West Virginia Murder, Unsolved

Brutal Murder of Redhead Near Maryland Line One of State's Most Baffling Unsolved Crimes

By James A. Hill (Staff Writer for The Gazette)

BERKELEY SPRINGS .- Late in the afternoon of May 10, 1950, Benjamin J. Mills of nearby Hancock, Md., worked his way slowly along t he West Virginia side of old U.S. 522 searching for mushrooms.

As he approached the south end of the Hancock bridge on the Maryland border about 4 p. m., he stumbled onto a gruesome find.

Lying in the sparse grass about 42 feet from the top of the west bank of the highway was the twisted body of a nude woman.

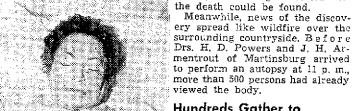
For a few fleeting seconds the 45-year-old laborer stared fearfully at the contorted face, swollen purplish in death, then headed for the Hancock police station about three-tenths of a mile away.

A half hour later the state police radio at Romney sent Cpl. C. S. Burke of Berkeley Springs hurrying to the scene from where he cruised in his patrol car a few miles away. Burke, who was to find himself in the middle of one of the most

baffling crimes in West Virginia history, arrived about the same time as Morgan County Sheriff's Deputy Lawrence Michael and Also on hand was Maryland State Trooper R. E. Garvey, Police Chief Murphen of Hancock and the shaken mushroom hunter who

made the discovery. After the body was taken to Hunter mortuary in Berkeley Springs,

police hastily scoured the area for any tell-tale evidence. For more than two hours the area was combed for a two-mile



Hundreds Gather to View Body

Several hundred others gathered outside the mortuary along with newspaper reporters from nearby communities.

As quickly as possible a detailed

radius, but nothing connected with

description of the body was re-

It was described as that of an unknown white female; 30 to 35 years of age; height five feet, five inches; weight 125 to 130 pounds; auburn red hair; recent permanent; color of eyes not known; nationality not known; complexion fair, freckles on back

Her lips sealed by a strangler's of hands and lower arms; very small hands; shoe size 4 1-2 nar row; teeth natural; "Y" shaped scar on outside of right wrist; "W" shaped scar on center of forehead: two operation scars, one a 10-inch hysterectomy and the other

a four-inch appedectomy. The scars were later to weave a strange coincidence that mystifies police and medical authorities to this day.

Four hours later at 3 a. m. on May 11, the two doctors finished the autopsy and reported their findings to Burke. Their conclusions

"Evidence obtained from this examination would indicate death occurred from strangulation. It would appear that the strangulation had resulted from a rope or some similar object baving been drawn about the base of the neck in such a manner as to cause deep abrasions. The abrasions over the nose and forehead, and the bruised areas under the scalp over the temporal muscles and above the eyes would indicate the head had been struck numerous blows with

Many False Identifications

The two further concluded that the woman had been dead from 48 to 96 hours when the body was found.

Even before doctors sank the first probing scalpels into the less flesh, the first of many identifications which were later proven false was made,

Two women, one a Mrs. Ella Casler, a Berkeley Springs rooming house operator, declared the body was that of a woman whom we shall call "Millie Jones." The other woman, a sister of Millie's husband, also declared the

body was that of Millie, who had roomed with Mrs. Casler the summer before. At noon that day Burke and Sheriff Paul Munson went to the home of Millie's father-in-law and questioned him about the where-

abouts of his son, The man said his son lived at Cumberland, Md., and was working on a construction job there. From there Burke and Munson left for Cumberland and were joined at LeVale, Md., by Troopers Baker and

Long of the Maryland State police. The four searched Cumberland rooming houses throughout the night, finally locating their quarry about 5 a.m. He was brought to Berkeley Springs, where he viewed the body and declared it was not his wife. He pointed out that Millie had a partial plate and the victim had none. This was conformed by a Berkeley Springs dentist. Millie was located a short time later living in Pittsburgh, Pa.

FBI Files Fail to Yield Clue

Later in the day the weary state police corporal and Munson left Berkeley Springs enroute to FBI headquarters in Washington, D. C., for a comparison of fingerprints of the victim. They were joined at Frederick, Md., by Trooper First Class Harold Basore, who was assigned to assist West Virginia authorities on the case. They returned at 10 p. m. that night after finding no prints on file for the woman. Arriving home, Burke and Munson learned that a car stolen a few days earlier in Brownsville, Pa., had been recovered in Washington County, Md. Inside was found considerable auburn red hair on a pair of old work gloves sticking from the pocket of an old overall jacket. Several strands of the hair were found on the seat and the right front door. The vehicle was pulled into a garage at Sharpsburg, Md., where the interior was preserved until police arrived to examine the contents.

Sensing a possible break in the two-day old mystery, Burke, Basore, Garvey and Sgt. Roush hurried to the scene. Arriving at 3 a. m. on May 12, they also found a small rope and a dress picked up nearby on the Sharpsburg Pike.

hours later Burke, Munson and Basore were speeding again to FBI headquarters in Washington with their find. They discovered the red hair was human, but did not match the locks of the victim, No markings were found on the dress, but it was found to be a size 16. The officers returned to Berkeley Springs, where the dress

was found to fit the victim perfectly.

By this time the story of the discovery of the unidentified body had been carried on the front pages of papers all over the eastern United States. Letters radio messages, teletypes and phone calls swamped the Berkeley Springs state police detachment from all over the

The State Police Criminal Identification Bureau in Charleston prepared picture bulletins and flyers which were sent out to all of the major cities.

Prison Escapee Believed Involved

On May 13 police received another tip that sent them to Hagerstown, Md., to check the possible connection of a hunted prison escapee with the strangulation.

The escapee was John Raymond Shriver, a convicted murderer, who fled from the state penitentiary at Moundsville on May 4. Shriver was believed to have stolen a car in Wheeling, abandoned it in Brownsville, stealing another vehicle there. He had escaped from the prison once several years before and was shot by a Maryland state trooper.

From Hagerstown, Burke, Munson and Basore went to Sharpsburg and on to Boonsboro, where the father of Shriver was questioned. Most of the summer homes along Shenandoah River were searched without success.

On May 13, Sgt. G. E. Funk, Cpl. Lammy and Trooper Bender of the McConnellsburg, Pa., detachment were assigned to the case to help

run down clues in the Fulton County area.

The same duy the hody was placed in cold storage at Newton D. Baker Veterans, Hospital in nearby Martinsburg. By this time more than 2.000 persons from more than eight states had viewed the body.

searching for missing relatives and friends. Teen on Sunday, May 14, Burks and Basons received a tip that a driver for the Blue Grey Bus Lines had some information about the red-neaded wonlan,

\$100 Reward Offered by Gazette For Arrest, Conviction of Killer

The Gazette is offering \$100 reward to the first person who provides police with aid and information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for any of the murders described in this series.

The names of any person corresponding with this paper or police in connection with the crimes will be kept strictly confidential and will not be divulged under any circum-



Potters grave

The five who mourned the unknown victim

Bus Driver Remembered Redhead

At midnight Burke and Basore met the driver, H. H. Grossnickle, in Hancock, where the driver said he had discharged a passenger early on the morning of May 5 who closely resembled the murder

Grossnickle said his red-haired passenger, carrying only a small overnight case, alighted from the bus with another lady who had a ticket to Hancock from Savage, Okla. The driver said he remembered the red-haired passenger had a ticket from Columbus, O., to Hancock, and recalled she asked him how to get to Needmore, Pa. The driver said he advised the woman to call a cab.

A short time later Grossnickle showed up at the veterans' hospital, where he declared the dead woman to be the same passenger he let off in Hencock. Basore also had retrieved the usd tickets from the Potomac-Edison bus station in Frederick and found the red-head had bought her ticket about midnight on May 4 from the Penn Greyhound bus station in Columbus.

Pictures and fingerprints were immediately forwarded to Columbus police along with the information from the bus driver. In Columbus alone, police reported that at least seven red-neads were being sought as missing persons, tumbling the case into an almost hopeless maze. It was about this time that harassed police were confronted with a woman who had arrived with a hearse from Baltimore to lay claim

First Real Suspect Picked Up

The woman, identified as a Mrs. Esther Bove, declared the body to be that of a Ruth Magruder, alias June Williams, born Dec. 7, 1902, on whom Mrs. Bova had carried insurance since Ruth disappeared in December of 1941, Mrs. Bova demanded the body in order to claim her insurance. Her demands, however, were not met.

On May 15 the first real suspech was apprehended in Morgantown, falling like a bombshell into the web of the tangled mystery. The man, whom we shall name Fred Jackson, a tall, good looking 160-pounder, was taken into custody by Cpl. Frank Roberts on a tip

The woman told police that Jackson had just returned from a trip to New Jersey, describing "a horrible sight that met his eyes on side road near Hancock on the morning of May 9," just a day before the mushroom hunter stumbled on his gruesome find.

She quoted Jackson that he became sleepy while driving during the night of May 8 and had pulled off on the side road to nap. On awakening the next day Jackson said he took a short walk and saw the nude body of a woman, all swollen and blue, lying on the side of a steep embankment. He added that he knew the woman was dead and became frightened and drove away.

Lie Detector Backs Up Story

Jackson was brought to Berkeley Springs on May 16 and placed in the Morgan County Jail. At midnight he was taken to detachment headquarters and grilled until 4 a. m. He then was taken to the scene of the discovery, where he admitted making the statement to his landlady. Jackson declared he had lied about the whole thing, that he made up the story "just to tell something exciting."

On May 17 he was taken to detachment headquarters at Elkins and given a polygraph (lie detector) test which showed no guilty reaction. Disappointed over their failure to connect Jackson with the crime, police released the suspect after his story was checked from the time he left New Jersey and acrived in Morgantown,

On May 22 the dead woman was tentatively identified for the second time as a "Martha Sunth," who had married the son of a Fulton County family and was supposedly living somewhere in Ohio. The same day Sheriff Munson and Trooper Basore went to Columbus to hunt Martha and to check with the agent who had sold the red-haired woman a ticket to Hancock. The agent positively identified a picture of the murder victim as the woman who had bought the ticket.

The search for Martha carried Munson and Besore from Columbus to Mansfield and to Akron. In Akron the mystery was thrown into further confusion when Martha was discovered alive.

A day later the unknown red-head was returned to Hunter mortuary in Berkeley Springs and that afternoon buried in a potter's grave in Greenway Cemetery.

Woman Knew Little of Passenger

At about the same time the other woman who alighted from the bus in Hancock the morning of May 5 was located in Hancock and identified as a Mrs. Mellot of Savage, Okla., who had come to Maryland to see her new grandson, Mrs. Mellot remembered her fellow passenger but could shed no light on her movements.

By this time, 13 days after the twisted corpse was found sprawled on the embankment, more than 235 inquiries were received and studied. 53 teletype messages handled by Maryland state police at Frederick for Berkeley Springs, including numerous radio messages and phone calls, police had traveled more than 2,000 miles and worked total of 500 man hours, winding up right back where they started the day of the discovery.

'Then on June 28 another clue dropped into the laps of police which eventually ended in the arrest of an entire family of 11. This came June 28 on a tip that the dead woman was a "Lillian

Grimes," common-law wife of a "Frank Basham" from Black Oak, in Fulton County, Pr. Frank was described as a member of an old and clannish family, notorious for their violent outbursts throughout the county. It was only 13 days before that one of the members of the clan shot and

killed his brother during an argument over some furniture and was awaiting trial in the Fulton County jail. Four days later, Burke, Sheriff Munson, Trooper Basore, Trooper Garvey and eight Pennsylvania state troopers met at the Pennsylvania-Maryland state line and swooped down on the village of Black Oak at dawn. Every member of the Basham family that could be found was arrested and taken to the county jail where they were

grilled throughout the day. While the family was being questioned, their homes were searched for possible evidence. When nothing was found the 11 were released

Young Cab Driver Offers a Lead

However, police learned that "Lillian" had visited the family party on the morning of May 6 and that she arrived in a taxicab from Hancock. Police also found that "Lillian" departed on the afternoon of May 8 in company with the brother who was later shot and killed. Two days later on July 4, police converged on the town of Hancock and took into custody the drivers of every taxicab in operation.

After a lengthy grilling, 22-year-old Lloyd Emons Munson admitted that he had picked up an unidentified red-head on the streets of Hancock about 1:50 a.m. May 5, taking her to Black Oak.

Munson claimed he had been reluctant to report the incident because he was afraid of the Basham family. Police later learned that the missing "Lillian" had a brother in Akron. The brother told Akron police that his sister was alive and well in Michigan.

The hopes of police were dashed when "Lillian" showed up in Berkeley Springs and identified herself. It was, she said, "Lillian" herself that had taken the cab from Hancock to Black Oak, thus establishing the identity of the unknown traveler from Columbus. One last and mystifying clue popped up on Jan. 10, 1951, which led police through a maze of events that still defies belief.

A young Berkeley Springs girl, whom we shall call "Jane Doe," approached Burke declaring she knew the dead woman to be a "Daisy Post," common-law wife of Jane's cousin.

Jane said Daisy and her cousin, whom we shall call "Harry Light," operated a beer joint at Colonial Beach in Prince George County, Vr.

Cleaning Fluid Drink Killed Brother

Jane said Daisy had once been married to Harry's brother, who died under mysterious circumstances several years before in Washington, D. C. She recalled that at the time Harry was a suspect in the death but was released after police determined that the brother had died from drinking cleaning fluid in a Washington laundry.

Jane declared further that Harry and his mother had arrived in Berkeley Springs on May 8, two days before the body was found, driving a jeep station wagon with a large steamer trunk roped on the top. She said they left on the afternoon of the 10th. She also said that a letter was received several weeks earlier by

Berkeley Springs Police Sgt. Brooks Dyche, naming "Daisy Post" as the dead woman. Burke later called Sgt. Dyche into his office where Dyche admitted he had received the letter from Colonial Beach police, adding that he had known the victim was "Daisy" all the time. Burke added

that Dyche described the woman as "a common old drunk who wouldn't be missed anyway." On Jan. 21, 1951, Burke and Sheriff Munson motored to Colonial Beach where they were told by city police that Harry and Daisy had operated a beer joint about two miles out of town but had

moved away a short time earlier.

The two then contacted Prince George County Sheriff J. S. Dishman of Ninde, Va., who said he had arrested Harry and Daisy several

man or Minge, va., who said he had already times and remembered them well.

Sheriff Dishman said all the residents around Colonial Beach were convinced the dead woman was Daisy, adding that the couple once was very popular but lost out when they started running around

with a rough crowd,
Dishman then sent the hopes of Burke and Munson soaring again
when he told of a jeep accident in which Daisy hurt her right wrist
and was admitted to a Richmond hospital.

'Daisy" Was the One, Agents Sure

The two West Virginia officers learned further that Daisy was being sought by a Richmond fuinance company for missing two payments on a jeep station wagon she had bought. The finance company said Daisy had always been prompt in her payments until she dropped out of sight the last of April.

At the same time Burke and Munson checked the Richmond hospital and the Medical College of Virginia where they were told that

pital and the Medical College of Virginia, where they were told that Daisy bore the same identical operation scars that were found on To Burke and Munson this information was almost positive proof

that the dead woman was Daisy, Hurrying back to Berkeley Springs Burke again contacted young "Miss Jane Doe," learning that Daisy had a brother and several sisters living in Cumberland,

On Jan. 23, Burke finally found the father of Daisy and her five sisters. All said the picture of the dead woman looked very much

All six were questioned extensively by Burke, Munson and Trooper

that a jeep station wagon was seen parked on the highay near Han-

cock a short time before the body as found.

The next day Burke, believing he was on the brink of solving the seven-month-old mystery, put in a cal lto Capt. B. E. Wright at

Elkins for more help in running down contacts in Washington, Richmond, Catonsville, Md., and Florida before their quarry be-came wise to the progress of the investigation.

On Jan. 26 Trooper Baker called Burke from Catonsville to meet him at aHncock. There Baker told Burke he discovered that Daisy and Sam had been employed in a mental institution at Catonsville and that Daisy had been fired in April for excessive drinking.

Baker said Daisy was authorized payment to May 15. She was not seen again after returning May 5 for a partial payment on her severance allowance. The Treoper said Sam was authorized payment until June 18, but left employment there on June 10.

19-Month Search Is Far From Ended

Baker also discovered that Sam had married a "Daisy Post" on May 5 in Elliot City, Md., and supposedly left the city for Florida on June 25

State Police Cpl. C. C. Burke He found himself in the middle ida on June 25. After arriving in Florida they

of one of West Virginia's most After arriving in Florida they wrote to a sister of Thompson's baffling murders. in Baltimore giving their address. On learning this Burke put a

rush call through to Miami police who reported the woman described as Thompson's wife was alive and well.

It was a heart-breaking turn for Burke and his hard working aides, driving them to the brink of exasperation.

However, still suspicious of the woman who bore the same scars

as the murder victim, declared as an almost impossible coincidence, Burke prevailed upon the sisters of Daisy once more for aid.

At his request a letter was sent to the Miami residence asking for a picture of Daisy. A short time later the picture was received, but of

a picture of Daisy. A short time later the picture was received, but of a woman lying on the beach with a towel over her head!

The gaping question remained. Was it really Daisy lying on that southern beach, or was it some other woman posing as the Cumbersouthern beach, or was it some other woman posing as the Cumber-land native to throw police off the trail? Or, was there any woman down there at all?

Although 19 months have now clapsed since the lonely mushroom

Atthough 19 months have now enapsed since the lonely mushroom hunter's discovery, police are far from ending the search. Burke, a 41-year-old native of Grafton, is convinced that some day he'll find the unknown hands that dumped the unidentified red-head from a car on that lonely road near Hancock

State Police Issue Appeal For Aid in Finding Killer

The following is an express ap- tle girl who laughed and played. peal from the West Virginia De- went to school, grew up, had partment of Public Safety for in- friends, worked and perhaps was formation leading to the identity married. There must be many perof the murdered redhead or the sons, perhaps hundreds, who knew unknown hands that throttled her: the woman who was brutally mur-"Somewhere approximately 30 dered, and thrown over the highyears ago a baby was born, a lit- way embankment.

"If only one of those persons read this story and communicates with the state police at Berkeley

Springs or to the State Police Criminal Identification Bureau in Charleston giving the desired information this case might be solved and a murderer brought to jus-Until someone comes forward

with this information, the case is likely to remain unsolved and every day and month and year that passes will further obscure the memory of this woman's life.

"Discovering and apprehending a murderer is a difficult job even for the most skilled and hard-working police officer. In the Berkeley Springs case police were up against a stone wall before they started, all their efforts and hard work have so far not accomplished the first step-the identity of the victim. Any further progress de-pends on the chance that some person will provide police with necessary information to establish her identity.

"Any person withholding such information must be struggling with a heavy conscience as it is the duty and responsibility of all law-abiding citizens to aid in the solution of any crime.
"It is to this end that if any

person has such information and is afraid to come forward over fear of the murderer, the police will, as they have done in many other cases, keep the matter strictly confidential. The name of the person will never be revealed no matter

what happens thereafter.'



Scene of discovery

Mushroom hunter stumbbled on a gruesome find

William F. Baker, who were told that Daisy had married a Sam Thompson and was now believed to be living in Miami, Fla.

The spirits of Burke and his aides were further fired when the sisters declared they had received several letters, signed Daisy and Sam, but none appeared to be Daisy's handwriting.

Pictures Bore Strong Resemblance

They also revealed that in one or two of the letters the name of her hometown. Cumberland, was misspelled along with the names of two of the sisters. Police also were shown family pictures of "Daisy." which Burke described as having a strong resemblance to the dead woman. Then on the night of Jan. 24, the father of "Jane Doe," and an uncle of Harry approached Burke and announced that the dead woman was "Daisy." Both men quoted two Berkeley Springs women

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