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Armando Zapien, 38, a decorated former Marine and Vietnam veteran called a "killing machine" by prosecutor, who was found innocent on four felony counts of threatening police officers.

Jury Dismisses 'Killing Machine' Label

Man Innocent in Threats on Police

By SAM ENRIQUEZ, Times Staff Writer

A Sun Valley man, whom a prosecutor described as a "killing machine," was found not guilty Thursday of threatening to kill three Los Angeles police officers.

Armando Zapien, 38, was acquitted by a jury on four felony counts of threatening police officers after a six-day trial before San Fernando Superior Court Judge Ronald S. W. Lew. The rarely filed charges each carry a maximum penalty of three years in state prison upon conviction.

Zapien, a former Marine and Vietnam veteran, was accused of threatening on Feb. 27 and March 2 to kill police officers while he was in custody at the North Hollywood Division police station.

Zapien, who had been held in County Jail on \$1.5-million bail since his arrest, is a decorated war veteran whose record shows that "he is a trained killer without any kind of human feeling or moral judgment," Deputy Dist. Atty. Rosalie L. Morton said. During court appearances Zapien was shackled and extra court bailiffs were assigned to guard him.

Peter Williamson, Zapien's at-

torney, told jurors that there was no evidence to show that his client "was a cold-blooded killer."

Outside of court, Williamson said that it was ironic that Zapien's prowess as a Marine sharpshooter during a 1969 tour of Vietnam had prompted the unusually high bail and extra security precautions.

'Using It Against Him'

"They take a guy, a decorated war hero who did his duty extremely well and now we're turning it around and using it against him," Williamson said.

Zapien, who was apparently angered by a police officer who had attempted to serve a subpoena at his home, allegedly telephoned the North Hollywood station Feb. 27 and threatened to kill any police who came to his house, officers testified during the six-day trial. He allegedly fired several gunshots while speaking on the telephone, according to Detective Angela Morris.

Zapien told Morris that he was "practicing to kill a policeman," Morris testified.

Morris, who testified that she

had known Zapien before the incident, told jurors she was afraid that Zapien would carry out his threat to kill her and other police officers.

Police eventually surrounded Zapien's home and arrested him without incident several hours after the initial phone call.

A .22-caliber rifle, bullets and spent shells were later found at Zapien's home, police testified.

After his arrest, Zapien allegedly threatened to kill Morris and two other police officers while he was in custody at the North Hollywood station, officers testified.

Jurors said after the trial that they believed that Zapien made the threats to police but it was not proven that he intended to either interfere with or influence police with the threats.

For conviction, the accused must be found to have made the threats with the intent to influence police activities and that police believed that the threats could be carried out, Morton said.

"The main issue was that they could not prove his intent," said juror Paul Mangone, 31, of Chatsworth.