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KP1883

# Five arrested in \$1.6m heist Officer charged over cigs theft

A SUSPENDED policeman was behind bars last night after being charged over his alleged involvement in the theft of illegal cigarettes worth \$1.6 million.

Sen-Constable Troy Holmes, who is awaiting a County Court trial for an unrelated matter, is one of five men charged over the theft of 36 pallets of counterfeit cigarettes from Port Melbourne.

An out-of-sessions court hearing was told Sen-Constable Holmes, 30, returned to Melbourne from Sydney when warrants for his arrest were issued by police.

The hearing was told Sen-Constable Holmes was allegedly involved in the cigarette theft with former Australian Federal Police investigator Kevin Dickson, 42, Anthony Purdy, 38, Min Liang, 40 and Jian Weng, 43.

The others appeared in Mel-

**Cameron Smith  
and Katie Laphorne**

bourne Magistrates' Court earlier yesterday. Det Sgt Wayne Amor, of the Technical Response Unit, said members of the group allegedly deceived staff at a communications company on December 16, 2003.

It is alleged a man told staff he was from the Australian Taxation Office and hired four radios and a satellite phone worth \$8000. They were never returned, the court heard.

The hearing was told that on December 18 a similar incident involving radios worth \$33,000 occurred at Motorola Australia.

Det Sgt Amor said \$1.6 million worth of counterfeit cigarettes was seized by Customs on December 22 in a shipping container.

They were placed in storage used by the ATO in Port Melbourne.

It is alleged that on January 20, Mr Purdy produced fake documen-

tation at the storage facility authorising the removal of the cigarettes.

The hearing was told he entered at 5.40am with four truck drivers and removed the cigarettes.

Det Sgt Amor said Mr Weng received a large quantity of the cigarettes. He was arrested when he was caught with Mr Dickson at Northland Shopping Centre. Mr Weng allegedly handed Mr Dickson \$138,000 during the meeting.

Magistrate Lisa Hannan bailed Mr Liang, of Maribyrnong, on a \$10,000 surety and Mr Weng, of Glenroy, on a \$75,000 surety.

Mr Dickson, of Box Hill, and Mr Purdy, of Ringwood, did not apply for bail and were remanded in custody. All four men will appear in court again in June.

Last night Bail Justice Derrun Kearns remanded Sen-Constable Holmes in custody to appear again in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court today.

## Aussie in court drama

**Anna Cock**

New York

AUSTRALIAN *La Femme Nikita* star Peta Wilson emerged yesterday as a surprise beneficiary of the corporate largess that drove Adelpia Communications into bankruptcy.

The glamorous actor, 33, told the United States federal court trial of former Adelpia executives she took more than a dozen flights on private jets owned by the financially stricken cable company in 1999 and 2000.

On four occasions in 2000, Adelpia's then chief financial officer, Timothy Rigas, sent a corporate plane to pick her up from the *Nikita* set in Toronto, Canada, so she could join him for dinner in New York.

Though the pair met through business, the New York dinners were "personal", recalled Wilson, who listed her home as Woolgoolga, on the New South Wales north coast.

The actor told the court she had also "hitched a ride" with Rigas, 47, in December 2000, to Los Angeles where her boyfriend,



**Real life:** Peta Wilson leaves the New York court yesterday after giving evidence. Picture: AURORA

director Damian Harris, lived.

Wilson befriended Rigas when she made a promotional appearance during 1999 at a Buffalo Sabres ice hockey game.

She testified yesterday she was at first reluctant to attend the event because it would interrupt a vacation she had planned in St Barts in the Caribbean.

The USA Network, for which *Nikita* was its prime show, and business partner Adelpia, arranged for an Adelpia jet to take Wilson to St Barts, then pick her up later for the promotional appearance in

New York in an arrangement that changed her mind.

Rigas's generosity also extended to a family emergency in the Bahamas during mid-2000 when Wilson was holidaying with partner Harris, his young daughter Ella, his father, actor Richard Harris, and Wilson's friend Jasper Scats.

Federal prosecutors allege Rigas, his brother Michael, 50, and father John, 79, committed conspiracy and fraud in using Adelpia as a "personal piggy bank", extracting millions of company funds for personal extravagances.

## Rocket settles claim

FORMER St Kilda hard man "Rocket" Rod Owen has settled a compensation claim brought by a woman who alleged he assaulted her at his brother's Port Melbourne hotel.

Marina De La Roche pocketed \$30,000, plus costs, in an out-of-court settlement.

Ms De La Roche claimed Mr Owen grabbed her, lifted her up and threw her on to the footpath outside the Railway Club Hotel in May 1999.

In a County Court writ, Ms De La Roche, 43, said she suffered a fractured pelvis, chipped coccyx, depression and has developed post-traumatic stress disorder.

Ms De La Roche sued Mr Owen, 37, his brother, Christopher Graeme Owen, 40, and the hotel owner, C.O. Catering Pty Ltd. The Owens and the company settled the claim, but denied liability, about two weeks before a civil trial was to begin.

Ms De La Roche's lawyer, Carolyn McNamara of Arnold, Thomas & Becker, yesterday said her client was pleased with the result.

"She is glad that it is over and is looking forward to moving on with her life," Ms McNamara said.

- **Jeremy Kelly  
and Philip Cullen**

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