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## Jury awards former West Palm Beach officer, fired on PTSD rumors, \$880,000

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BY JANE MUSGRAVE - PALM BEACH POST STAFF WRITER

**WEST PALM BEACH** – For three years, Matthew Ladd insisted that his military service in Iraq and Afghanistan shouldn't have disqualified him from the ranks of the city's police force.

Late Friday, a Palm Beach County jury agreed, ordering West Palm Beach to pay the 28-year-old Army veteran \$880,000 for firing him on the basis of rumors that he had post-traumatic stress disorder.



Matthew Ladd, in court during jury selection for his lawsuit against the city of West Palm Beach Wednesday afternoon Aug. 21, ... [Read More](#)

"I'm stunned," Ladd said shortly after the verdict was announced. "I've just been so stressed out about this case. Finally, I can get some sleep. My wife can get some sleep."

His attorney Sid Garcia said Ladd was the victim of "malicious gossips" who lied about the trauma the rookie officer suffered while serving in the Middle East. They ultimately persuaded then-Police Chief Delsa Bush that Ladd was a danger to himself and others even though a psychiatrist who examined the rookie officer at the request of police

brass found no evidence of mental distress and declared him fit for duty.

"Former Chief Bush did not take time to treat him like a human being," Garcia said. Instead of believing the doctor, he said, she believed a vicious memo a sergeant wrote, claiming Ladd was mentally ill.

- [West Palm police unfairly maligned veteran booted from force, lawyer tells jurors](#)
- [Ex-West Palm cop fights firing over PTSD allegations](#)

Months after Ladd was fired in October 2010, three months into his year-long probationary period, he was diagnosed with PTSD by doctors at the Veteran's Administration Medical Center in Riviera Beach.

But, Garcia said, that doesn't disqualify him from working as a police officer. Two officers testified that they, too, have the malady that in earlier days was known as shell shock or battle fatigue. Dr. Norman Silversmith, a psychiatrist, told jurors that PTSD is treatable.

Media accounts of veterans killing themselves or others have contributed to the public's misunderstanding of the psychological ailment. "Like any other problem, depression or anxiety, people can function with this condition," Garcia said. "There's a huge misconception about PTSD."



Matthew Ladd served two years in Afghanistan and Iraq. He is a sergeant in the Army Reserve, where he said none ... [Read More](#)

Ladd has undergone therapy. His war experiences are part of him but they don't haunt him, Garcia said.

What still haunts him, and apparently what led to his downfall at the department, are allergies. He was ordered to undergo the psychological evaluation after his allergies flared up and paramedics were summoned to his house. A neighbor who called 911, cursed at the dispatcher who was uncertain what agency to call. Thinking Ladd made the call, fellow officers also

responded. From there, the rumors of Ladd's mental instability began, Garcia said.

Now that he was won the lawsuit, Ladd said he intends to seek reinstatement to the job he has dreamed about since he was a youngster. Palm Beach County Circuit Judge David Crow is to decide that issue.

Eliot Cohen, a West Palm Beach spokesman, said city officials were disappointed by the verdict. He said no decision has been made as to whether the city will appeal.

Even if the city doesn't appeal, Garcia said he expects that city to argue that Ladd can only collect \$200,000 of the nearly \$900,000 the jury said he deserves. Under state law, that is the maximum governments can be forced to pay for wrongdoing.

However, Garcia said he will argue that federal discrimination law trumps state law and Ladd is entitled to recover the entire amount. Further, he said, Ladd can also enlist the help of federal laws that protect veterans.

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