

UK police officer found guilty of trying to sell information to News of the World

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The fallout from the investigation ignited by the News International phone-hacking scandal continues. On Thursday, January 10 at Southwark crown court in London, Detective Chief Inspector April Casburn was found guilty of misconduct in public office.

At the end of a three-day trial, the jury had been satisfied Casburn, a £60,000-a-year counterterrorism investigator, was guilty of offering to sell inside information about the phone-hacking investigation to News International's *News of the World*—part of Rupert Murdoch's media empire before it was forced to close in July 2011.

The original offence took place in 2010 as the Metropolitan Police (Met) were forced to re-examine allegations of phone hacking at the *NoW*. Casburn, who worked for the Metropolitan Police's SO15 counterterrorism command, is the first person convicted in the £40 million investigation set up by the Leveson Inquiry looking into illegal phone-tapping allegations. Leveson instigated three interlinked investigations, Operations Weeting, Elveden and Tuleta, into phone and computer hacking and the corruption of public officials.

Operation Elveden's specific role is to investigate "inappropriate payments made to police and public officials" and works under the supervision of the Independent Police Complaints Commission. It is looking at documents handed over by News International in June 2011, which are being assessed by police for "information relating to alleged inappropriate payments to a small number of officers".

Casburn, who was manager of the national financial investigation unit with counterterrorism, claimed she had never asked for money when she telephoned the *NoW* on September 11, 2010. She said she made the call because she was concerned that resources from

counter-terrorism and her unit were to be diverted into a new phone-hacking investigation. She attended a meeting with colleagues the day before in which it was revealed that John Yates, the Met's then-assistant commissioner, was to reopen the phone-hacking investigation. She said her colleagues were joking about the inquiry, and were excited about who would get to interview Sienna Miller.

Casburn said, "I felt very strongly that we shouldn't be doing hacking. Our function was to prevent terrorist attacks and I was particularly worried that the behavior of my colleagues was such that they thought it was a bit of a jolly. It made me really angry."

She said she regretted making the telephone call, but defended contacting the newspaper because she said she was not an influential member of the counterterrorism team and would not have been listened to if she raised concerns. She claimed that she had suffered two years of bullying within the counterterrorism unit and, as the only woman within her department, had not been given a desk. "I think in some circumstances it is right to go to the press, because they do expose wrongdoing and they expose poor decisions," she said.

The jury rejected Casburn's defence and accepted the Crown's case that she had phoned the *NoW* to say that former editor Andy Coulson, and five other people were being investigated by the Met and had asked for payment for the information. Mark Bryant-Heron, prosecuting, said, "There may be occasions when putting certain information into the public domain, so called whistle-blowing, can be justified. This was not one of them. In this case DCI Casburn approached the *NoW*, the very newspaper being investigated, to make money," pointing out it could have undermined the case against them.

The reporter on the *NoW* who took the Wood, wrote an email to more senior colleagues detailing what he claimed had been said. It was the main evidence against Casburn.

It read: “PHONE TAPPING. A senior policewoman ... who claims to be working on the phone-tapping investigation wants to sell inside info on the police inquiry. She says the investigation was launched yesterday (Fri) by Yates and he is using ‘counter-terrorist assets’, which is highly unusual. An intelligence development team is being used and they are looking at six people. Coulson, Hoare and a woman she cannot remember the name of. The three other people used to work for the News of the World and police do not know where they are now (she did not know their names either). Pressure to conduct the inquiry is coming from (Labour’s) Lord (John) Prescott.”

Casburn was arrested 15 months after she made the call as a result of a huge tranche of evidence, including 300 million emails, handed to the police by the NI management and standards committee. This committee was set up in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal and has been used to filter damaging material.

Mr Justice Fulford warned Casburn, a mother of three, that she faced a custodial sentence.

A week after Casburn’s conviction, two more serving officers from the Met’s Specialist Crime and Operations Command, along with the crime reporter from Murdoch’s *Sun* newspaper, Antony France, were arrested at separate addresses in Herefordshire and Surry.

The command was formed in October 2006, with the merger of the Branch (SO13) and Anti-Terrorist Special Branch (SO12). It covers a range of serious offences in London, including murder, rape and organised gangs. It also deals with protection of public figures including the royal family and government ministers, counterterrorism and security at the Houses of Parliament, the City and Heathrow airports.

France is the 39-year-old crime reporter for the *Sun* and was arrested on “suspicion of conspiracy to corrupt and suspected conspiracy to cause misconduct in a public office.” He and both police officers were bailed until April.

On Tuesday it was announced that Virginia Wheeler, the *Sun*’s defence editor, has been charged with

conspiracy to commit misconduct in public office. Former Metropolitan police officer, Paul Flattley, has also been charged with the same offence, which is said to relate to receiving payments from the *Sun* for information on criminal investigations.

This brings to eight the number of people charged under Operation Elveden. Fifty-six have so far been arrested. Fourteen individuals, including the former NI chief executive Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson, the ex- *NoW* editor and Prime Minister David Cameron’s director of communications, face trial later this year for offences including perverting the course of justice and conspiracy to illegally intercept phone messages. The charges include allegations that some of the 14 were involved in hacking the mobile phone of the murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler.



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