunpoint and made them bathe afterward, conceivably to remove any traces of physical evidence.

Pelo was arrested in July 2006 for the sexual assaults and has remained in custody since.

Nearly five years had elapsed between the first rape in December 2002 and the beginning of his trial in May. Almost six weeks later, the jury found him guilty of all 35 felonies.

Freitag, however, didn't impose sentences for each charge. Citing case law and state law, he merged several charges that had been leveled for the same physical acts and decided terms based on the charges that carried the harshest penalties.

For the December 2002 attack, Pelo was sentenced to 60 years. The victim's mother read her daughter's impact statement in court Tuesday, detailing the woman's descent into drug addiction as a result of the rape and concluding, "I will have to live with it for the rest of my life."

For the April 2003 attack, Pelo was sentenced to 70 years. Kristy Hasty Mills, who agreed to be publicly identified as the victim to encourage other rape victims to tell their stories, said in court she was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder after her assault.

"I was lucky to get an hour or two of sleep at a time," she said.

"It's now over five years later, and I still have nightmares. ... There are days I can't even shower."

The victim of the early January 2005 attack declined to read an impact statement to the court, though she did attend the sentencing. For that attack, Pelo was sentenced to 45 years.

Pelo's longest term, however, came for an assault in late January 2005. Sarah Kalmes Gliege, who also agreed to have her identity published for the sake of other victims, endured a three-hour attack that she said ultimately robbed her of her independence and unborn child.

"There was never a moment during the rape that I thought Jeff Pelo would let me live," she said in court. "Jeff Pelo raped and violated every person that cares for my family and I."

Freitag gave Pelo 255 years for that crime.

The stalking victim whose house Pelo was arrested outside in June 2006 expressed similar feelings of vulnerability in an impact statement read to the court by a friend, Nicki Mason. Pelo was sentenced to 10 years for the incidents leading up to that night.

“Nothing can convince me that this man has a conscience,” Jonelle Penn Galuska said in the statement, noting that she had spoken to Pelo about a peeping tom and potential prowler in her neighborhood.

Pelo has 30 days to appeal the sentence. Freitag on Tuesday denied the defense’s motion for a new trial but scheduled a hearing for additional post-trial motions for Oct. 6.

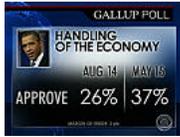
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