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The Record (New Jersey)

THREAT ON COP LAID TO IRS AGENT

The Record By Alan Jacobs, Correspondent
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A Hasbrouck Heights volunteer fireman who is also an IRS agent has been accused of threatening to audit the tax returns of a policeman investigating reports of recklessly driven fire trucks.

██████████, 34, was arraigned in Superior Court in Hackensack last week on a count of criminal coercion. ██████████ pleaded not guilty and was released on \$1,000 bail.

The Bergen County Prosecutor's Office is investigating and will decide whether to ask a grand jury to indict ██████████. Criminal coercion carries a maximum 18-month prison sentence.

"We are very concerned that policemen are not threatened in the line of duty. We can't have policemen being restrained in their duty," said ██████████ an assistant county prosecutor.

In addition to being charged with criminal coercion, ██████████ was one of four Hasbrouck Heights firemen charged with harassment. They allegedly harassed Sgt. ██████████ while he investigated complaints that the firemen had driven fire trucks recklessly in early May.

In a complaint signed by an investigator in the prosecutor's office, ██████████ is charged with threatening to order an audit of Jones's income tax returns.

Neither ██████████ nor his attorney, Michael Beatrice, would comment on the case yesterday.

The three other firemen charged with harassment are ██████████, 31, ██████████, 23, and ██████████ 31-year-old brother, ██████████. If convicted, each faces a maximum sentence of six months in jail. ██████████ said they have not yet been arraigned, but would not say why.

The alleged harassment occurred at police headquarters within earshot of police and civilian witnesses, according to an investigator in the prosecutor's office.

Follender said the preliminary investigation convinced officials that ██████████ should be arraigned and that a further investigation was warranted. "Whether the case is referred to a grand jury is a policy decision of this office," he said.

Besides the investigation of ██████████ the prosecutor's office is trying to ease strained relations between the police and fire departments, ██████████ said. Monday night, ██████████ met with police and fire officials along with a number of council members at borough hall. No further information about that meeting could be gathered yesterday.

The borough council ordered a municipal investigation of the matter soon after it occurred, but officials have not revealed the results of that probe.

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The incidents in question occurred after a May 4 outing by members of the Hasbrouck Heights fire department at a Ramsey firehouse. After receiving a report from a motorist that the fire trucks had been driven recklessly on Route 17, Jones questioned one or more of the firemen. The four men subjected the officer to "unreasonably loud language" and other harassment, Police Chief ██████████ said.

According to a Hasbrouck Heights fireman who was at the Ramsey party held to inaugurate new equipment a lot of liquor was drunk. ██████████ said he did not know whether any of the four charged with harassment were intoxicated at the time.

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