

Sun journalist, UK military staff charged over royal stories

LONDON: British prosecutors on Wednesday, 24 April 2013, charged The Sun tabloid's royal editor and two former staff at the military academy where Princes William and Harry trained over the sale of stories for thousands of pounds.

Journalist Duncan Larcombe, 37, was charged with conspiracy to conduct misconduct in a public office, along with John Hardy, 43, a former colour sergeant at the elite Sandhurst military training academy, and Hardy's wife Claire, 39.

The Hardys are accused of accepting more than £23,000 (US\$35,000, €27,000) from The Sun, Britain's biggest-selling newspaper, which is owned, by Australian-born media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, for stories about Sandhurst and the royal family, the Crown Prosecution Service said.

Tracy Bell, a 34-year-old former assistant at Sandhurst's medical centre, will also be charged with misconduct in a public office over allegations that The Sun paid her £1,250 for stories between 2005 and 2006, the CPS said.

"It is alleged that from 10 February 2006 to 15 October 2008, 34 payments were made to either John Hardy or Claire Hardy totalling over £23,000 for stories relating mainly to the royal family or matters at Sandhurst," the CPS said.

"In addition we have concluded that Tracy Bell should be charged with one count of misconduct in public office."

Police later confirmed that all four had been charged after returning on bail to various police stations on Wednesday following their earlier arrests.

A fifth person, a 32-year-old man, will face no further action, police said.

Prince William, a Royal Air Force search and rescue helicopter pilot, trained at Sandhurst in southern England from January to December 2006, while his younger brother Harry was there from May 2005 until April 2006.

Harry, an Apache helicopter gunner, has served twice in Afghanistan.

All four of those charged will appear at London's Westminster Magistrates' Court on May 8, the CPS said.

They have been charged as part of Operation Elveden, a Scotland Yard investigation set up in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal at The Sun's sister newspaper, the News of the World.

Murdoch was forced to shut down the News of the World after it illegally accessed the voice mail messages of a murdered schoolgirl, as well as hundreds of celebrities and public figures.

Prime Minister David Cameron's ex-media chief Andy Coulson, a former News of the World editor, is among those who have been charged in connection with the scandal, as is former News International chief executive Rebekah Brooks.

Earlier Wednesday, a former police officer became the 62nd person arrested under Operation Elveden.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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