Motorola Trade Secrets Thief Gets 4-Year Term

Jason Keyser, Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A Chinese-born American convicted of stealing trade secrets from Motorola was sentenced Wednesday to 4 years in prison in a case that prosecutors hoped would send a message to those who might be tempted to siphon vital information from U.S. companies.

Hanjuan Jin, who worked as a software engineer for Motorola Inc. for nine years, was stopped during a random security search at O'Hare International Airport on Feb. 28, 2007, before she could board a flight to China. Prosecutors say she was carrying $31,000 and hundreds of confidential Motorola documents, many stored on a laptop, four external hard drives, thumb drives and other devices.

U.S. District Judge Ruben Castillo found Jin guilty in February of stealing trade secrets but acquitted her of more serious charges of economic espionage, explaining that the evidence fell short of proving she stole the information on behalf of a foreign government or entity.

Prosecutors alleged that among the secrets she carried were descriptions of a walkie-talkie type feature on Motorola cellphones that prosecutors argued would have benefited the Chinese military.

Jin's lawyers say the naturalized U.S. citizen was not an agent of China and took the files merely to refresh her knowledge after a long absence from work. They asked the judge for probation and said in a court filing last week that "Jin has overwhelming remorse and regret" for her actions and "continues to suffer from the collateral consequences of her admittedly poor choice."

After her conviction, prosecutors said they hoped the ruling would send a message that such crimes come with heavy penalties. They said they also hoped the trial would demonstrate to U.S. companies that they can report such crimes and not risk their trade secrets being revealed in court.

Prosecutors say the former University of Notre Dame graduate student began downloading files at her Chicago-area Motorola office after returning from an extended medical leave just a few days earlier.

During the trial, prosecutor Christopher Stetler told the court that Jin "led a double life" as a seemingly loyal company worker who was actually plotting to steal her employer's secrets.

Even before returning to Motorola to download files over the several days in February 2007 prosecutors say Jin had already begun working for China-based Sun Kaisens, a telecommunications firm that government attorneys say develops products for China's military.

But the defense insisted Jin harbored no ill intent and merely grabbed the files to refresh her technical knowledge after her long absence from work. They also said prosecutors overvalued the technology in question, saying the walkie-talkie feature is no longer cutting edge and would have been of little military value.

In his February ruling, Judge Castillo wrote that the government hadn't met several requirements to prove economic espionage, including clearly demonstrating that Jin knew the materials she stole could benefit China or its military.

Jin was allowed to remain free pending Wednesday's sentencing, though she had to wear electronic monitoring and was confined to her Aurora home.

Motorola Inc. has since become Motorola Solutions Inc., in suburban Schaumburg.

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