

Golden eagle trophy tarnishes cop's life

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DETROIT—During his eight years with the Detroit Police Department, Tom Wilson had always kept a beautiful mounted golden eagle on the wall of his den.

It hung there while Wilson rose through the ranks to lieutenant, with a prestige job in the department's internal affairs section, a watchdog unit that investigates the behavior of other officers.

According to Wilson, dozens of fellow police officers visited his home over the years and saw and admired the eagle. According to Wilson, he was unaware he was breaking federal law by having it there.

BUT WILSON'S promising career may be shattered because of the eagle. He will stand trial in United States District Court in Detroit starting next Wednesday for possession of a dead golden Eagle, a violation of the federal Eagle Protection Act.

If convicted of the misdemeanor, he could go to jail for up to a year and be fined up to \$5,000. A confidential informant who put the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the case will split half of any fine with the federal government.

Wilson still is a lieutenant and isn't likely to be fired, regardless of what happens at his trial. But he already has been transferred out of the internal affairs section to the notification and control section, costing him his daytime hours and free weekends and jeopardizing his efforts to obtain a law degree.

Wilson discusses the case as freely as he displayed the eagle in his home, until Fish and Wildlife Service agents confiscated it from his wall on Sept. 6. Wil-

son's position is that he did not know he was doing anything wrong.

Wilson's version is that he found the eagle, wet, straggly looking, and dead, lying in the water's edge along a river at Lake Nacimiento in California in 1967.

HE WAS AN 18-year-old Marine and was hiking in the area 200 miles south-east of San Francisco with his 17-year-old fiancée, now his wife, Joanne.

In Salinas, Cal., Wilson says, they showed the bird to Allen Martin, owner of Al Martin's Taxidermy, and were informed that the bird was a golden eagle and that, to mount it, he would have to get a permit from the state of California. According to Wilson, the taxidermist said he would try to get a permit, and if he could, he would stuff the bird for \$75.

Wilson claims that he later got a phone call from Martin saying the permit had been issued and to bring the \$75 in advance.

That was it, Wilson got his bird and has proudly displayed it ever since, he says.

IN A PHONE interview, Allen Martin said he doesn't remember Wilson and did not stuff the eagle. But, Martin said, a former assistant at the shop may have done it. He said he fired the assistant for doing such jobs on the sly.

L. Wilson says the case has soured him on the Fish and Wildlife Service. Its agents, acting on a tip, faked engine trouble in front of his house Aug. 24 and talked their way into the home to use the phone, court records show. There, Wilson's brother-in-law described to them how Wilson had found the bird in California and had it stuffed.

The agents confronted Wilson Sept. 6 with a search warrant in the middle of

a Youth League football practice in which he was coaching about 40 children, including his 10-year-old son.

WILSON CLAIMS the agents told him there would be no criminal prosecution

and that he freely told them how he got the eagle. He was never read warnings of his constitutional rights, he says.

If he had known he was breaking the law, he would have turned the eagle over to authorities, Wilson says.

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