

## Woman who accused officer of rape is charged

Web Posted: 05/27/2005 12:00 AM CDT

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It was an incredible allegation: an assistant police chief and 30-year department veteran accused of raping a relative.

Called to the hospital where the woman was being examined, an investigating officer reported that she appeared frightened as she recounted the lurid details of how and when the assaults occurred.

But, as it turned out, officials determined that the accounts were not true.

Marci Lynette Bennett, 39, the woman who leveled the charge against her uncle Assistant Police Chief Jerry Pittman, was arrested Thursday and charged with perjury and filing a false report, both misdemeanors.

Bond was set at \$1,600. Bennett also faces a theft charge in another matter.

Assistant District Attorney Cliff Herberg said his office pursued charges after it was determined that Bennett knew what she was doing was wrong. Prosecutors also established a link between Bennett's accusations and a request that Pittman help her with the theft charge.

"People like this who make false allegations undermine the system for everyone else who is a legitimate victim of crime," Herberg said. "I would not wish what happened to Chief Pittman on my worst enemy."

In February, the case against Pittman led newscasts, dominated headlines and was fodder for talk radio. And people debated Police Chief Albert Ortiz's decision to leave Pittman at his post - which includes oversight of the department's sex crimes unit - during the investigation.

Pittman denied the allegation from the start and said he was confident the department's investigation would exonerate him. He declined to comment Thursday, noting that he is a potential witness in the case against Bennett.

Bennett called police Feb. 6, Super Bowl Sunday, to say her uncle had raped her on three occasions, and that he had threatened her if she told anyone.

But separate investigations by the Police Department and the district attorney's office exonerated Pittman. Evidence including witness statements, phone records and surveillance tapes from stores indicated that Pittman could not have been at the location where Bennett alleged the assaults occurred.

Ortiz also revealed that Bennett had previously filed sexual assault reports against as many as seven other men, including her father, brother and another San Antonio police officer. Although none of those accusations was found to have merit, Bennett was never charged in connection with those reports.

When Pittman was exonerated in March, District Attorney Susan Reed said, "Truly, this is a case where there isn't any evidence." She later added that Bennett was "lying. It's that simple."

Reed theorized that Bennett lied in retaliation for Pittman's refusal to help her get rid of the theft case pending against her. The hotel where she worked had accused her of refunding more than \$10,000 in customers' credit card charges into her own bank account.

In that case, Bennett was indicted on a felony theft charge Thursday by a Bexar County grand jury.