

Investigators heat up 30-year-old cold case

Brad Baker's Dec. 31, 1980 murder draws scrutiny

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On a snowy New Year's Eve 30 years ago, two gunmen entered Brad Baker's house in The Plains and killed him.

Baker, 31, the manager of Kinloch Farm, died at 2:15 p.m., Jan. 1, from a gunshot wound to the head and another to the groin.

The Dec. 31, 1980, murder remains unsolved, but investigators with the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office believe they have enough evidence to soon begin moving the case to trial.

The case attracted the attention of national media. An extended 1983 Washingtonian Magazine article, "Blood and Money in the Hunt Country," spoke of money, privilege and a failed romance. The piece hinted at jilted lovers and hired killers.

Reality, however, may turn out to be far less sexy.

"The Washingtonian had a fascinating article, made for a good story," said James Hartman, Criminal Investigation Division lieutenant at the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office. "But it wasn't anywhere close to what happened."

Snow, broken glass, blood

Snow fell all afternoon and into the evening on New Year's Eve 1980. Baker made plans to go to a party that night with a female friend, Dr. Linda Davies. She called Baker's home, located just outside the security perimeter of the well-guarded Kinloch Farm, at about 7:30 p.m. to tell him she would pick him up around 9 p.m. She called from the nearby home of Dr. Jonathan Shurberg, where she was helping with party preparations.

Shortly after 9, Davies

pulled into Baker's snow-covered driveway, walked onto the porch and saw the front door open. Entering the living room, she noticed broken glass on the floor.

She called for Baker. Receiving no answer, she walked across to the bedroom, where she found the farm manager laying on his back, gasping for breath with a gunshot wound to the head.

Panicked, Davies drove back to the Shurbergs'. She and Dr. Shurberg returned to Baker's, called the rescue squad, and the mortally wounded man was flown to Washington Hospital Center, where he died the following afternoon.

Initially, investigators suspected a revenge killing. "Based on the evidence we have, it looks like a grudge killing of some kind," said Sheriff Luther Cox in a 1981 *Fauquier Democrat* article. "It's the kind of thing a jealous husband might do."

By 1983, attention turned to a more bizarre theory, that Baker had been murdered by professional killers, and the shot to the groin was a red herring meant to muddy the investigation. In another strange turn, investigators sought the help of a psychic.

Investigation renewed

Robert Wilcox, a major in the Sheriff's Office, said when Sheriff Charlie Ray Fox came aboard in 2004, he assembled a team of investigators in the Criminal Investigation Division to re-exam the evidence in several cold cases, including the Baker killing.

The team reviewed dozens of interviews initially conducted in the case three decades ago. "This is a case that we have devoted hundreds and hundreds



Photo by Adam Baker

LOOKING FOR CLUES: Detective Todd Durica of the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office works through the hundreds of files, evidence and interviews gathered by investigators in the Brad Baker murder over the past three decades.

of hours to. We even devoted several detectives full time," Wilcox said.

Investigators again questioned witnesses and other persons of interest based on their original statements. Using new interview techniques, investigators walked their subjects through the events of Dec. 31, 1980, hoping to spark some new memory or recollection overlooked or not thought important 30 years ago.

"If you go back to all the articles, there were a lot of theories thrown out there," Wilcox said. "We have our theory, and we're working toward proving that."

They came to the case with

fresh eyes, letting the interviews and evidence provide the basis for a new theory of what happened that snowy winter night.

Though closed-mouthed on the motive for the killing, Wilcox believes there is enough evidence to establish probable cause. "We have some very good suspects. We feel we have a pretty strong case that will one day lead to an arrest," he said.

Hartman said, "We've spoken to the suspects, and they know that we're still working on this. I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't try to keep abreast of these stories."

Five shots fired

Fauquier County Detective Todd Durica mapped out a chronology of what investiga-



Photo courtesy Fauquier County Sheriff's Office

MURDER SCENE: Brad Baker was killed 30 years ago in this two-story farmhouse that was located on Kinloch Farm in The Plains. The house has since been torn down.

tors think happened prior to Davies' arrival.

Baker had just finished taking a shower when the assailants smashed the front door window panes, letting themselves into the two-story farm house. A startled Baker, wearing a sweatshirt and underwear, grabbed his 20-gauge shotgun and entered the living room.

The first intruder fired a single-barrel 20-gauge shotgun, missing Baker and hitting the door jamb behind him. Baker got off one blast in the opposite direction before a second shot hit him on the right side of the head, knocking him backward into the bedroom.

The killer then fired a second round into the groin of mortally wounded Baker. Another assailant fired two rounds from a .38 caliber handgun. One bullet ricocheted off the floor and became lodged in the ceiling, the other in the wall.

"He had just got out of the shower, grabs the shotgun, confronts them as they're coming through the door," Durica said. "Most everything happened right at the doorway for what he used as a bedroom."

The detective says the second assailant fired from outside the doorway, having never entered the living room. Both took off, leaving no tracks or fingerprints.

Making cold cases warm again

According to David Cordle, chief investigator with the Anne Arundel County, Md., State's

Attorney Office, memories dull with time, but people often recall long-forgotten details. "Once we've piqued their curiosity, people will start remembering things a couple of days later."

"All of a sudden, one little recollection that wasn't important back then could be important now," said Cordle, who is one of the founders of the Mid-Atlantic Cold Case Homicide Investigators Association.

He followed a tip about a man involved in a long-cold 1968 case. He tracked him down two years later. "When I finally found him, he looked at me and goes, 'I've been waiting for someone like you to come knock on my door,'" he said.

Relationships change. Couples divorce. People become remorseful. In the Baker case, two people have lived with the murder on their conscience for half a lifetime.

"There's always the thought that there's somebody out there who hasn't come forward, who after 30 years will read this and say, 'Oh my God, they're still looking into this,'" Hartman said.

Investigators say they're confident they know why Baker was killed and by whom. They say they have probable cause for an arrest, but they're not ready to try proving the case beyond a reasonable doubt to a jury.

"In a case like this, you only get one shot. It's either now or never, and we're not at that point just yet," Hartman said.

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