

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

A CASE STUDY OF FOUR SERIAL MURDERERS
TO PROFILE THEIR
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, CRIMES,
AND
METHODS OF OPERATION
FOR
LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

Violent crime in the United States grows each year. In 1987, 20,096 persons were killed, in 1988, 20,675. Thirty-three percent of the victims were unknown to the murderers. Not only is this trend on the increase, but a new type of criminal class is emerging, a serial murderer. In 1983 alone, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), approximately five thousand Americans of both sexes and all ages- fifteen people a day and fully twenty-five percent of all murder victims were struck down by murderers who did not know their victims. Some killed them for the sheer "high" of the experience. The FBI calls this class of homicides serial murders and their perpetrators recreational or lust killers. They are described as the most cunning and sinister of all violent people.¹

First, let's consider the difference between serial killers and mass murderers. Serial killers kill in a series of acts, slaying their victims on different occasions. They are accomplished killers and are present in everyday society with an air of normal acceptable behavior. They strike without warning in an episodic frenzy by carrying out their crimes not by a passion of the moment, but by compelling urges to kill and then to kill again. They connect their crimes by subsequent victims at their own wills and pleasure, and then lead a near normal life in

society until the next convenient stranger crosses their paths. Examples of serial killers include Randy Woodfield, John Wayne Gacy, Ted Bundy, Christopher Wilder, Richard Ramirez, Wayne Williams, Juan Corona, Henry Lee Lucas and Dean Corill. Mass murderers, on the other hand, are simultaneous killers; those who murder their victims at the same time or in one episode.² They will slaughter their victims in one enormous attack. Their characteristics include multiple killings with suddenness, ferocity and extensive overkill. Mass murderers have more psychotic neurological symptoms than serial killers and are almost always caught. Some examples include James Huberty, Richard Speck and Charles Witman.

Almost impossible to capture, diagnose, or predict using ordinary investigative methods, and perversely attracted to the police who are pursuing them, serial killers dance just beyond their pursuer's reach from state to state, retreating into the background, then spring up again in a different part of the country to begin another series of seemingly motiveless killings.³

The emergence of the serial murderer in today's society is different from murder in the past. In traditional cases, law enforcement seeks motives, intent, a traceable relationship between victim and murderer, anger, passion, or crimes committed for theft or robbery. The motives are clear and develop within the span of the criminal investigation.

Serial murderers are entirely different criminals. They are practiced, accomplished, and can exist in society as a normal functioning individual with acceptable behavior. Even the newly emerged serial murderers have been fantasizing for years about committing crimes.⁴ The victim may be missing for a long period of time before the crime is discovered, and multiple crimes may be spread over an entire region or even across the United States. This, in itself, will pose a tremendous manpower and jurisdictional problem for police investigations. Also, with this expanding crime form, management must be redefined for both crime scene, investigative, evidence processing and prosecution roles.

Cases in point include Ted Bundy, Richard Ramirez, John Wayne Gacy, Angelo Bona, Henry Lee Lucas, Otis Toole, Dean Corll, Elmer Wayne Henry, and Kenneth Bianchi.

Investigating some of these cases may take years. In some

instances, the cases are almost unsolvable, an example being the "Green River Killer" in Seattle, Washington suspected to have killed more than fifty-two women since the 1970's. This type of criminal is addicted to murder. They silently "troll" for their victims amid shopping malls, neighborhoods, city streets, county roads, or isolated rural communities. The serial killer will seek out, locate, corner, and trap his prey. He does not only commit the extreme act of homicide, but takes pleasure in terrorizing, tormenting, and torturing his victims until the end. Each crime is planned, well organized, and calculated for the most intense pleasure for the killer which includes eluding from the police. The serial murderer may also strike over a period of days, weeks, or years even in one place a case in point being John Wayne Gacy.⁵

Serial murder is different from any other type of crime. Law enforcement managers must recognize that traditional approaches to homicide investigation, limited resources, and jurisdictional boundaries, coupled with the very nature of the serial killer, will leave them several steps behind in the investigation.⁶

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since 1960, not only have the number of individual serial killers increased, but so have the number of victims per killer and the level of savagery of the individual crimes themselves. Of the 160 serial killers who have been captured or singled out by law enforcement authorities over this period, at least 120 were found in the United States.⁶ The hard truth is that serial killers are extremely skillful killers. They are unrestrained by either conscience or the law and they may slay dozens of human beings before their luck runs out and they commit a fatal blunder.⁷

The average law enforcement agency would find it quite difficult, if not impossible to investigate and bring to justice a killer of this type. Some time may pass before investigators realize that a series of seemingly unrelated homicides is actually the work of a single individual.⁸ Normal practices, including current medical and psychiatric diagnosis may be ineffective in determining responsibility in these cases.⁹

Law enforcement managers must plan to allocate extensive manpower, equipment, time and financial resources to solve a serial murder in their jurisdiction. Agencies involved in serial murder cases must form multijurisdictional task

forces and cooperate, coordinate, and communicate to solve each case. When a serial crime is recognized within a jurisdiction, a proactive, managed investigation must be set in motion. Failure to recognize and implement these and other new management strategies will lead to more victims and less containment of this growing societal problem.

Some of these case management approaches are described in the several serial killer case studies presented in the following section.

CASE STUDY I ... RANDALL BRENT WOODFIELD

Randall Brent Woodfield became known as the I-5 Killer in California because he cruised a Northwestern super highway and turned it into a trail of terror and murder. He was active between 1972-1981. Woodfield was a white male born in California to a middle class family and had three sisters. He was considered an all around young man and excelled in sports. In his early years, he grew to resent the dominance of his mother and older sisters. Woodfield felt humiliated when he was disciplined or chastised by women.

In junior high school, he began exposing himself to girls in his community. It was gratifying to him to see the frightened look on a women's or girl's face when they saw his genitals. He was caught a number of times by the local police, but Woodfield was sent home because he was a local athlete and an arrest would not look good on his record. Woodfield stated he was always attracted to large breasted girls. Woodfield never was able to establish a lasting relationship with girlfriends. In 1970, Woodfield's relationship with Sharon McNeill came to an end. It was a matter that he could not deal with and he broke into her apartment and vandalized it, and stole items that he had given her previously. Woodfield was arrested, charged and found not guilty of the crime. In 1972, he was found

guilty of indecent exposure and received a suspended sentence.

According to Ann Rule in her book, The I-5 Killer, he was recruited by the Green Bay Packers in 1973 and dropped from the roster that same season. The unofficial reason was between ten and twenty incidents of indecent exposure, pulling a knife on victims, and taking their purses. In 1975, he attacked an undercover female police officer and attempted to sexually assault her. He received a ten-year sentence for armed robbery. After a plea bargain, Woodfield was paroled in less than four years. He began robbing stores that had female clerks working in them and he forced his victims to undress, ejaculate him, and watched as he forced them to perform sex acts on themselves. With each incident, there was more force and added violence. His crimes stretched from the I-5 Freeway Corridor of Redding, California to Bellevue, Washington. During his active years, he was charged with 22 active cases from serial rapes to murder.

It was not until law enforcement agencies began to communicate with one another and discuss similar cases in their jurisdictions that Randy Woodfield became a suspect. Through a team investigation effort, dates, locations and telephone records placed him within the vicinity of the crimes. Scientific testing equipment was

utilized in identifying bullets, bullet fragments, blood samples, and semen and enzyme factors. Randall Brent Woodfield received life plus 99 years. He will be eligible for parole in 2031 at the age of 81. Detective Dave Kominek of Marian County, Oregon is credited with establishing the network of detectives working similar unsolved cases and bringing their talents to this investigation. He is also credited with establishing a model for solving future serial murder/rape cases.¹⁰

CASE STUDY II ... JOHN WAYNE GACY, JR.

John Wayne Gacy, Jr. was born in 1942. He wanted to truly be his father's son; always anxious to please, hungry for praise, but never quite good enough for his dad. He grew up in a love-hate relationship in which his father often employed corporal punishment to "teach" him. His home had a basement which his father forbade him from visiting. John later developed his own "secret spot" where he hid 33 bodies of his victims.

At age seven, he was disciplined for taking and hiding his mother's silk underwear. He also began to steal items, money, and even a car during his teen years. John Gacy, Jr. had the cleanest room on the block and was always well organized when he took on a project.¹¹ At the age of 16, John was already thinking about death. He felt he was different. At age twenty, Gacy worked in a mortuary, sleeping on a cot behind the embalming room, where he memorized the embalming process.¹² John Wayne Gacy Jr. enjoyed uniforms, colors, playing a cop, and lived to speed through traffic lights with lights flashing and siren blaring.

In 1968, he was arrested for the crime of sodomy. His leisure enjoyment consisted of buying beer for kids in the area and inviting them over to watch pornographic films

in his recreational basement.¹³ He was respected as a civic-minded citizen and in 1967, was even nominated as Man-of-the-Year in Springfield, Illinois at the age of 25. John Gacy trolled his local area looking for certain types of boys to fulfill his sexual appetite. He would promise the boys jobs, each for sexual favors, and even offered them fatherly warmth and understanding. Gacy would then overpower the victim with a blow to the head, bound them, sodomize, torture, and then kill them.¹⁴

John Wayne Gacy, who was a sickly and effeminate child and who was also abused as a child by his violent, alcoholic, and castrating father, struck at the genitalia of the boys he had trapped in his basement. While strangling them slowly, he recited the Twenty-third Psalm and urged them to be brave in the face of torture and death. It was not the immediate death of the young boys that Gacy sought, it was the prolonging of the process of death. Through this ritual Gacy sought to reassert his own vision of a masculine identity that had been squashed down by his father.¹⁵

John Wayne Gacy maintained strong control over his crime scenes as they were located in his basement and the bodies were buried in the crawl space of his home. Many of his boy victims were transient and his favorite hunting grounds were bus and train stations.

It was not until the end with the disappearance of a neighborhood boy and Gacy's missing young male employee

did the investigation point to him. The police utilized a search warrant, surveillance, and constant interviewing before Gacy admitted, "I've been a bad boy...I killed thirty people, give or take a few".¹⁶

The management of the police investigation was criticized in this case by the community. John Wayne Gacy tortured and murdered 33 young boys. Traditional investigative methods did not link up the missing boys, or even establish patterns between the cases. It was the odor coming from the crawl space and constant surveillance that broke the case involving John W. Gacy.

CASE HISTORY III ... TED BUNDY

Ted Bundy was convicted of brutally murdering two Florida women and a 12 year-old girl. He stalked the United States from 1974 to 1980. Bundy is further suspected of the murder of 33 women over four states and as such must be considered one of the most intelligent, organized and vicious serial murderers of this age. He came from a middle class family, was a law student, and was active in local politics. He was normal in appearance and blended in with a crowd, even being noted for his attractiveness and charm.

His trolling tactics included striking up conversations with his potential victims and asking their assistance. He was very selective in his victims displaying a boyish manner that charmed the female victims into believing they were helping a friendly stranger. He charmed the victims and courted them until he reached one of his "safe places"; often an isolated field where he bludgeoned his victims to death and bit into their flesh.¹⁷ Furthermore, he chose to dispose of the bodies with infinite care.

Bundy was never out of control until he struck. He was compelled by lust to have a momentary intense relationship

with his victim before he killed her and always appeared charming and ingratiating.¹⁸ Even so, Bundy could not closely relate to those around him and he was described by one of his girlfriends as having no empathy.

The Seattle Police cleared Ted Bundy from their suspect list in two earlier murder incidents.¹⁹ When it was reported that he was a possible serial murder suspect, the police noted that he had no prior arrests, was a college student, and was active in local politics. The police concluded that he was too normal and not likely to go on a murder spree.²⁰ Ted Bundy studied the police investigations and clearly did not want to get caught. Until his execution in January 1989, he refuted the charges against him, his conviction, and worked through the court system attempting to clear himself.

Prior to his arrest, Ted Bundy confronted the police and asked them about the progress of their investigation into a number of the murders he had committed. He followed both police and the news media changing his patterns and methods of operations to thwart the investigations.

When the Florida police authorities pulled him over and arrested him for giving a false name, they did not know they had a serial murderer until routine fingerprint and background checks linked Bundy to previous victim locations

and also determined he was an escapee from a previous murder case. The traditional follow-up homicide investigation did not work in bringing Ted Bundy to justice. The problems encountered in solving this case included a mobile suspect, multi-jurisdictions, long periods and distances between crime sprees and also the suspect's knowledge of the police investigations.

CASE STUDY IV ... CHRISTOPHER WILDER

Christopher Wilder was born in 1945 in Australia to a middle class family. At age 17, he was arrested for the rape of a teen-age girl. He was referred to psychiatric treatment which included electric shock. In 1977, he was again arrested for sexually molesting a 16 year-old girl. In December of 1982, Wilder was arrested for the rape of two fifteen-year-old girls and was also referred to a sex therapist. Wilder admitted in treatment that he had an obsession with the book, "The Collector", about a clerk who held a young female art student captive and forced her to pose for him. Wilder stated that he wanted to completely dominate and have power over women.²¹ He also confessed that he had fantasies in which he administered electric shock to women having sex with him.

Wilder was married once for eight days, but his life was basically that of a playboy millionaire. He was a successful contractor and raced cars living primarily in Florida. He lived a bachelor's fantasy life and was known as a playboy who loved women. Wilder posed as a fashion photographer to lure victims that he chose very carefully. Each victim of his six-week cross-country spree of rape, torture and murder was selected because they were young, vulnerable, and physically perfect.

Wilder has been referred to as the classic serial killer. He apparently needed more stimulation for arousal and satisfaction and used the elements of torture and sadism to develop a new erotic dimension.²² He trolled shopping malls, public areas and beaches to find his victims. Wilder lured them with money, or a job in the fashion industry, and captured them when he totally controlled the environment. In 47 days, he traveled from coast to coast and murdered eight women. In one three-week period, he drove 4,000 miles. Law enforcement officials stated he was a compulsive murderer who would go on killing until he was stopped.²³ Wilder was cornered at a service station in Colebrook, New Hampshire on April 13, 1984 and committed suicide with his own .357 magnum revolver. The criminal file of Christopher Wilder was over two inches thick. When the first victim, who Wilder knew, disappeared, the police did not contact him because he seemed to be the last person in the world to be a suspect.²⁴ As the leads pointed to Wilder, one of our nation's largest manhunts was launched by local, state and federal officers. Extensive use of the media was utilized to inform and warn the public and potential victims. Finally, an all-points-bulletin of the Wilder vehicle identified it and the driver.

Law enforcement responded as quickly as possible by using networking, communication and public information. Wilder was finally stopped, yet during his 47 day murder odyssey, he was extremely dangerous and made frequent victim contacts.

Without question, serial murderers continue to roam freely in our society today. The case studies of Randy Woodfield, John Wayne Gacy, Ted Bundy and Christopher Wilder are only four that law enforcement officials have identified and directly linked to a series of killings. Many others have been arrested including Henry Lee Lucas, Otis Toole, Gary Carlton, Juan Corona, Bobby Long, and Edmund Kemper. At this writing, the Green River Killer remains active with at least 52 victims. Some authorities suspect that the Zodiac Killer has again emerged after a dormant period to kill again. These serial murderers are only two who are active in the United States. Without question, law enforcement officials will continually face these problems and must adjust with the best proactive response to maximize the level of protection in United States communities.

New styles of management must be employed to track, catch and even predict the next move of serial killers such as Woodfield, Gacy, Bundy, and Wilder. New police managers must develop and utilize computerized communication systems.

There must be coordination between agencies and jurisdictions. Some of the major obstacles in investigating these cases included communication problems, priority problems, different styles of paperwork reporting, and the problem of keeping investigating departments informed on the progress of the cases. It was recommended by officers working these cases that multi-agency investigation task forces be organized and the use of computers be utilized in the investigation. Also, to stop a serial murderer, law enforcement must be pre-emptive; they have to be able to predict the killer's next move.

Finally, when evidence suggests the possibility of a serial killer, the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) should be utilized. It is described by its originator, Pierce Brooks, as a centralized data information center and crime analysis system designed to collect, collate and analyze all aspects of similar pattern multiple murders, on a nationwide basis, regardless of location or number of police agencies involved. Once operational, any police agency, having an unsolved murder involving mutilation or torture of victims or the disappearance of children, can submit a thorough description of the case to a central location at the FBI Academy. The department activates the system by using a 27-page questionnaire that contains 285 pieces of information including suspect description, modus operandi, and types of evidence. VICAP will then

alert the crime analyst to similar cases elsewhere. This program should raise the probability that separate jurisdictions will recognize a serial killer, and the quicker this recognition, the greater the chance of interdiction.²⁵

FUTURE IMPLEMENTATIONS
FOR
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT

Law Enforcement administrators must respond to the continuing problem of the serial murderer by modifying strategies to demonstrate flexibility when confronting the ever changing problem of individual serial killers. The following pages present general assumptions and case considerations important to the effective conduct of a serial murder investigation. By reviewing these suggestions and considerations, police officials should achieve greater success and a higher case clearance rate in investigations of this nature.

GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS
FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT
MANAGER IN DEALING WITH
THE SERIAL KILLER

- 1) They will often kill their victims slowly.
- 2) They may kill in one location and move body to another area.
- 3) Body dumping is often at a pre-chosen location:
there may be dismemberment and ritualistic spreading
of remains.
- 4) The serial killer may take a souvenir or "trophy" as
a physical reminder of his/her hunting-sport success.
- 5) Generally, there will be torture before death.
- 6) In execution-style killings, there may be a single
shot to the head or stab wound to the heart.
- 7) The organized serial killer will often manipulate the
crime scene to mislead or even taunt investigating
officers.
- 8) The serial killer may have no personal emotional depth,
be antisocial, have a low tolerance for boredom and
be a sexual experimenter.
- 9) During the killing phase, the serial murderer is often
completely out of control and totally violent.

- 10) Family violence, child abuse, sex abuse, substance abuse and other violent criminal activity are components of the serial murderer's syndroms.
- 11) They are not novice killers.
- 12) They are practiced and accomplished in violent activity.
- 13) The new serial killer has been fantasizing about the crime for a long period of time.
- 14) The victim may be missing for months or even years before being discovered.
- 15) Often there is only a random chance for encounters between police and serial killers.
- 16) There is often little or no relationship between the victim and serial killer.
- 17) Serial killers, while organized, are like wild animals and are frequently fascinated with their victims' remains.
- 18) They may cut out and keep news articles of their crimes, visit victim grave sites and even contact the police and inquire about the investigation.
- 19) Serial killers may have had prior contact with law enforcement, or even been subject to mental health referrals in their past.
- 20) Serial killers will troll, stalk, and choose their prey.

- 21) Established serial killers will seek new areas knowing the problems of law enforcement jurisdictional boundaries and the lack of networking by criminal justice agencies.
- 22) Serial killers often murder their victims at the rate of two or more a month, year after year, and may continue for decades.
- 23) Between crimes, serial killers slip back into society existing in plain sight from day to day. They often appear to be normal individuals who go to work or school, come home, and blend into their environments.²⁶
- 24) Serial killers are addicted to their passion; they suffer from a disease that is terminal. It seems that they cannot be rehabilitated anymore than the heroin addict can kick his habit.²⁷
- 25) The current pattern of serial killers suggests that they lead relatively normal lives while pursuing their homicidal compulsions.
- 26) Serial killers may choose their innocent prey merely because they possess certain physical features or because they happen to be in the murderer's "troll" area.
- 27) There is often an apparent lack of traditional motive such as robbery, theft, or victim-assailant relationship in serial killings.

**MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS
IN CONDUCTING
A SERIAL MURDER INVESTIGATION**

- 1) To effectively respond to serial murder problems, law enforcement must improve networking and expand task force investigations to better pool information.

- 2) Taking advantage of the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) is a most important investigative step in effective serial investigations.

- 3) The importance of a skilled, properly trained crime scene investigator cannot be over emphasized. The purpose of a crime scene investigation is largely to effect the complete reconstruction of events with respect to sequence, method of operation, motive, property stolen, and whatever else the criminal may have done. Secondly, officers at the scene work to recover clues that will serve as evidence against the suspect.²⁸ The crime scene includes not only the body recovery site, but also the murder site, victim contact area, the suspect's body, residence, and vehicle. High quality crime scene processing are required in serial murder cases to include hair, fiber, blood stain, and other trace evidence analysis and review of other case files that may relate to the current investigation.²⁹

4) The department management team should consider scientific analysis of evidence by DNA testing.

5) The management team should utilize a computer network system with prioritizing leads and cross referencing.

6) Supervisors should assign more than one or two officers to investigate cases of this nature. With several deaths, leads, pressures to make an arrest, time length of crime discovery, and general time restraints, officers may feel extreme stress and burnout can occur.

7) Consideration should be given to the formation and management of a multiple agency task force. This procedure will open channels of communication and improve the exchange of information.

8) Investigators should give the serial concept some thought in each murder case to promote early pattern recognition that a serial killer is operating in the jurisdiction or region.

9) Police administrators must recognize and accept the potential expenditure of resources including officers, equipment, time, scientific tests, travel, and communications to effectively conduct serial murder investigations.

END NOTES

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³ Norris, 17.

⁴ Ibid, 13.

⁵ Robert D. Keppol, Serial Murder (Cincinnati, Ohio: Anderson, 1989), 5.

⁶ Norris, 19.

⁷ Fox, 186.

⁸ Fox, 232.

⁹ Norris, 252.

¹⁰ Ann Rule, The I-5 Killer (New York: New American Library, 1988), 231.

¹¹ Tim Cahill, Buried Dreams (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 19.

¹² Ibid, 47.

¹³ Ibid, 60.

¹⁴ Norris, 15.

¹⁵ Ibid, 32.

¹⁶ Cahill, 272.

¹⁷ Norris, 30.

¹⁸ Ibid, 26.

¹⁹ Ibid, 34.

²⁰ Ibid, 81.

- 21 Bruce Gibney, The Beauty Queen Killer (New York: Windsor Publishing Corp., 1984), 53.
- 22 Fox, 59.
- 23 Gibney, 122.
- 24 Ibid, 26.
- 25 Fox, 183.
- 26 Norris, 20.
- 27 Ibid, 20.
- 28 Arne Svenson, Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing., 1981), 24.
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