

statesman.com

Saturday, December 13, 2003

A rifle, a silencer, a mower

Man faces charges for allegedly threatening 8th wife

By Steven Kreytak

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Marriage, apparently, doesn't suit Bruce Harkey.

The former nursing home administrator has been married eight times, and his latest union unraveled as Harkey repeatedly threatened to kill his wife, according to court documents.

At the same time, Harkey, 51, bought a new rifle, enlisted a co-worker to fashion a silencer for it out of a lawnmower muffler and discussed ways to remove serial numbers and fingerprints from the weapon,

according to the documents and court testimony by federal and state authorities.

In July, when Harkey was facing charges involving his estranged wife, Kami Harkey, 28, he went to her workplace and said: "If you (mess) me over in this case I will kill you," according to an affidavit.

U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks called the confluence of events "troubling" on Friday as he sentenced Harkey to five years in federal prison for failing to register the silencer. Charges of retaliation, a third-degree felony related to the alleged threats, are pending in

state court. Three misdemeanor charges are also pending.

In a preliminary hearing three months ago, U.S. Magistrate Andrew Austin said Harkey should be used to dealing with failed marriages by now.

"The bad talk got out of hand, but that's all it was ... bad talk," said Harkey, who had lived in northern Travis County with his wife. His voice cracked as he told Sparks he would never leave the couple's 5-year-old daughter without a mother.

But Kami Harkey said she

See **THREATS**, A17



Bruce Harkey

'The bad talk got out of hand, but that's all it was ... bad talk.'

03-1213 HARKEY RIFLE SILENCER
MOWER

Clipped By:

CSTX7

May 3, 2025

THREATS: Husband asked co-worker to build silencer from mower parts

Man 'has gone beyond being an angry spouse,' judge says

Continued from A1

has been married to Bruce Harkey since 1996—the longest of any of his marriages—and had no doubt that he was serious when he delivered the threats, including the one at her work in July.

"He said it slow and deliberately," she said. "He knew what he was saying."

Things between the couple had already soured when a Travis County sheriff's deputy responded in February to a call from the Hunt Club Apartments on Shoreline Drive, near Wells Branch Parkway.

Bruce Harkey had moved out of the couple's apartment in the sprawling complex, and Kami Harkey was living there with their daughter and a roommate, according to court documents.

Bruce Harkey went to the apartment, and when he refused to leave, Kami Harkey's roommate, Janet Henderson, picked up the phone to call 911. Harkey then allegedly grabbed the phone from Henderson, hit her in the face with it and hung up, said an affidavit filed to support misdemeanor charges of assault and interfering with an emergency call.

Later in February, after investigators spoke with Kami Harkey again, authorities filed a misdemeanor charge of impersonating a peace officer against Bruce Harkey. A court affidavit said Kami Harkey told investigators that her husband had a false police identification card that he used to get out of tickets and to buy unspecified police equipment, an affidavit said.

Harkey was free on bond on the three misdemeanor charges when the alleged threats started against Kami Harkey, court records show.

By July, Bruce Harkey had been calling Kami Harkey almost every day for about three months, ordering her to "have the charges dropped," according to an affidavit.

On July 20, the affidavit said, Bruce Harkey told his wife: "I want you to go home and kill yourself. I can't kill you because they will implicate me. So I want you to go home and

I want you to go home and kill yourself. I can't kill you because they will implicate me. So I want you to go home and commit suicide.'

Bruce Harkey, to his wife, according to an affidavit

commit suicide."

Texas Ranger Matthew Lindemann testified Friday that on Aug. 4, he got a call from a lawyer in Bryan who was representing Harkey in his divorce and was with one of Harkey's co-workers, Hank Powell. The pair wanted to report that Harkey had been acting irrationally for several months and that Harkey had repeatedly asked Powell to make him a silencer, Lindemann said.

Lindemann called agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, who investigated. They taped conversations over five days at the Heartwood Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Taylor, where Harkey had worked for about 18 months, ATF Special Agent James O'Flaherty testified.

In one, taped on Aug. 13, Harkey recounted to Powell how he threatened his wife's life earlier that day.

In that conversation Harkey also said he was "going to step over the edge and not be able to come back one of these days," court records said.

Harkey gave the rifle, a lawnmower muffler and instructions on how to turn the muffler into a silencer to Powell, court records said. Powell, in turn, gave them to the agents, who had the muffler modified into a silencer.

On Aug. 15, Powell gave the silencer and the rifle back to Harkey, who was under close surveillance by authorities, court records show.

One day later, Harkey was arrested. A search of his vehicle turned up the rifle, the silencer and 450 rounds of .22 caliber ammunition, court

records said.

"Based on all the evidence put together," O'Flaherty testified, "I felt we needed to stop this before something happened."

In federal court, Harkey made a deal with prosecutors in October and pleaded guilty to failing to register the silencer. In return, prosecutors dismissed a charge of carrying the rifle in relation to a crime of violence. That charge could have netted him an additional five years in prison.

Harkey, who attorneys said has worked as a police officer and as an investigator for the Texas attorney general's office, faces an additional two to 10 years in prison for the state retaliation charge and up to one year on each of the three misdemeanor charges.

That has not deterred the plans of one of Harkey's previous wives, Jennifer Johnson, to marry Harkey again when he gets out of prison.

Johnson testified Friday that she has known Harkey since he was 14 and has never known him to be violent. The two grew up together in San Saba County, she said, and were married for 28 days. She suggested that Harkey might have obtained the silencer because "when you are out hunting deer, you don't want to scare the whole herd."

Johnson did not say what year the couple was married. Public records show Harkey has been divorced five times in Texas.

In addition to his oral argument at the sentencing that Harkey's threats were "non-sense talking" from someone "fond of the tall tale," Harkey's defense lawyer, Joe Turner, made a motion for a lesser sentence, arguing that Harkey's actions were a sign of stress from a divorce.

Austin, the U.S. magistrate, discounted Turner's theory in September when he ordered Harkey held without bond.

"Given defendant's seven prior divorces, one might think that defendant would be accustomed to the unraveling of a marriage, and be able to avoid such reactions," Austin wrote. "Taken as a whole, these facts and circumstances suggest that the defendant has gone far beyond being simply an angry spouse."

skreytak@statesman.com; 912-2946