Immigration Agent Guilty of Violating Rights

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Body

A New Jersey man who called himself the most decorated ***immigration*** ***agent*** in history with more than 70 commendations watched in silence yesterday as a Federal jury convicted him of civil-***rights*** ***violations*** and making false statements against recent immigrants.

The charges stemmed from searches that the ***agent***, Joseph Occhipinti, made while running "Project Bodega" and "Project Kuala Lumpur," two programs he organized to detect illegal aliens from the Dominican Republic and Malaysia who might be involved in illicit activities.

Mr. Occhipinti, 41 years old and a 22-year veteran of the ***Immigration*** and Naturalization Service, grew pale as the jury foreman repeated the word "***guilty***" 17 times in response to Judge Constance Baker Motley's request for the verdicts on individual charges. But the jury of seven women and five men found Mr. Occhipinti not ***guilty*** of three counts of embezzlement, two counts of making false statements and one count of ***violating*** civil ***rights***.

The verdict came after three days of deliberations, following a four-week trial in Federal District Court in Manhattan.

Sentencing Set for Oct. 4

 Mr. Occhipinti, whose sentencing is set for Oct. 4, is free on bail. He faces a maximum sentence of one year to 10 years in prison, as well as a maximum fine of $250,000, on each of the 17 counts.

He told reporters afterward that he had dismissed his lawyer, Norman J. Mordkofsky, but refused to say why. "This verdict reflects one important thing, that I'm not a thief," Mr. Occhipinti said, adding that he plans an appeal. "And it sends a message to dedicated Federal ***agents*** to think twice about doing their jobs. They have to be concerned about going to prison and disrupting their entire family life."

One of the prosecutors in the case, Jeh C. Johnson, called the verdict "fair and just."

In opening arguments, Mr. Johnson said that he would prove that Mr. Occhipinti stole money from his victims in the course of conducting illegal searches. About $16,000 was said to be missing from money confiscated during those searches, but the jury apparently was not convinced that Mr. Occhipinti took it.

Witnesses included Mr. Occhipinti and several store owners, one of whom wept as she described suffering a miscarriage after being arrested by Mr. Occhipinti.

Another witness was John F. Kennedy Jr., an assistant Manhattan District Attorney, who said he questioned whether Mr. Occhipinti had obtained consent-to-search permission from store owners in upper Manhattan, who "may have had something to hide."

Classification

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