

High court: Obara buried Blackman

Serial rapist's life term is upheld; abduction added to convictions

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Staff writer

The Tokyo High Court on Tuesday sentenced serial rapist Joji Obara to life in prison for kidnapping Briton Lucie Blackman and mutilating her corpse eight years ago, after a lower court acquitted him of the charges.

The high court also upheld the Tokyo District Court's life sentence for Obara, 56, for nine other rape cases, including that of an Australian woman who died from an overdose of sleeping drugs Obara slipped her before the assault.

Dressed in a dark suit and brown-framed glasses, Obara nervously wiped his face with a blue handkerchief before the judge read out the 1 1/2-hour decision. As the ruling was being announced, Obara stared at the floor and remained motionless.

Obara was charged with six cases of rape, two cases of rape resulting in bodily injury, and rape resulting in the death of Australian hostess Carita Ridgway.

In the Blackman case, he was charged with kidnapping with intent to rape, attempted rape, and damaging and disposing of a body. He was not charged with murder or manslaughter, however, due to lack of evidence.

Prosecutors demanded a life term.

Presiding Judge Hiroshi Kadono said that while the court couldn't find direct evidence that Obara raped Blackman, there was enough circumstantial evidence to conclude he abducted the 21-year-old from her

residence in Shibuya Ward with the intention of drugging and raping her in July 2000.

The court also said that there was enough evidence to believe that Blackman died for some reason after Obara drugged her in his condominium in Zushi, Kanagawa Prefecture, and that he dismembered her with a chain saw and buried her body parts in a cave near another condo he owned on the Miura coastline.

But the court said it was unable to determine exactly where Obara dismembered her corpse, except that it was in the vicinity of his condo.

The court also rejected Obara's appeal in the Ridgway case and determined her death was caused by the chloroform Obara forced her to inhale, which caused her to die from fulminant hepatitis in 1992.

Afterward, Ridgway's family issued a statement saying they welcomed the ruling.

"It is hoped that this finally brings an end to a process that began over eight years ago. The process has been prolonged because Obara refused to accept his guilt and has had access to significant financial resources which he used to fund his attempts to escape justice," they said.

In April 2007, the Tokyo District Court sentenced Obara to life in prison for a string of nine rapes between 1992 and 2000, including Ridgway's.

But the court acquitted him of all charges in the Blackman case, ruling that the circumstantial evidence linking him to her dismemberment and burial was not convincing enough to link him directly to her death.

Although the evidence included some 200 videotapes showing Obara engaging in sexual acts with his victims, Blackman was not among them, and the court said other evidence could not prove Obara was involved in any way with Blackman.

During appeal sessions that began in March, prosecutors said there was sufficient evidence

showing Obara was involved in the Briton's death.

Blackman's dismembered corpse was found in February 2001 in a Miura cave near one of his condos. The prosecution argued that Obara raped her at his Zushi condo several kilometers away.

Prosecutors said he bought a chain saw shortly after the ex-British Airways flight attendant vanished in July 2000.

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