

Phone Threatener let off the hook

Dave Racher Daily News

Robert Staats, 39, is off the hook for allegedly making telephone death threats against Mayor Rendell last March. Staats, of Pine Street near 20th beat his terroristic-threats case without even trying yesterday. "They didn't bring him to trial within the required time period, so the judge dismissed the case" said defense lawyer A. Charles Peruto Jr.

Peruto, who was prepared to contend that Staats was "joking" when he made the calls to 911, and later to Channel 10, won his motion after the prosecution reported that a key witness was ill, and asked for a postponement.

After the defense lawyer noted that he had been prepared to try the case on two prior isitings, Common Pleas Judge Renee Cardwell Hughes granted the speedy trial motion. Staats, who was convicted of the threats and placed on probation at a Municipal Court trial in June and then granted an automatic new trial, "was jubilant" after Hughes made her ruling, said Peruto. He said the prosecution should have brought Staats to trial within 120 days of the appeal, and "now they have just run out of time."

According to court records, Staats called a 911 operator on March 16, 1997, and asked what time Rendell would be in, "so I can shoot him" the operator taped the call. After police arrested Staats, he made bail, and on March 19, telephoned Channel 10 and said "The idiots gave me bail, and now they'll be sorry. Now I'm really going to hurt Rendell."

Staats was then re-arrested and held in Jail under \$100,000 bail. Peruto convinced a judge to let Staats sign his own bond and be freed. Peruto said Staats was sorry for his action and "has seen the error of his ways"