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ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

A Gold Coast Murder and the Importance of the Golden Hour

By Inspector Terry Goldsworthy, Queensland Police Service

First Contact

On Wednesday 7 June, 2006, I was woken by a telephone call at 3am. There had been a suspected murder in a unit at Neptune's Apartments in Margaret Street, Broadbeach, in Queensland.

The Queensland Fire Service had responded to a fire alarm at apartment 803 around 1.30am. On entering the apartment they found a woman lying on the bedroom floor. They took her out into the hallway and began CPR at which point they found she had multiple stab wounds. Ambulance officers arrived soon after and pronounced the woman deceased. The Criminal Investigation Branch of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) had also been notified and on my arrival I was met by my colleagues Detective Sergeant Rod Seaman and Detective Inspector Jim Keogh.

On Arrival – the Golden Hour

We immediately declared the resort complex a crime scene. Our initial inquiries identified the deceased as Ms So Ra Moon, a 32-year-old Korean national and sex worker.

As in any investigation the main priority quickly became a search for information. In this case, the apartments had a fully-operational recording video surveillance system which was to prove crucial to our investigation. On watching the footage we observed a man attending the resort just after midnight and then leaving at 1.24am. He was the only man to be observed entering or leaving the building. The video also showed the man making a phone call while waiting outside the front doors. It appeared that we had identified our prime suspect.

But, the offender had been thorough in attempting to conceal the murder and any evidence that may have linked him to the crime. To make matters worse, all the victim's mobile phones had been destroyed in the fire. Given that working girls invariably do not use their real names we had problems in identifying the victim's mobile phone numbers in our efforts to start building a time-line of contacts and possible suspects.

The initial crime scene processing began but was delayed due to the damage caused by the fire. As daylight approached



Murder victim So Ra Moon



Neptune's Apartments in Broadbeach, Queensland



Surveillance vision shows this male entering the Neptune's Apartment complex at 12:24am



The same male is recorded walking toward the entry/exit door of the premises at 1:20am

we sought assistance from the State Emergency Service and a search of the surrounding grounds was made in an attempt to find any evidence of the crime, in particular, a murder weapon. Unfortunately the search failed to reveal anything of any significance. A doorknock of the 7th, 8th and 9th floors revealed a number of witnesses from apartments either directly below or next to apartment 803 who had heard banging noises. One witness also heard a woman screaming for a number of seconds.

The next major issue arose when the sun came up and occupants of the apartment complex woke up and began to become active. Because the suspect had used both lifts in the apartment complex we had isolated them to preserve any evidence in them. As well as this the entire foyer and entry areas were sealed. A decision was made that all occupants of the apartments would need to vacate the building until the crime scenes had been processed. This involved moving hundreds of people, which was no mean feat. Luckily the apartments were part of a chain which happened to have another apartment block just down the road. Over the next few hours uniformed police doorknocked all the units and moved the occupants out via the fire escapes to avoid contaminating the crime scenes.

About the Author



Dr. Terry Goldsworthy is an Inspector with the Queensland Police Service with over 25 years' policing experience in Australia. He is currently working as an Assistant Professor at Bond University. He has served in general duties, watchhouse and traffic branch before moving to the Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB) in 1994. He spent eight years as a Detective Senior Sergeant in Gold Coast CIB where he was responsible for the management of major and high-volume crime. He is currently an Inspector at the Ethical Standards Command. Dr Goldsworthy has completed a Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Laws, Advanced Diploma of Investigative Practice and a Diploma of Policing. As a result of his law studies, Dr Goldsworthy was admitted to the bar in the Queensland and Federal Courts as a barrister in 1999. Dr Goldsworthy then completed a Master of Criminology at Bond University. He later completed his PhD focusing on the concept of evil and its relevance from a criminological and sociological viewpoint. In particular, Dr Goldsworthy looked at the link between evil and armed conflicts using the Waffen-SS as a case study. He is also employed as an adjunct teaching fellow at Bond University.

Dr Goldsworthy recently published his first book titled *Valhalla's Warriors*, which examines the genocidal actions of the SS in Russia during World War II. He has also contributed chapters to the tertiary textbooks *Forensic Criminology* and *Serial Crime*, published by Academic Press. He has also written a chapter to the general crime book *Crime on My Mind* published by New Holland Publishing.

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The Hunt for Information – first 24 Hours

Most investigations are a process of moving from a low information state to a high information state. Exploring lines of inquiry, identifying and sorting through information is essentially an exercise in information management and this murder investigation was no different. We needed to acquire information in order to build a plausible account of what had happened.

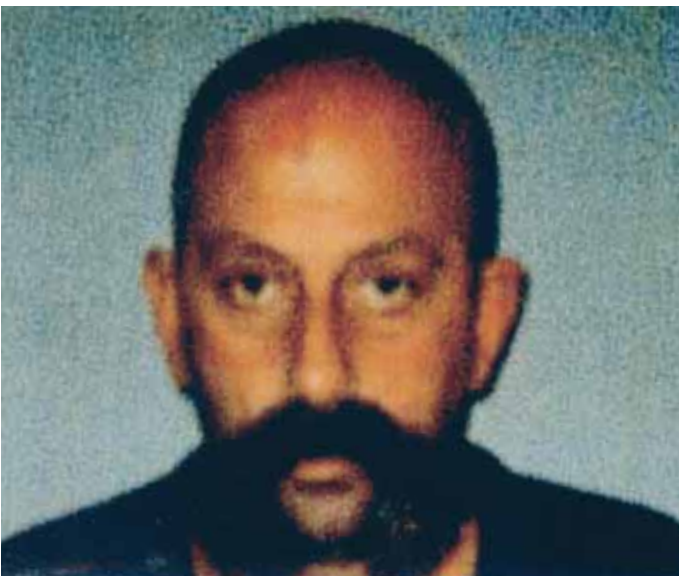
The video surveillance was our best lead yet, however, although we could watch it we were unable to download the footage. The building managers were concerned that if they tried to download the footage they may delete it and this evidence would have been lost to us. This is a not uncommon problem when dealing with the vast array of video systems now available. To this end I contacted the QPS Electronic Recording Section and arranged for assistance. A short time later, Neil Neilsen, a forensic recording analyst,



The suspect was captured on video inside a petrol station



Video surveillance of the petrol station frontage



2006 – 130424
PETER PAPAS

attended the scene and assisted in the retrieval of the video footage from the surveillance camera system at Neptune's Apartments.

The search for information went on and for this purpose I tasked various detectives to visit nearby locations to see if we could identify any movements of either the victim or the suspect that we had from the video footage.

I was later contacted by Plain Clothes Constable Michael Harris and he told me that he had detected the suspect on video surveillance at the Caltex service station on the Gold Coast highway at Broadbeach, just a few hundred metres away from the crime scene. I joined Constable Harris at the service station and watched the relevant section of the footage. I saw our suspect enter and leave the service station and I also observed a green Ford Falcon AU sedan. We already had the face of the suspect and now we could put him in a vehicle.

By this stage it was about 4.30pm. I returned to Burleigh Heads Police Station to continue to supervise investigative and intelligence functions. Inquiries were stymied to some degree by the inability to identify the phone numbers that had been used by the victim.

To address this we enlisted the help of Detective Sergeant Murray Pearce of the Prostitution Enforcement Task Force. Sergeant Pearce had an excellent knowledge of the working girls and the aliases they used. Using this knowledge he scanned the local newspaper, the Gold Coast Bulletin, and quickly identified the escort advertisement that the killer had used to find his victim. Checks with the paper led us to the newsagency where the advertisement orders were made and the store attendants identified So Ra Moon as the person who had placed the advertisements. On the basis of this identification we arranged for urgent call charge records on the two phone numbers listed in the advertisements. It was at this point that the invaluable assistance of a good intelligence officer came to the fore. In this case it was Kath Hall, an experienced intelligence officer, who began to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

The checks on the victim's phone came back with one phone call in particular that seemed to match the time the suspect was seen making a phone call at the front of the apartments. Checks on this revealed the subscriber details to be a person by the name of Pino Cahir of a Gold Coast street address. QPS computer checks for this name failed to match the subscriber details, however when checks on the address were completed it showed a 51-year-old man named Peter Papas living at this address. Papas also owned a green Ford Falcon AU sedan.

We obtained call charge records for the phone that we thought Papas was using. They showed a large amount of activity around the Neptune Apartments at the time of the victim's death. By this time we had been working for almost 24 hours straight, however there was now a fresh spring in our steps as the net began to close in on the murderer of So Ra Moon.

Closing In

Once the suspect and his vehicle had been identified our priority was to have this information utilised and disseminated. A district wide intelligence BOLF (be on the lookout for) was broadcast. This paid dividends a short time later when I was contacted by the communications office at Broadbeach about 10.30pm and told that information had been received from a member of the public that Papas had been seen trying to commit suicide by gassing

himself in his car in the Robina area. Police attended the scene where the suspect's vehicle had been seen but to our frustration we found that it was gone.

Nonetheless Detective Inspector Johnson of the Homicide Squad and I attended the Robina area on the lookout for a green Ford Falcon sedan. Our plan, if we couldn't find the car, was to attend the suspect's address and execute a search warrant. Our main priority was to get the suspect before he did any more harm. We had an urgent triangulation done on his phone and we knew that he was still in the Robina area.

The Arrest

Just after midnight on Thursday 8 June, Detective Inspector Johnson and I were driving past Dunstan Street, Robina, when I saw the suspect's green Ford Falcon sedan. I had to do a double take – I couldn't believe that we had actually found the car. Inspector Johnson then drove into Dunstan Street and parked directly alongside the suspect's vehicle.

As I got out of the front passenger side of the police car I could see what appeared to be two hoses running from the exhaust pipe into the rear driver's side window. I pulled the hoses out of the window and threw them onto the ground. I looked in the rear seat of the sedan and I could see Papas lying on the back seat. I tried to open the rear driver's side door but it was locked. The engine was still running.

I yelled "Police! Get out of the car!"

The Offender then looked directly at me and began to move into the front of the car. I recognised him as being the same person I had viewed on the video footage at Neptune's apartments and also at the Caltex service station. We had our man.

Papas managed to get into the front passenger seat and I had drawn my firearm. I tried several times to kick in the driver's window but was unsuccessful, with nothing to break the window I couldn't get into the car.

By that stage Papas was in the driver's seat and began to drive away. Inspector Johnson and I raced back to the police car and began a pursuit, calling VKR for urgent assistance. The suspect continued to drive until he turned into a cul de sac. He drove for a few hundred metres until he came to the end of the street. The suspect's vehicle was then nose to nose with the police vehicle and was boxed in.

I got out of the police car and went to the driver's front side of the suspect's vehicle and again drew my firearm. I identified myself as a police officer and directed the suspect to get out of the car. It seemed a long time that Papas and I stared at each other down the barrel of a GLOCK® and I still wonder to this day what he was thinking at that point in time. After what seemed like minutes (but in reality was probably only seconds) Papas complied with my directions, got out of the car and assumed a prone position on the ground (facedown).

Detective Inspector Johnson then secured Papas while I went back to the police vehicle and called for further police assistance.

I then returned to Papas and said, "You're under arrest for murder."

A short time later a number of other police arrived at the scene. Detective Sergeant Percival read Papas his rights and safeguards under the *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act*. I helped put Papas into the rear of a police vehicle and Detectives Percival,



Caption to come

White and I drove back to Burleigh Heads Police Station. I was sitting next to Papas in the back seat. Initially he was calm and answered questions that placed him at the murder scene but when the questioning got more pointed he suddenly became aggressive and refused to say anything more.

We arrived at Burleigh Heads Police Station around 12.40am. I took the suspect to an interview room with Detectives Percival and White but he declined to take part in a formal record of interview.

The Twisted Fantasies of a Murderer

Papas was then charged with murder and arson. Whilst in custody he spoke to his psychiatrist. A search warrant was later executed to obtain these records and they revealed Papas making full admissions to the psychiatrist about the murder and arson of So Ra Moon. They also revealed that Papas had previously fantasised about killing someone. In particular he outlined to his psychiatrist that he had thought about stabbing a prostitute to death and on a number of occasions had taken a knife with him when visiting prostitutes.

The Right One Turned Up

The notes provided a chilling, blow-by-blow account of the murder of So Ra Moon. Papas stated that he had picked the victim's name out of the paper, gone to her apartment and had sex with her. He then showered and asked her for a cigarette. He claimed that he opened the bedside drawer and saw a six-inch knife and then thought "I have to kill her". The victim came back into the bedroom



Caption to come



Caption to come



Caption to come



Caption to come

and he had hidden the knife under the pillow. He stated that he then began to stab her in the stomach a few times then grabbed her throat to stop her from screaming. He claimed he did not know why he started the fire and said he threw away the murder weapon on the Gold Coast Highway. The weapon was never found.

Perhaps most chilling is his comment that he had been visiting prostitutes for some time until 'the right one turned up'. On 2 June, just six days before the murder, Papas had told his psychiatrist that he had taken a knife with him to visit a prostitute.

Interestingly, Papas had no significant criminal history prior to the murder.

More Evidence

We executed a search warrant on Papas' home and found the clothing he was seen wearing in the video surveillance from Neptune's Apartments. This clothing was blood stained. A search of his car also located blood contact evidence on the steering wheel, the indicator arm and driver's seat cover.

An autopsy was conducted on the deceased. It showed she had suffered 17 stab wounds to the left chest, two stab wounds to the upper left abdomen, two stab wounds to the back and there were defensive wounds to both of her hands. So Ra had not died without a fight and at some point had tried to escape. A number of the stab wounds were to her heart and these were the fatal blows. She also suffered post mortem burns to her feet and legs.

Court

Papas attempted to have his matter dealt with by the Mental Health Tribunal on a number of occasions. He based this on the fact that he was diagnosed as a schizophrenic with a paranoid disorder. He was unsuccessful in these attempts and after four years finally went to trial at the Supreme Court. Me and the other

investigators attended court on the first day to begin giving our evidence. Mere minutes before evidence was to start Papas changed his mind and pleaded guilty to murder and arson. He had not changed much in the four years since I had seen him except for the fact that he had put on some weight and looked smaller than I remembered him.

Peter Papas appeared in the Supreme Court in Brisbane on 16 August, 2010, charged with arson and the murder of So Ra Moon. The court heard that she had been living in the Neptune Resort at Broadbeach and had agreed to meet Papas at the complex. Papas had sex with her before she left the room briefly. During that time he found a six-inch knife in a bedside drawer and hid it from his victim when she returned to the bed. He then stabbed her, set the unit on fire and fled. Police used security footage and mobile phone records to identify and find the killer. He had originally tried to flee from police when they rushed to Robina to investigate a report of a car with two hose pipes running from its exhaust, but later gave himself up. The court heard the motivation for the murder was unclear but Papas may have been angry that the woman was not aged 18, as advertised in the newspaper.

Justice John Byrne sentenced Papas to life in gaol.

Unfortunately for So Ra Moon she was the 'right one' at the wrong time and she paid for it with her life. This investigation highlighted some of the most important aspects of investigating a major crime, in particular the 'Golden Hour'. The Golden Hour refers to the period immediately after an offence is committed. Maximum effort needs to be put into an investigation in these early hours and, in this case, the effort paid dividends. This murder was unusual in that it was a stranger murder. Most murders in Australia are committed by someone known to the victim. The fact that this job could be brought to a conclusion within 24 hours was testament to the dedication and investigative ability of a number of officers across a range of specialist areas.

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