Stuntwoman Sues News Corp. over Alleged Phone Hack

Linda Deutsch, AP Special Correspondent

A woman who worked as a stunt double for Angelina Jolie sued Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. in Los Angeles on Tuesday, claiming she's a victim of a phone hacking scheme to obtain information about the actress.

Eunice Huthart, of Liverpool, England, is the first person to sue the media company in the U.S.

Her New York attorney, Norman Siegel, said, "This is the beginning and we're going to go one step at a time." He said the suit speaks for itself on the reasons it was filed in Los Angeles. It claimed Huthart's phone was hacked while she was working with Jolie on Hollywood films including "Mr. & Mrs. Smith."

She said that was how the Sun newspaper learned that Jolie and Brad Pitt were "an item." A News Corp. spokesman declined to comment.

Huthart, who became a close friend of Jolie and is the godmother to her first biological child, said she was unaware that she was a victim of the phone hackers until British police came to see her last year.

She said the intrusion which removed messages from her cellphone caused distress in her family life and caused her to miss calls from Jolie.

The lawsuit cited numerous references to the United Kingdom phone hacking scandal involving News Corp. companies and claims numerous grounds for damages. A monetary figure was not specified, but it asked that the companies be assessed damages based on the profits they made from the stories on Jolie. It also seeks punitive damages.

The lawsuit also names as defendants News Corp. entities News International Ltd. and News Group Newspapers Ltd., and unidentified private investigators and journalists.

The case is the first hacking-related lawsuit against News Corp. in the U.S. and is the culmination of a lengthy search for a plaintiff who would take on the company in a U.S. court room.

Siegel, Huthart's lead lawyer, has been on the hunt for evidence of News Corp. hacking on U.S. soil since the scandal broke in July 2011. Siegel, who has represented Sept. 11 victims' families in civil cases, sent a letter nearly two years ago to the FBI demanding an inquiry into whether 9/11 victims' phones had been hacked by News Corp. journalists.

Siegel was later retained by British attorney Mark Lewis, who has represented hacking victims in the U.K.

Since the scandal broke in the summer of 2011, News Corp. has spent $388 million in settlements, legal fees, and other costs associated with ongoing investigations in the U.K. Last year, the company settled 36 lawsuits by hacking victims including actor Jude Law and soccer player Ashley Cole.

The federal suit claims Huthart began missing telephone messages in 2004 from family, friends and others, causing damage to relationships with her daughter and husband. She said her husband began to think she was having an affair because she didn't answer her voicemail messages.

She said she was particularly distressed over failing to receive messages from her young daughter who "called several times to report that she was being bullied in school in Liverpool, England," the suit said.

"Plaintiff did not receive those messages and could not console her daughter," said the suit, adding that Huthart "was despondent and believed she had failed as a parent."

During the filming of "Mr. & Mrs. Smith," Huthart said she lived at a home in the Brentwood area of Los Angeles with Jolie and her assistant and they became close friends. On occasion, she said Jolie would leave her messages with code names for hotels and individuals and details of times they would be meeting. The suit said she often did not get Jolie's messages because they were being intercepted by investigator Glenn Mulcaire and his alleged co- conspirators. Mulcaire was imprisoned for six months in 2007 for hacking phones on behalf of the now defunct News of The World.

The suit said that it was through hacking the stunt double's phone that the Sun newspaper learned that Pitt and Jolie were "an item."

The paper reported it had exclusively learned that the couple checked into a hotel posing as a married couple while plugging their movie.

Once, Huthart said she missed a message from Jolie confiding that she was registered at a hotel under the name "Pocohontas," and Huthart had trouble locating her.

The latest case comes at a sensitive time for the media giant controlled by Rupert Murdoch, which will spin off its publishing and newspaper arm from its more profitable TV and movie unit by the end of the month. On Friday, Murdoch also filed for divorce from his wife since 1999, Wendi Deng Murdoch.

News Corp. has said that the stronger entertainment side of the company, to be called 21st Century Fox, will bear any further legal costs or civil claims related to hacking after the split, while the publishing company, to retain the name News

Corp., will be liable for any criminal penalties if they arise.

21st Century Fox would also be responsible for any civil settlement involving a U.S. law that aims to prevent bribery overseas called the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

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AP Business Writer Ryan Nakashima contributed to this report

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