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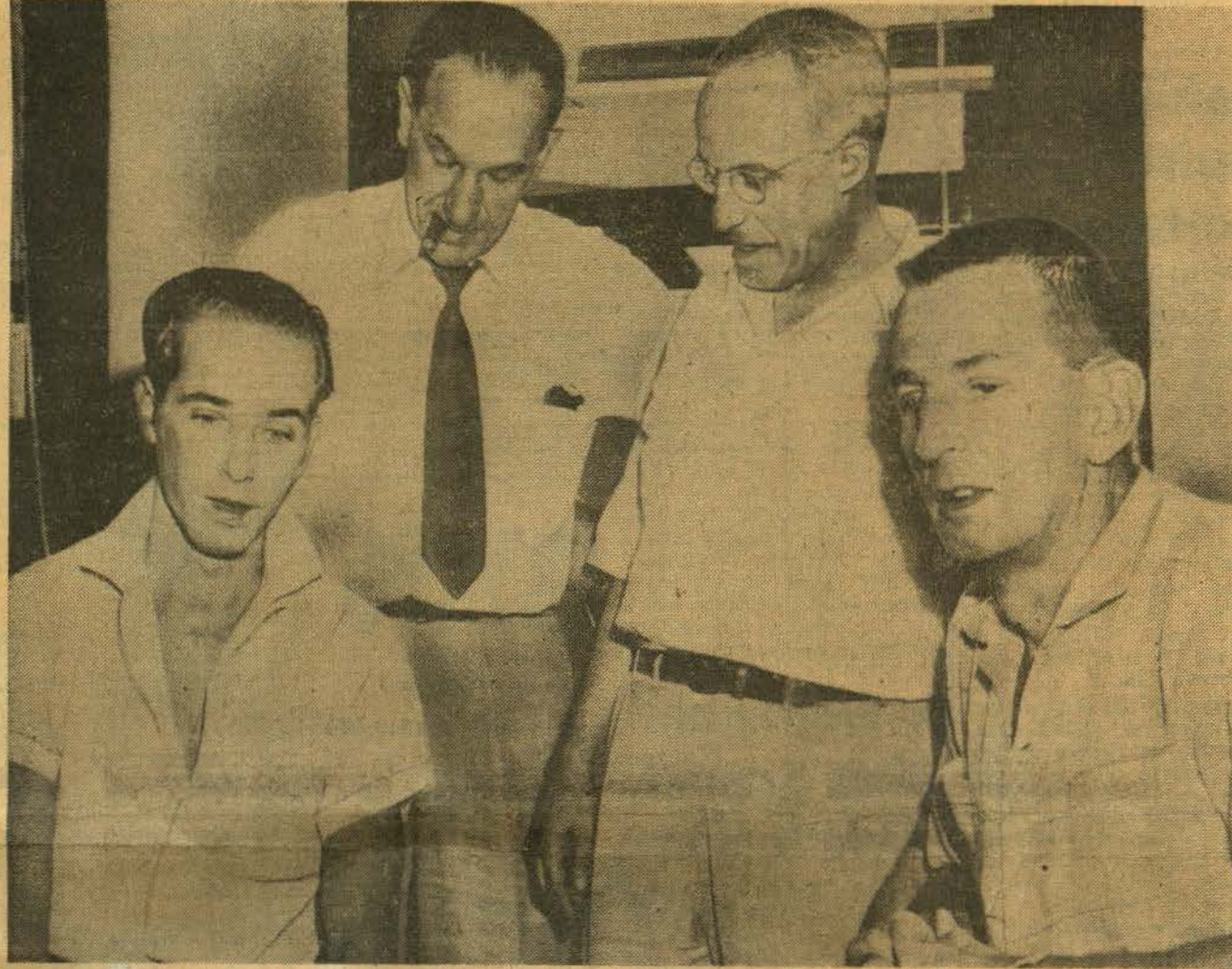
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CALLS WEDLER HOAXER

Gerber Rips Sam Case Confession as Lie



Suspect's Story Fails To Jibe

By HOWARD BEAUFAIT
News Staff Writer

DELAND, Fla. — Cleveland and Florida officials joined in an official statement today that branded Donald J. Wedler's tale of the murder of Marilyn Sheppard "a complete hoax."

After four hours of questioning by a team of Cleveland investigators, Wedler himself finally admitted that "it doesn't seem likely" that he murdered the Bay Village housewife.

Cuyahoga County Coroner Samuel R. Gerber announced the decision to reporters gathered in a stuffy room of the County Jail here.

"As far as we are concerned, Wedler is not telling the truth," Dr. Gerber said. "His story of the killing of Marilyn Sheppard is a complete hoax."

Can't Pin Him Down

James E. McArthur, retired head of the Cleveland Detective Bureau, and Sheriff Rodney Thursby of Volusia County, Fla., who was present during the interrogation, seconded Dr. Gerber's remarks.

"We can't pin him down to any specific detail of the crime," McArthur said. "He even says he drove down a side road to the Sheppard house."

Dr. Gerber pointed out that Wedler "said he hit her (Marilyn Sheppard) over the head five times with a piece of five-inch pipe nine inches long with an elbow at the end."

"The wounds of Marilyn Sheppard never could have been inflicted by this type of weapon," Dr. Gerber stated.

Thursby reported that Wedler "still sticks by his story," but he added that "from the information I have now, I do not see how this man (Wedler) could be connected with the Cleveland crime."

"When Inspector McArthur showed him the pictures of Marilyn Sheppard," Thursby said, "he asked him, 'Does that look like your handiwork?'"

More Than Five Blows

"Wedler replied, 'It doesn't seem likely. It looks like there are more than five blows here.'"

It was then, the law officials said, that they ended the questioning and ordered Wedler returned to his cell.

Dr. Gerber said the Wedler aspect of the Sheppard case "is a closed issue as far as we are concerned." He said he would return to Cleveland immediately with McArthur and Deputy Sheriff Dave Yettra, third member of the Cleveland team of interrogators.

Dr. Gerber reported in a break in the questioning earlier that Wedler had changed his story in several respects.

Vague on Ohio Angle

"He says now he doesn't know how he got into Ohio," Dr. Gerber said at that time. "It now appears he thinks he

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Donald Wedler (left), "confessed" suspect in the Sheppard case, is questioned about murder of Marilyn Sheppard by (left to right) Dave Yettra, Cuyahoga County deputy sheriff; Cuyahoga County Coroner Samuel R. Gerber and retired Cleveland detective inspector James McArthur in Deland today. — (AP Wirephoto.)

Officials Brand Confession In Sheppard Case a Hoax

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murdered some woman closer to downtown Cleveland and not far out in the suburbs."

Earlier, Dr. Gerber told reporters he and the other Clevelanders were leading Wedler step-by-step through all the details of his sordid young life in the first step in their attempt to crack his "confession."

"We're going to let him tell his story," Dr. Gerber said. "Then we're going to try to pick it apart piece by piece, particularly as to how he claims he murdered Marilyn Sheppard."

Somewhere in the process, Dr. Gerber said, they would confront Wedler with photographs of the Bay Village housewife shortly after she was battered to death with manicacalfury in the bedroom of her home on July 4, 1954.

Questioned by Three

Wedler, 23, was paraded before visiting newsmen on his way to the small white-washed room on the second floor of the Volusia County Jail where he was questioned.

He looked little like a murderer and more like a frightened, emaciated child.

Although nearly six feet tall, he walks with a hunch that makes him appear smaller. His weight is listed at 160 pounds in prison records, but he looks closer to 140 pounds. His blond hair is long and bleached white in spots by the sun.

He wears long Elvis Presley-type sideburns. His left arm bears a tattoo of a skull with an arrow through it and the single word, "Donald," above it.

Past Life Probed

He was dressed in a clean white sport shirt and blue jeans when the questioning began shortly after 10 a.m. Cleveland time. Dr. Gerber emerged from the small room a little over an hour later to reveal details of the investigators' probing into Wedler's life.

He said Wedler's tale of his wanderings throughout the country sounded like a travelogue. Briefly, this is the

story, as repeated by Dr. Gerber.

Wedler was born Oct. 25, 1933, in Washington, D.C. His father deserted him and his mother, Evelyn, two months later. His mother later married a man named Helm.

She lived in Baltimore with Helm until 1950, when he deserted her. Wedler last heard from his mother shortly thereafter and hasn't heard from her since.

Travels Across U.S.

His travels included trips from one end of the country to the other during which he worked as a bricklayer, book-binder and attendant in gas stations through the country.

His last regular job was as a driver for the Republic Transfer Co. of Los Angeles. While on the road, he was involved in numerous petty crimes, and started on dope.

Wedler had his first brush with the armed forces at the age of 14. He enlisted in the Army under the name of Helm and was sent to Fort Bragg, N.C. There he stole a car and was dishonorably discharged.

Involved in Car Thefts

Three years later he enlisted in the Air Force under his own name, but his previous service record came to light and he was discharged dishonorably again.

While back in Baltimore briefly he stole another car and was sent to the Maryland Industrial School for Boys. He went on the road again later—to Colorado Springs, Colo.; to Cheyenne, Wyo., and to Omaha.

Back in Virginia briefly in 1954, he was arrested for stealing several rolls of wire in the small mining town of Clincho, Va.

This was the point where Dr. Gerber stepped from the room to let the host of newsmen waiting outside know what was going on. He returned to the room after answering the questions.

Story Called Hoax

An hour later he emerged from the room again and labeled Wedler's story a hoax.

He said Wedler's meandering tale had led them finally to Cleveland. He said Wedler told of meeting a girl and then a man named Charley Freeman and later of getting a shot of heroin from a man named Duke in Freeman's apartment.

He said he stole a car later and drove round and round in downtown Cleveland before crossing a bridge and going into a house in search of money.

Dr. Gerber returned to the interrogation room before reporters could question him more closely on the "discrepancies" in Wedler's story.

Convinced Man Lies

Before starting the questioning, Dr. Gerber said he hoped the shocking pictures of Marilyn Sheppard's battered head would force the truth from Wedler, the latest of 25 persons to confess to the crime.

On the basis of everything they had been told in the case, Dr. Gerber, McArthur and Yettra were convinced even before they started the questioning that "Wedler is a psychopathic liar."

Erle Stanley Gardner announced earlier in Columbus that he was withdrawing his Court of Last Resort from the case because of a lack of cooperation from Ohio officials.

Although obviously surprised at the decision, Dr. Gerber said the mystery writer's actions would not affect his investigation into Wedler's tale of the murder.

"We also have some facts that were unknown to Erle Stanley Gardner's Court of Last Resort," said Dr. Gerber.

Sure and Not So Sure

The unofficial "court," a promotion of a monthly magazine, first announced a lie detector showed Wedler's confession was true, then said it wasn't so sure—that he may have hypnotized himself into the false belief that he killed Marilyn Sheppard.

Dr. Gerber said that one of the facts unknown to the "court" was that the Lake Road door to the Sheppard home was warped and very difficult to open.

Wedler told Gardner's lie experts that he walked easily into the house," Gerber said. "That was impossible. Besides, there's some evidence that the door was locked by Marilyn Sheppard before she retired that night."

When the plane bringing Dr. Gerber and his team of expert questioners to Florida stopped at the Columbus airport, they were met by Gardner, the mystery story writer who has unofficially injected himself into the Sheppard case.

"Have you got a lie detector with you?" Gardner asked the coroner, with a note of sarcasm.

"I'm a lie detector," snapped Dr. Gerber.

Gardner, turned down by Gov. C. William O'Neill on his request to give Dr. Sam Sheppard a lie test in the Ohio Penitentiary, later said:

"Well, anyway we are having a lot of fun."

McArthur Provoked

The remark drew a sharp reply from McArthur.

"This is not fun for me, Mr. Gardner," he said. "I lived with this case for months. We have dealt with all kinds of screwballs. We have the right man in the penitentiary—Dr. Sam.

"And don't forget, we had other dealings with your Court of Last Resort."

"How did we make out in the other case?" Gardner asked.

"The man went to the electric chair where he belonged," McArthur said.

Gardner told McArthur to "calm down," that there was

nothing personal in his remarks.

Dr. Gerber and his associates were met by Sheriff Ronald B. Thursby at Daytona Beach Airport at 1 o'clock this morning.

Gardner Drops Case

Thursby asked the Cleveland authorities to wait until this morning to question his prisoner.

Irked by Gov. O'Neill's decision to cancel the proposed lie test, Gardner announced shortly after his arrival in Columbus that he is going to drop all further efforts to aid the convicted wife-slayer.

"We are just going to pick up the pieces and go back to making a living," he said. "We are just going to get the hell out of here and we are not coming back unless pressure from readers of the Court of Last Resort is so, so great that we must."

Gardner and other members of the "court" received permission from the governor last Friday to administer the lie test to the 33-year-old doctor convicted of the July 4 bludgeoning-slaying of his pregnant wife.

Gov. O'Neill canceled the test yesterday, however, after the "court" informed him that Wedler's statement may have been "just plain deception."

Won't See Governor

Bristling over the turndown, Gardner emphasized vehemently at a hastily-summoned news conference that he will "absolutely not" see the governor.

"I have no intention of seeing Gov. O'Neill without an invitation," he said.

"However," he added, "I would like to talk unofficially with a member of his staff to explain our position and belief in the matter."

Gardner said he felt his motives in his investigation into the Sheppard case had been misinterpreted. He explained that the "court," sponsored by Argosy Magazine, is an unofficial group of crime experts who seek to determine the innocence of persons they believe wrongly convicted of crimes.

Denies Inconsistency

He said he had made "no inconsistent or conflicting statements" in his report to Gov. O'Neill.

"We have no desire to see Dr. Sheppard turned loose," he said. "We have no axe to grind. Many persons have pooh-poohed us as a commercial enterprise but I can assure you our interest in the matter is to see that justice is done."

Gardner also said that unless a lie test is given Dr. Sheppard, he will not under any circumstances seek an interview with the prisoner.

"I wouldn't see Sheppard even if I were invited," he said. "I have no interest in him as an individual."

Gardner said he would take to the printed page as his next step to give his supporters "the facts of this case as we see them."