



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 19, 2022

Guilty Verdict of Racist Police Investigation Against Thunder Bay Staff Sergeant – A First

Today, Thunder Bay Police Service Staff Sergeant Harrison was found guilty of discreditable conduct and neglect of duty due to a racist police death investigation that he conducted into the death of Stacy DeBungee.

In his decision, Hearing Officer Greg Walton made the following findings concerning the alleged misconduct of the officers. With respect to Staff Sergeant Harrison: Count #1: Neglect of Duty – Guilty; Count #2: Discreditable Conduct – Guilty; and, with respect to the alleged misconduct of Sergeant Whipple: Count #1 Neglect of Duty – Not Guilty; Count #2: Discreditable Conduct – Not Guilty.

In reaching this decision, the hearing officer referenced his inability to understand how or why Staff Sergeant Harrison concluded so quickly that alcohol was a contributing factor into Stacy’s death, other than reliance on his conscious or unconscious bias linking it to Stacy’s Indigenous status:

“There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that Staff Sergeant Harrison decided very early on that the death was nonsuspicious. I am equally convinced that because the deceased person was Indigenous, found in a river where other Indigenous men had been found drowned, with a high level of alcohol in their system, he assumed the very same circumstances must have therefore existed in this case.”

Staff Sergeant Harrison was found guilty of discreditable conduct because “he failed to treat the investigation equally, without discrimination due to Stacy DeBungee’s Indigenous status” and that “a reasonable, impartial, and fully informed member of the public would find that Staff Sergeant Harrison’s conduct would bring discredit to the reputation of his employer.”

Counsel for the Public Complainants, Asha James of Falconers LLP, expressed the following:

“It was clear from the evidence that by the time Stacy DeBungee was removed from the river, Staff Sergeant Harrison had already concluded his investigation based on racist stereotypes. What the public complainants sought is accountability for that conduct. The evidence that came forward from this hearing, that Staff Sergeant Harrison, who is responsible for training other Thunder Bay police officers, had not even read the Broken Trust Report was just appalling to



the family. To see Staff Sergeant Harrison being found guilty of both discreditable conduct and neglect of duty is a relief felt by the Public Complainants seven years in the making.”

Brad DeBungee stated, “My family and I are pleased that there is finally some accountability for the way Stacy’s investigation was handled. We have had to fight the Thunder Bay Police Service every step of the way to ensure accountability for Stacy. He deserved to have a proper death investigation. We deserved to know what happened to our brother.”

Falconers LLP has the honour of representing Stacy DeBungee’s brother, Brad DeBungee, and Rainy River First Nations. For further information, please visit our website at www.falconers.ca.

This matter will resume in September 2022 for a penalty hearing for Staff Sergeant Harrison.

Decision



Thunder Bay
Decision.pdf

Broken Trust: Indigenous People and the Thunder Bay Police Service

One Year After Broken Trust: Report on Implementation

