

Former Ripley police officer facing child porn charges - Cops and Courts - Charleston Daily Mail - West Virginia News and Sports -

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Warrant says man used department-issued equipment to take images

by Ashley B. Craig

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. - A former Ripley police officer was arraigned a second time in federal court on child porn and intimidation charges stemming from an alleged relationship with a teen girl that went sour.

The two had sex multiple times while the girl was underage, according to new details in a search warrant application. Many of those times, patrolman George Michael Puskas II was on duty.

The victim also alleged that Puskas used his department-issued camera to take hundreds of pornographic images of her and that he later tried to use those photos to intimidate her.

U.S. Magistrate Dwane Tinsley arraigned Puskas Wednesday in Charleston. Puskas, who remains free on a \$10,000 bond, worked for the department for three years before resigning in May 2012.

A three-count indictment handed down by a federal grand jury in January was dismissed last month when a six-count superseding indictment was filed.

In January he was charged with enticing a minor into sexually explicit conduct to produce child porn, possession of child porn and receiving child porn.

The six-count indictment included those charges and three more, alleging Puskas transmitted child porn and twice traveled across state lines with intent to kill, injure, harass and intimidate a person known to the grand jury.

Puskas came under investigation in September 2011 when State Police interviewed an 18-year-old woman who claimed Puskas, then 30, had sexually exploited her for years. Her account of the relationship is detailed in the warrant application filed in U.S. District Court.

Much of her statement was redacted in a previously filed copy, but those statements were made available last month in revised exhibits.

The warrant application reveals allegations that the two had sex multiple times and that Puskas was on duty and in uniform the first time, which occurred when the girl was 16.

She said they met when she was 6 or 7 years old and he was her soccer coach.

The romantic relationship began when she was 14. She said she had been injured in a soccer game and Puskas carried her off the field to a storage room where he told her he loved her, kissed her and asked for her phone number. She said she gave him her number.

They began talking and texting daily. Eventually they started sharing nude pictures with each other, she said.

She said from the very beginning he was "very jealous and would become angry when she spoke with other boys."

The woman said they had sex nearly every day from March 2010 until April 2011. She said she would often meet the officer behind a school while he was on duty and they would have sex on the hood of his police cruiser, according to the document.

He took pictures with his work camera and told her he had stored the photographs on his department-issued laptop computer, which was locked in his desk at the Ripley Police Department.

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The woman told police that Puskas drove her to a Planned Parenthood Clinic in Parkersburg during their relationship for birth control injections, which he paid for.

Toward the end of the relationship, the birth control failed because of an antibiotic she took. She then found herself pregnant with Puskas' child.

He wanted her to get an abortion, she said. She miscarried in March 2011.

She broke off the relationship in April 2011 and began dating other men, but Puskas began harassing her shortly after.

She said he sent her text messages and messages via Facebook. He also emailed her copies of the photographs and videos he had taken while they were together, she said.

The woman said he followed her and showed up at her job. The harassment escalated until August 2011 when they met and he threatened to kill her and himself if she dated anyone else.

She reported the situation to the Ripley Police Department but Puskas allegedly told her it wouldn't go anywhere.

She said she told another Ripley officer who had been aware of their relationship about Puskas' harassment in hopes that Puskas would stop. Puskas told her that her complaint to the other officer "would not go anywhere."

She decided to flee to Virginia to escape Puskas, the application said.

But she alleges that the harassment continued. Puskas drove to Virginia first on Sept. 7, 2011 and sat outside her workplace for three hours before she confronted him. He asked her to lunch to talk about their relationship, but she refused and he eventually left.

He appeared again, this time in her driveway, on Sept. 14, 2011. She called Ripley Police Chief R.L. Fridley and told him Puskas had been to her house.

State Police searched Puskas' home and the Ripley Police Department last spring. They took computers, discs, phones and other electronic devices as evidence.

Troopers also obtained search warrants for email and social media accounts linked to Puskas. The investigator found that all of the email accounts were empty.

Trial is set to begin on the matter at 9:30 a.m. July 30.

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