Beat: News

I-65 Killer Identified 30 Years After Murders

Cold Cases Solved

Columbus, Ohio, 06.04.2022, 13:43 Time

USPA NEWS - A composite police sketch of the I-65 killer was made based on the description of a Columbus Days Inn clerk who survived an attack on Jan. 2, 1990. The suspect was identified Tuesday as Harry Edward Greenwell, who died in 2013.

The “I-65 Killer,” who raped and fatally shot three women in Indiana and Kentucky as well as robbing and sexually assaulting a Columbus woman who survived his knife-point attack to provide critical evidence, was identified Tuesday after decades as a cold case. Indiana State Police said Harry Edward Greenwell, who died in New Albin, Iowa at age 68 on Jan. 31, 2013, was positively identified through DNA evidence and investigative genealogy as the attacker who also was known as “The Days Inn Killer.” Authorities said Greenwell had a long criminal history before he died from cancer.

The breakthrough was announced at a press conference Tuesday at the Indianapolis State Police post in Indianapolis. Numerous family members of the victims, Jeanne Gilbert and Mary “Peggy” Gill of Indiana, and Vicki Heath of Kentucky, attended the news conference. “This animal no longer walks the earth,” ISP Superintendent Doug Carter said, telling victims’ family members he wouldn’t mention the killer’s name out of respect for them. Carter said the scientific and investigative developments in the I-65 killer case, named as such because the victims were hotel clerks along I-65 in Indiana and Kentucky, would herald a new day in investigations by law enforcement.

While the announcement cleared the Indiana and Kentucky cases, state police said that since I-65 goes from Gary, Indiana to Mobile, Alabama, investigation continues into murders, rapes, robberies and assaults that have occurred along the I-65 corridor to determine if any of them are connected to Greenwell. The process of identifying Greenwell as the suspect “involved uploading a crime scene DNA profile to one or more genetic genealogy databases in an attempt to identify a criminal offender’s genetic relatives and locate the offender within their family tree. Utilizing this process, a match was made to Greenwell with a close family member,” with a 99.9999% match.

The message for criminals, Carter said, is “You might be able to hide for a while, but we’re going to find you, even if you’re not here.” For family of victims, Gilbert’s daughter, Kim Gilbert Wright, who is now an attorney, said the news offered an opportunity for healing, though she said those touched by Greenwell’s crimes will heal in different ways. “I remember her last words,” Gilbert Wright said of her mother. “…’I love you, I’ll see you tomorrow.’ I didn’t see her that tomorrow, but I see her every day.”

State police said Greenwell targeted women who worked behind the front desks of motels during the overnight shift. The three women whose rapes and murders he is linked to worked as night auditors at motels along I-65, as did his victim in Columbus. The Columbus victim, who Greenwell attacked on Jan. 2, 1990, provided police a description that ultimately became the face on wanted posters. The suspect’s DNA collected after his attack in Columbus, along with ballistics evidence, also connected him as the suspect behind the killings of Gilbert, Gill and Heath.

Columbus Police Dept. Lt. Matt Harris, who spoke at the press conference in Indianapolis, said the local victim has remained in touch with investigators over the course of more than 32 years in which the investigation continued. The Columbus victim was robbed at knife-point and raped at the Days Inn just off Interstate 65 on Jonathon Moore Pike in Columbus, and the crime closely resembled Greenwell’s fatal attacks. The assault happened nine months after Gilbert and Gill, working at separate motels in northwestern Indiana, had been raped and murdered within hours of each other in March 1989.

The cases remained unsolved until Tuesday, despite the persistence of victims’ family members and law enforcement at the local, state and federal level in seeking justice. After the police sketch based on the Columbus victim’s description appeared in The Republic and newspapers around the state and country, similar crimes ceased.

Heath, 41, of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, about 115 miles south of Columbus, was the I-65 killer’s first victim in February 1987. A guest of the Super 8 motel where she worked awoke to discover the lobby in disarray and what appeared to be evidence of a fight. The phone had been ripped from the wall, and Heath was reported missing. Police soon found Heath’s body behind a dumpster near the

motel. Investigators determined she had been sexually assaulted and shot twice in the head with a .38 caliber handgun.

A little more than two years later and 300 miles north of the Elizabethtown, Kentucky crime scene along I-65, Greenwell struck again. Gill, 24, who worked at the Merrillville Days Inn, also was raped and shot twice in the head, this time with a .22 caliber handgun. A few hours later and about 50 miles south, Gilbert, 34, who worked at the Days Inn in Remington, was assaulted and then shot with the same gun. Investigators say each case followed a similar pattern: The suspect robbed the motel cash drawer at gunpoint before violently assaulting each victim, then killing them and leaving their bodies outside.

Nine months after the double-killings in northwestern Indiana, a white, bearded man described as about 35 to 45 years old, 6 feet tall and weighing about 180 pounds, wearing blue jeans, a plaid flannel shirt and a stocking cap arrived before 5 a.m. at the Days Inn on Jonathan Moore Pike, Columbus. On a freezing morning in January 1990, he stopped in and asked the woman behind the desk where he could get something to eat at that hour. After the woman offered some suggestions, the man left saying he'd return shortly. He came back a few minutes later holding a Styrofoam cup full of coffee and asked for some change for vending machines, according to reporting in The Republic.

"When she opened the cash register, the man threw coffee in her face and jumped across the desk. He drew a 6-inch knife with a brown handle and told her to give him all of the money," police said at the time. After assaulting the victim, he led her outside, and she told police she believed he was going to kill her. She walked behind the motel, hearing her attacker's footsteps behind her, until she fell through a thin layer of ice in a ditch into freezing shallow water. "The woman continued walking up a hill where she found a house trailer, about one-quarter mile from the motel," according to the police report. "She pounded on the door and a woman answered. The victim was given shelter. City police were called immediately, about 5:55 a.m." The victim was treated and released from the hospital.

Harris and Sgt. Glen Fifield, public information officer for the ISP Lowell District, said evidence the Columbus victim provided was critical in piecing together the details that ultimately led to the positive identification of Greenwell. She was "the only known victim to survive the vicious, brutal attacks of this killer," Fifield said. She also provided a detailed description of the suspect, which was crucial to the investigation, state police said. Meanwhile, police said the evidence gathered in the investigation of the deaths of Gill, Gilbert and Heath, as well as the attack on the Columbus victim, is being looked at for possible connections to at least one other cold case. Police said there could be others.

Authorities said the case marked a cooperative approach between police departments in Columbus, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, Merrillville, Jasper County, Indiana State Police and the FBI. "These cases did not go unsolved all these years because of a lack of investigative inactivity — investigators continuously tracked leads across the country and did everything they could to identify the person responsible for these crimes," FBI Indianapolis Special Agent in Charge Herbert J. Stapleton said. "Now, through technological advances and strong, collaborative partnerships we were able to identify this person and, hopefully, start to bring closure and healing to the families of Vicki, Peggy and Jeanne; as well as the surviving victim."

ISP officers removed reporters before the scheduled start of the press conference Tuesday to give families of the victims an opportunity to address them privately. Fifield said this would be the families' only opportunity to do so as a group at the conclusion of the investigation. Family members met privately with law enforcement officers for about 10 minutes before Greenwell was publicly identified.

Thank you for reading my article. These are merely my thoughts and insights based on the facts. I use only verified sources. No fake news here. I write about a variety of subjects, mainly things I want to research and know more about. You can check out my website – Small Village Life at smallvillagelife.com, where I share useful articles and news.

Wendy writes for the United States Press Agency and is a former columnist with the Fulton County Expositor, Wauseon, Ohio.

Source: Columbus Dispatch

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20381/i-65-killer-identified-30-years-after-murders.html

Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Wendy Westhoven, based in Hungary

Exemption from liability:
The publisher shall assume no liability for the accuracy or completeness of the published report and is merely providing space for the submission of and access to third-party content. Liability for the content of a report lies solely with the author of such report. Wendy Westhoven, based in Hungary

Editorial program service of General News Agency:
UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619