

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Oregon

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Jury Delivers Verdicts in Trial of FBI Special Agent

PORTLAND, Ore. – A federal jury today acquitted W. Joseph Astarita, a member of the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team (HRT) based in Quantico, Virginia, on charges of making false statements and obstruction of justice.

"We thank the jury for their dedicated service and for giving full consideration to an important case. We strongly believe this case needed to be brought before the court and decided by a jury," said Billy J. Williams, U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon. "Our system of justice relies on the absolute integrity of law enforcement officials at all levels of government."

"The OIG respects the jury's verdict. We will continue to investigate allegations of misconduct by Department of Justice employees to ensure the integrity of our law enforcement components," said Michael E. Horowitz, U.S. Department of Justice Inspector General. "We also would like to thank the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office and the Major Incident Team for their assistance with this investigation."

Astarita was one of a number of FBI agents assigned to the armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and was present during the shooting of Robert LaVoy Finicum on January 26, 2016, in Harney County, Oregon.

Astarita was accused of knowingly and willfully making false statements to FBI Supervisory Special Agents. Specifically, Astarita told his supervisors he had not fired his weapon during the attempted arrest of Finicum.

A federal grand jury charged Astarita with three counts of making false statements in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1001 and two counts of obstruction of justice in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1521(b)(3) on June 20, 2017. One count each of making false statements and obstruction of justice were dismissed pre-trial.

The verdicts concludes a three-week trial during which jurors heard testimony from FBI agents, state and local law enforcement officers, forensic scientists and ballistics experts.

The Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General investigated this case in partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon. The case was prosecuted by Gary Y. Sussman and Paul T. Maloney, Assistant U.S. Attorneys for the District of Oregon.

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