

The Delphi Murders: First Person: First Sergeant Steve Buckley

02/11/2025

[Aine 3:31]

Content Warning. This episode contains discussion of murder, including the murder of two girls. First Sergeant Steve Buckley of the Indiana State Police was involved with the Delphi case even before the bodies of Liberty German and Abigail Williams were found. He stuck with it all the way to the end, being present in the courtroom when the jury's verdict convicting Richard Allen was announced. Along the way, he was part of some of the most important moments in the case.

[Kevin 3:57]

Now that the gag order is lifted, First Sergeant Steve Buckley and others are free to speak about their experiences with the Delphi case. A quick disclaimer, the state police stopped doing new interviews on this case a few weeks back. We were very fortunate to have done our interview with First Sergeant Buckley earlier in January before that cut off. So we did not do this recently, but the information within is still highly relevant.

[Aine 4:25]

This episode will feature our interview with First Sergeant Buckley. This episode is part of our first person interview series. We will seek to interview as many of the individuals with firsthand experience in the Delphi case as possible in the coming weeks and months. If you had a direct role in the case and are open to talking to us, email us at murdersheetatgmail.com. This is part of our ongoing effort to report on the Delphi Murders. For many years, we have not gotten the chance to hear directly from some of the principal figures in this case. That all changes now. My name is Áine Cain. I'm a journalist.

[Kevin 4:57]

And I'm Kevin Greenlee. I'm an attorney.

[Both 4:59]

And this is The Murder Sheet.

[Kevin 5:01]

We're a true crime podcast focused on original reporting, interviews, and deep dives into murder cases. We're The Murder Sheet.

[Aine 5:10]

And this is The Delphi Murders. First Person. First Sergeant Steve Buckley. I guess to start off with, can you tell us a bit about your background?

[Buckley 5:05]

Yeah, I grew up southwest of Lafayette, in a very rural area of Indiana. Went to a school where I came in in kindergarten and didn't leave that building until I graduated high school. After that, I went to college, out of state. I kind of wanted to get away from the area, get away from Indiana, just to kind of explore. So went out of state. Eventually, I made my way back, ended up at Indiana State University, where I obtained a bachelor's degree in criminology.

[Aine 6:35]

What made you gravitate toward law enforcement?

[Buckley 6:39]

So I grew up in a family. We had some influence of law enforcement. I've always liked law and that kind of thing. My original plan was to go to law school. After my bachelor's degree, I just got tired of being in school, writing papers, reading. I wanted to get out and then kind of experience the real world. Law enforcement was kind of along that track. My second default was the federal system, and I kind of held on to that even when I started with state police, but I let go of it shortly after getting on there. I just really enjoyed that career track.

[Aine 7:12]

What made you select the state police? Can you tell us a bit about your trajectory there?

[Buckley 7:17]

So I graduated college December of 1999, and for that next year, I kept putting in for different departments. I had a full-time job at the time, and I was putting in for different police departments, different sheriff's departments. One of the first ones that I put in for, for instance, was Indianapolis Metropolitan Police, and IMPD. And it was kind of a slow process for me at the beginning, I think mostly because I didn't have a lot of confidence that this was where I needed to be. So when I applied with IMPD, I went down for the physical test and the written test. When I get there, it looked like the Indianapolis Colts training camp. I mean, these guys were absolutely huge. And I'm not a big foreboding looking guy. I say I'm 5'8, but that's only because I'm slightly over 5'7, and I round up. And so I'm looking at all these 6 plus, 2'30 guys standing, and I just felt like, nope, not for me. This is not where Steve belongs. So I hightailed it out of there. And kind of slowly, I was putting in for different places and that kind of thing. And back then, the process for law enforcement was a lengthy process. I mean, it wasn't something that happened as quick as it does now because of everything being online and being able to get things taken care of. So state police was one of them that I put in for. And finally, as 2001 was kind of under way, I was getting closer. During that process, I had two other offers from departments, but I was kind of holding out to see what the state police would do. I didn't really have any real ambitions of wanting to be a state trooper until I got into the process. And then they took me and I went into the academy July of 2001 and graduated and became a state trooper in December of 2001.

[Kevin 9:13]

What's your career been like with the Indiana State Police? What roles have you fulfilled there?

[Buckley 9:17]

So I started out as a road trooper, as we all tend to do, and I was assigned Carroll and White Counties. So originally I moved into Carroll County. That was my primary county that I would work as a road trooper, doing traffic stops. That's where I got to know a lot of the guys that were involved in this case. So I'd been working with them for 20-plus years before we got involved with this, or 15-plus at that time, 20-plus now. So I would do road responsibilities. As I was on the road, I always kind of had a affinity for investigations of different types. So I went into crash investigation, for instance, just because I enjoyed the extra schooling. I enjoyed the extra commitment. So I did that for a little while. I was on the bomb squad for a little bit, just because I needed some fun, some break from the road. Then 2008, I finally had an opportunity to get back to investigations. I had made some good friends that were back in investigations already. So I kind of enjoyed being out in that area, being with them. So in 2008, I moved back to investigations, became a detective. As a detective, I kind of focused in on a lot of the child crimes. I would do child sex crimes, child physical abuse, serious physical abuse cases. I think I focused on those because it wasn't an area that a lot of the guys enjoyed doing. I seemed to have an ability, especially with the suspect interviews. So that's where I made my niche. They didn't want them, I wanted them. So I brought those into life. That's where I really focused my attention.

[Aine 11:01]

I'm curious, what made you interested in that? I imagine those are kind of emotionally difficult cases to work on. And so kind of, I guess, tell us a little bit about that and what those were like to do and what made you sort of prioritize them and feel they were so important.

[Buckley 11:18]

I think it was the victims, honestly. That was one of the cases where you really didn't have any truer, pure victim of a crime. I mean, these kids did

nothing to deserve what was happening to them. They did nothing to bring this on to themselves, unlike oftentimes they'd say that adults do. They put themselves into situations where things are going to go wrong or they put themselves in contact with people that they know better. Kids don't do that. They're a product of their environment. They have no say over who's around and who takes care of them and who watches them. So it was mainly for the victims. I got a lot of gratification out of knowing that the people that I was going after were kind of on the higher end of evil, and that made me feel good about what I was doing and what was going to happen to them.

[Aine 12:14]

I'm curious, are there any memorable cases that you worked on prior to what we're going to talk about more today, which is the Delphi Murders case?

[Buckley 12:22]

Yeah, there were quite a few. I have one. I remember I had a card from a girl that I hung up in my office, and I had it in there for quite some time, just kind of as a reminder of what I was working towards. I can't remember, I don't remember the exact details of the case, but she was, it was a sex crime. She was one of the victims. There were several. I think we were able to get charges on him after hers. So she wasn't included in it, but while we were going back looking at his victimology, she was kind of brought out. And the card just simply said, thanks for giving me a voice. And that's all it was. So I think that was probably one of my most memorable ones.

[Kevin 13:06]

I want to ask maybe a bit of a silly question. You mentioned you worked on the Bomb Squad. What was that like? Is that like the movies?

[Buckley 13:13]

No, not at all. No, it was fun. I mean, it was fun until you knew there was a point where it wouldn't be so fun anymore when it got very serious. Luckily

for us, we didn't really run into those situations as much. I enjoyed it from the aspect of I got to do things like, I got to work Notre Dame football games, for instance. And so I would get to be at the stadium before anybody else was there. We'd have to do sweeps around the stadium and before the media comes in and sets up and all that stuff. So I would actually get to walk on the Notre Dame football field with nobody in there, the stadium. And of course, they'd yell at you if you got on the grass too close. But they didn't yell at us too much if we showed them who we were. But there were long days, but it was a fun time. And it was something interesting that I got to do that was out of the ordinary.

[Aine 19:01]

I guess to start off with on the Delphi case, can you tell us how you started on that case?

[Buckley 19:06]

Yeah, so at that point in my career, I had been promoted to supervisor of investigation. So I was the squad leader in charge of the detectives. We had, I believe at that time, five detectives. Our district covers eight counties. So we tend to be pretty busy. We try to keep in touch with all of our counties, to see if we can offer help, see what we can do for them. Being a larger agency, having more resources, and having a lot of very rural counties in our district, we kind of become the investigative arm a lot of times because they don't have dedicated investigators for the sheriff's departments or the smaller PDs. So they kick a lot of those over to us. So we're kind of monitoring. I was relatively new in my position. And I was working under, that time, First Sergeant Jerry Holeman, who was the district investigative coordinator or commander. He was over a much larger view of investigations, which included the roadside as well as the detectives. I just focused on the detectives. And I remember that morning, I was driving to the post from my house. I didn't live very far from the post. But I remember hearing on the radio about his search, where they were all gathering in Delphi to look for these two missing girls. And so that kind of piqued my

interest, but I hadn't gotten any information or nobody had called. And it was a short time after that, I think that Jerry called and he said, hey, did you hear about this? What's going on in Delphi? I said, yeah, just a little bit on the radio. So he filled me in a little more and said that he'd already spoken with the sheriff. At that time was Tobe Leazenby. Offered our assistance. They said they think they've got everything right now. They're not sure exactly what's going on. You know, they're still searching in the area. So he said, right now we don't need anything, but just, you know, be aware of the situation. So I go on to my office and as I'm doing some work in there, I was also at that time, what's known as a digital media recovery specialist, DMRS. And on our department, that position would be somebody that you would take a cell phone or a computer to and have it downloaded. So that was also a role that I did. And so Jerry calls, I think about 10 am and said, hey, they have one of the girls' iPad. Would you mind coming over and seeing if you could get anything off of it? So I gathered up my equipment, headed over to Delphi. We met at what would later become the first command center. And I was working on the iPad using some different tools and software, trying to see if we could get in there. Also troubleshooting with some of the friends and family of the girls to see if we could come up with maybe what the code would be. Because a lot of times it's a birthday or something significant to them. We were trying all those different options. And while I was doing that, I remember Steve Mullin, who was the chief of Delphi at the time, received a phone call, looked up and said they found them. And it doesn't take an investigator to get the feel of what was happening. There was no questions. Everybody was quiet and everyone just filed out to their cars and we drove out to the scene. So that was the first I had heard of it.

[Kevin 22:23]

So you actually went out on the scene and saw the girls there. What was that like?

[Buckley 22:27]

So when we got there, I wasn't sure where we were going. I just fell in line with everybody else. We all park in a cemetery and then had to climb over a cattle gate into a field and then down a huge, probably not as large as I make it out to be in my mind, but it was a pretty significant hill that we had to traverse down. I remember there was one spot that was kind of flat, partially way down and you'd see a lot of people kind of stop there and take a break, especially if you were headed up. But we make our way down to the flat area at the bottom. And I remember it was a warm day for February, but it didn't take long out there to realize it was a little cold for dressed clothes. So we were completely underdressed. I knew I was going to be there for some time. They'd already started setting up the crime scene tape. We were looking at how big of an area we were going to be covering, what we were going to need. We were talking about resources. We were talking about all these different things. I was on the phone getting detectives headed this way to help out. You knew that the urgency of the...You have to get things rolling very quickly in these instances because you want to gather as much as you can, as fast as you can. So I had those resources headed on the way. And I remember at one point, I had to stop realizing that it was February 14th. And I had to call now my wife, my girlfriend at the time. And since we've gotten married, I call her my ex-girlfriend, but she doesn't like that too much. But I had to call her and tell her, I'm not going to be coming home, we need to cancel the dinner plans. And she didn't really ask a lot of questions. I think she just knew from what I was saying that this was pretty serious and I would fill her in later. So she didn't ask any questions. We were out there the rest of that afternoon, well into the night.

[Kebin 24:22]

So what sort of work were you doing there processing the crime scene?

[Buckley 24:24]

So a lot of it was for us, we didn't really process any of the crime scene. We just kind of stay in the loop with our crime scene investigators. They do the processing. Really a lot of it is we just start talking strategy. What do we

need to do from here? Where do we need to send people? Is the scene large enough? Is there other areas that we need to be looking at? What do we, as they find things, they will come and let us know, hey, here's what we're seeing. This is what we found. And we're kind of logging that in our minds as far as, okay, how does that play into this? What are we going to need with that? What is that going to be? Or how significant is that going to be? Those kind of questions that you have at the scene. So that's why the crime scene in and of itself, you kind of take in the gravity of it when you realize what you're in. But you quickly kind of have to shove that to the side and start working. And you have to start through your process. And that's just what we were doing. We were discussing all the resources that we would need, what's available, how are we going to find things, that sort of thing.

[Aine 25:26]

Can you tell us a little bit about how brutal this crime was?

[Buckley 25:32]

Yeah, I mean, I'd been to several crime scenes. I was, you know, like I said before, I was in accident reconstruction. So I've been to pretty horrific scenes, you know. But those are easier to take, I think, the crashes, because those are, you know, mechanics taking a toll on a human body. But when you stand over and look at what another person could do to a human being, the indignity, you know, that's, that I think is a bit striking. I mean, it does kind of take you back for a moment. And then, like I said, then you have to get back into, I got a job to do, we need to move forward with this.

[Aine 26:10]

In terms of working this case, can you tell us a bit about what that looked like over the years, how it changed? I imagine it was very different in that initial weeks or months than it sort of became later. And I was just wondering if you could sort of talk us through that.

[Buckley 26:25]

Yeah, so I mean, initially, the case kind of just blew up very, very quickly. Because we had, at the scene, you had us, with the state police, you had the county, you had, we had a guy that was working with us from the FBI that was there, an FBI agent that was there, and everybody's just on the phone trying to gather resources. And, you know, one of the conversations I remember having with Jerry down there is, this type of crime, you can't afford to not take everything that's being offered. So it just became kind of a, do you want yes? Do you want yes? You know, sort of thing. We started getting resources there very, very quickly. And so it kind of, you know, even the first night into the first full day of investigation, we were, people were just streaming into what we called the command center we set up there, which was the old where the Delphi Police Department was. It was in the upstairs area, I believe where their city council meets and that sort of thing. And we just kind of took that over. Initially, I recall it very chaotic. We had so many resources in there, but nobody really knew what anybody had or what they could do. So, for me, one of the things that I wanted to try to work on, and I brought Jerry in on it as well, and he really helped out with it too, was just starting to make sure that there was a flow to everything. So, set up the analysts in an area, let the investigators know the analysts are here, and here's what they're capable of. Set up, me and the people doing the social media exploitation and cell phones, set us up in an area, let the investigators know that we're there, and here's what we're capable of. So, it was kind of, it really started taking on much more of a traditional investigation, regardless of how large it was. But it was very, very large at the beginning. That's when the Unified Command was established. And over time, it just kind of dwindled down to where it was just Unified Command primarily. But if they needed something, everybody was right there and ready to go.

[Kevin 28:38]

So, what sort of unique challenges were there when it came to working a case like this?

[Buckley 28:44]

I think one of the biggest challenges was just the size and scope of what we had to deal with. And not from the crime aspect, but from the investigative standpoint. All of these investigators coming in, how are we going to get the tips and leads out efficiently? How are we going to get them back? Who's going to review? Who's going to monitor? So that really was something that we had to really get into place fairly quickly. You don't want to lag behind because you're going to...the tips and leads started coming in almost, you know, immediately. Once we put it out, that's what we were looking for. So, you know, investigators tend to work, I think, better alone or in pairs. And this, we had to depend on investigators from all over the state, you know, even all over the country from different departments to help out.

[Aine 29:38]

You mentioned the tips. I'm curious, were the tips from the public helpful? Or how would you sort of characterize those that, obviously, a huge volume to go through?

[Buckley 29:50]

Yeah, so initially, they were very helpful. A lot of...that's, you know, where we came across a lot of people who were out there that day that we didn't know about. A lot of people who, you know, observed things that we needed to know. Some of it was not particularly helpful to us, but at the same time, I wouldn't fault the public for that. They don't know what's important to us and what's not. So we just wanted them to bring everything that they had and we'll decide if it's something that we can use or something that we can't use. But there was some very good information that came in.

[Kevin 30:24]

So what sort of work did you do on this case over the years?

[Buckley 30:30]

So I started out with the doing, I worked with my counterparts with the FBI that also did, you know, cell phone downloads, social media exploitation, that sort of thing. A lot of my responsibility initially was supervisory because I had all of my detectives were working the same case, which is very unusual. So just making sure I had the right people in the right places doing the, you know, doing the things that they were they were the best at was my primary responsibility at the beginning. And then just helping Jerry out with what needed to be done, helping anybody else, helping the investigators find things, you know, just helping with the investigative track, see where we were headed after this.

[Aine 31:11]

In terms of like looking at different, I guess, persons of interest over the years, is there anything you can tell us just regarding that project, that process and work you may have done around that?

[Buckley 31:21]

Yeah, so, you know, we use different terms. Suspect, persons of interest, it all gets kind of, you know, you say person of interest today, and everybody assumes suspect. And that's not necessarily the case, just means that their name got brought in for whatever reason, and we have to make sure we vet it appropriately and see if there is a connection with what we were doing. I didn't have a lot to do with the day to day, running down the tips and leads and that sort of thing, but I did get to, on one occasion, I did get to travel, for instance, out of state. There were things that would come up either from the public or from the media that we would feel would be more important that we follow up on in person, and this was one of them, and we had several of them like that, but in the end, it all came down to the same process of being able to put that person at that time, at that day, at that scene.

[Aine 32:20]

I'm curious, you know, you mentioned things would come up from the public and the media. How did the media attention over the years affect the Delphi case?

[Buckley 32:29]

Initially, it was very positive. I mean, the thing is with the media, we need the media, law enforcement does. There's no other effective way for us to get information out or to bring information in than through the media. So, media, what we do in the media a lot of times is part of a strategy. And so, we try to use the media as effectively as we can. We also try to respect the fact that the media is kind of the window for the public to know what we're doing and what's going on. And I think it's important for the public to understand law enforcement. They don't have to know everything. They don't need to know all the details, but they need to know that we are working, that we are moving forward, that we are doing something. That's what the media is good at. I became a little less impressed moving into, say, the courtroom. It seemed like the media didn't understand the proceedings as well as maybe they should have. I kind of looked around in there and I, of course, I'm going to be turning 50 this year, so everybody under 30 looks like a kid to me. But they all look like, you know, they were very young, but they also look like they were very uncomfortable in the courtroom setting. They weren't really sure what was happening. And I feel like there really wasn't a lot of analysis. There wasn't a lot of questions being asked. There wasn't a lot of kind of the integrity, the journalistic integrity of being non-biased, being able to report from both sides and being critical of both sides equally.

[Aine 34:01]

One thing that happened a couple of years into this case was that then-trooper David Vido came on and was looking into the Kegan Kline angle. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

[Buckley 34:14]

Yeah. So kind of going back to how the case changed over time, as an investigator, especially a murder case, there's always that potential that it could become a cold case and get picked up some time down the road by somebody else. Your job as an investigator is to leave that case in good enough shape that they can just pick it up and go with it. They're not going to have to go back and redo a lot of things in that. So we started looking at the longevity of the case, and we knew that we weren't going to be out of it. We weren't going to be away from it. We were there for the duration, whatever that duration may be. Our lead detective, Jay Harper, who was part of the Unified Command, he was there practically every day, all the way up through the end. He was helping out with a lot of things. We knew that his retirement was coming up within a couple of years, and we were at that point, not sure, is this going to take more than that time. So in preparation of that, we decided we needed somebody a little earlier in their career, but was adept with investigative ability to come in. With Jay being dedicated to that, we only had then four detectives taking care of eight counties. So to task another detective with that would be a hardship, because they would almost have to entirely dedicate themselves to that case, just as Jay had done. So Jerry called me and said, hey, I've got to prove that we can get somebody off of the road. Would you have anybody in mind? And I immediately said, Dave Vido. And Jerry agreed that that would be the most likely quality candidate that we would have for that. So we went to him and we proposed it to him. And we have what's called a TDA, which is just a temporary duty assignment to bring somebody back to investigations for a short time. Normally, it's 90 days. I think Dave's lasted four and a half years. So once he was in, he was in. There's no getting out. But he proved himself to be a huge asset as far as the investigation goes.

[Kebin 36:42]

There was a huge number of law enforcement personnel involved in this case. Can you talk about that? That also must have been something that was difficult to deal with.

[Buckley 36:53]

Oh, yes. We're talking definitely hundreds, maybe thousands of law enforcement officers over the course of many months, even years, and they were from all over. I mean, we, I remember there was somebody, I don't know how, I think it must have been an internet tip or something, was somebody from Australia that was supposedly traveled over here and somehow ends up in our tips and leads. And so we had to call, you know, Australia law enforcement to go interview this guy. And the FBI helped out with that. They were, you know, a huge help with those kind of things. But just having people, I mean, it touched almost every state, I think, at some point. And the fact that you had men and women in law enforcement that just so readily dedicate themselves to this case, they'll drop everything and come. We saw that time and time again, and they stayed as long as they could stay. A lot of them, their chiefs or sheriffs were saying, hey, we need you back here. And they didn't want to go back. They wanted to stay with this case as long as they could. It was just something that drew you to this.

[Aine 40:04]

I wanted to ask you, obviously this kind of, I guess the Richard Allen portion of the case came about thanks to Kathy Shank, a volunteer, who's working with Unified Command. Can you tell us about that? And I'm curious, like, do you remember where you were when you found out that there had been a bit of a break in the case?

[Buckley 40:24]

I don't remember where I was driving to or where I was driving from, but I do remember I was driving, I was in the car, and I get a phone call pops up, Jerry Holeman. So, as I always do, I took it, and he said, I just remember the phrase that he uses, they think they found Bridge Guy. I said, who thinks they found Bridge Guy? So, that's when he goes through the story of Kathy and the lead and then giving it over to Tony Liggett, and they started following up on it. I said, have we identified who this is? Yep, we've identified him. So, then we met, and I remember, there was a lot of discussions on how

to proceed with this. I mean, it kind of came up suddenly. Do we rush into an interview? Do we take time to do a little more intel, a little more digging? And those kind of investigative questions that come up. And I think in the end, they made the right decision, and we were able to bring them in for an interview.

[Kevin 41:39]

You weren't a part of that interview in terms of you weren't the one asking the questions. But I understand you were actually present and watching it. Is that correct?

[Buckley 41:46]

Yes, I was. Yeah.

[Aine 41:48]

Tell us about that experience.

[Buckley 41:50]

It was a little surreal. I got to be honest with you because in my mind, and I had said it several times, that if you find Bridge Guy, you're going to find the killer. Like, it wasn't necessarily that Bridge Guy was the killer, but he was there in such close proximity to what happened. There's no way he didn't have information on who it was. And as time went on, and it took us longer to figure out who it was, that told me more about their involvement than not being involved. So as I'm watching the first interview, and I'm hearing, you know, that, you know, he was there, his vehicle was there, you know, he describes the clothing and all of this. And it just, you know, I thought, you know, at one point, I thought, wow, I mean, this is, I really believe this is Bridge Guy. Especially when I started talking about some of the eyewitnesses that we already had statements from and he's corroborating what they're saying. And they said this was Bridge Guy. You know, they saw that that, you know, that guy that was on that video was the one that they saw out there. So that was, I really, that was the first time I really started

feeling like we were on to something in this case, like we had actually gotten a good break.

[Kevin 43:04]

There were a lot of attacks on the credibility of the investigators and the investigation by Richard Allen's defense team. I just wonder what did you make of that?

[Buckley 43:16]

You know, I know that that's a, that's a tactic, you know, it's a defense tactic. We've seen that before. We're going to see it again. I mean, that's not unusual. I didn't go to law school. I don't know, Kevin, if maybe you missed out on, you know, Law 306, you know, which was an elective for defense tactics and strategies. But, you know, it comes from somewhere. I don't make a whole lot out of it because I don't feel like it's really effective, especially in an area like this. I mean, it's, we don't have the distrust of the public. We don't have a lot of people. There's people that make noise and there's always going to be people that don't like law enforcement. But for the most part, the public that we serve, especially here in Indiana, are very respectful. They tend to have our back. And I don't think they like having somebody go after law enforcement unless you really have and can prove what you're saying. So as a tactic, I don't put it, you know, it's there, it happens. It's not unusual.

[Aine 44:24]

And then I'm curious, you know, the theory that the defense put out there in this case, centered around Odinism and an alleged cult sacrifice in the woods. What do you make of the narrative that that theory was improperly suppressed by unified command and sort of the investigation as a whole?

[Buckley 44:43]

Yeah, I don't put a lot of weight or credit into that, primarily because the defense didn't bring out any new information. The only information they

gave was what we had already investigated, what our investigators uncovered. We were never able to make the connection. And ultimately, I just, you know, again, you're always going to have these different, you know, tactics that the defense uses. And I feel like if they're trying to kind of, you know, do the smoke and mirrors and not focus on the case in chief, then we've done a pretty good job with that case.

[Kevin 45:19]

Before we leave the topic, they also had a lot of talk about this professor, this Purdue professor, Jeffrey Turco. What were your interactions, if any, with Professor Turco?

[Buckley 45:30]

So at one point, you know, early on in the investigation, there was enough investigators or whatever, there was enough surrounding the Odinism or whatever you want to call it, the pagan aspect of it, that, you know, we knew we needed to do some investigation on it. And we didn't really know, you know, where we were going with it, because Odinism is such a broad term. It's like using the term Christian, you know, there could be, you could be Baptist, you could be Presbyterian, you could be Methodist. There's all kinds of different. So we didn't know exactly where we were going with it, or if there was a group that believed or practiced in this way. In my investigations, I have on a few occasions reached out to Purdue to get a, I mean, they're right in our backyard. We get an academic assessment of whatever we're looking at. And that's what I was trying to do with the professor. So one of the FBI agents and I went over and spoke with them, and he was able to give us a lot of information.

[Aine 46:30]

And it sounds like he was not convinced that this was some sort of a sacrifice, is that fair to say?

[Buckley 46:37]

Yeah. His assessment was kind of sort of like watching, I think the analogy he used was watching clouds go by with your child, and they'll say, hey, look, it's a bunny. And you'll look at it and you'll think, but it looks like a bunny to them. So, you know, you can make what you want. I mean, if you see that, that's what you're going to see. You know, it's that lens that you're looking at it through. In the end, my recommendation to the Unified Command was that this was not an avenue of investigation that was going to produce a suspect. This was not going to bring us to somebody's doorstep. If it had anything to do with this, and I don't know that I ever believed that it did. If it did, that was only known to the killer, and we'll find that out later. It would be good for corroborative efforts, but not for investigative. So.

[Aine 47:35]

Right. There's no pattern of Odinists or white supremacists going around sacrificing white children and leaving rune patterns. It's not like a series or a type of crime you can really connect it to.

[Buckley 47:49]

Right. And in my opinion, if you're talking about the white supremacist or the racist aspect, it's a completely wrong victimology. So, there's not enough there. It's an interesting story. It does make for good TV, but I don't think that it really had any, I don't think it really had any sustenance with our investigation.

[Aine 48:10]

So, you were there throughout the Richard Allen trial. Can you tell us a little bit about what you were doing and what was that experience like?

[Buckley 48:17]

I was there probably a little more out of selfish reasons than professional ones. However, I do have a nexus professionally to be there. So, I went ahead and took advantage of that. So, but hey, I mean, what we do is for court. I mean, everything that we do centers around that court, hearing, that

trial and everything, it's why we do what we do, but it also dictates how we do what we do. So, we have to be very keen on what's going on in trials. What are the, you know, what are the trends that are going on, for instance, with defense tactics and those sort of things, so that we can be prepared for that moving forward and we can better ourselves. But at the same time, I absolutely love the whole dramatics of the courtroom. I enjoy the back and forth, the game within the game that goes on between all of the attorneys, you know, and all of that. So, I really thoroughly enjoy being in there and kind of watching how everybody operates, how they do. I like watching when it's our cases, because I've got to sit in a lot of my cases that I had that went to trial, and then I've sat in on a few others. I like watching the jury and see what their engagement is like, see how attentive they are. You can really get a feel for where the jury is with their questions that they ask. I love that they've been doing that in court. I think that's very effective. I also like watching the gallery, just to see what the family's reactions are. It's hard to watch sometimes, but that's on both ends of the spectrum, because this is a very human thing that's occurring to real life people. I try not to forget that. I try to remind myself of that, to help me stay focused in doing what I do, and why I do what I do. So those are the kind of things that I was watching. And then if there was anything that I would, you know, I don't know as much as the attorneys know, but sometimes you hear things or you see things that they didn't catch. And if you can bring that to their attention during breaks or afterwards, a lot of times they'll sit down with us and talk to us about what we saw and what we heard. So it can be helpful for them.

[Kevin 46:37]

Yeah. As an attorney, I'm very interested in your observations about the prosecution team. But actually, before we get to that, it occurs to me that Indiana State Police Sergeant, or pardon me, Lieutenant Jerry Holeman actually had an opportunity to sit with the prosecutors. And you've mentioned him a couple of times throughout this interview. I'm just curious, what do you make of him? What is he like?

[Buckley 51:03]

So, and I probably should have been using a more formal term for him, like Lieutenant Holeman during this time, but I know him as Jerry. I mean, I've known him. He came out of the Academy six months before I did. So he graduated in June of 2001. I went in in July of 2001 and came out in December. So we were kind of rookies at the same time working the road. He was also assigned to Carroll and White County. It's the same area that I work. We didn't work a lot of our shifts, but our shifts would overlap. So I got to work with him quite a bit when we were on the road, just kind of as an out of the way. I do want to say that I did save his life once. So, yeah, it was a harrowing experience. I don't know if you recall, Áine, you may be too young. I don't know if you recall, cell phones used to come in bubble packs, and they were the most horrific things to try to open. And we had been issued new cell phones, and they were just little flip phones, back in the early days of 2002. And so I brought Jerry his. We met out on a county road somewhere. We were running some traffic. He said, hey, I picked this up at the Post for ya. You don't have to go down there. He's like, oh, I appreciate it. So he's over there, you know, with his knife, being a Marine, and just going after this bubble pack. And pretty soon I had my back turned to him, and he comes around, he says, hey, do you have a band-aid? And I said, I don't know, maybe in the first aid kit. Why? He raises up his arm. There's blood coming off of his elbow. And he cut himself trying to get into this bubble. And I'm like, a band-aid? So I get the gauze pad out, and I wrap it up like a catcher's mitt, you know? And he's like, how am I supposed to drive with that? I'm like, I don't know, but I'll follow you. So we had to go to the hospital and get him some stitches. But as we're driving, he's driving in front of me, and I could see his hand up with that baseball mitt, you know, gauze pad around it in the back window. So I like to say, you know, if I hadn't been there, who knows what would have happened to poor Jerry, but-

[Aine 53:02]

Dead on the side of the road.

[Buckley 53:02]

--Yeah, from a bubble pack. And that's the worst way to go for an officer. Anyway, they, so I've known him for quite some time. I mean, we, you know, I call him a friend first, co-worker second, supervisor on down the road. But he has, he has my supervisor. He has been my supervisor for some time. And I wouldn't want anybody else, honestly, because he, you know, he's the type of person, we're good friends. And we, you know, we talk all the time. But I can, I can disagree with him vehemently. And sometimes he'll hear me out and he'll, he'll be okay with it. And he'll say, you know what? I think you're right. And he'll change his mind. Sometimes he'll say, nope, that's not how I'm seeing it. And so this is what we're going to do. He has enough respect for me to hear me out and to give me that opportunity. And I have enough respect for him to say, okay, it's your decision. If that's how we're moving forward, then that's what we're going to do. So I just have a ton of respect for how he does his job. You know, you've been around him. He's kind of one of those bigger than life characters, you know, and, you know, it's hard not to like him. You know, he always get, he garners the attention of the room. But at the end of the day, he's also very big hearted. And he makes sure that he gets the job done. And he cares about the job that he does do. And I have the utmost respect for that.

[Buckley 54:34]

That was amazing. Thank you.

[Kevin 54:37]

I love that story.

[Kevin 54:39]

Well, other people at the prosecution table, Nick McLeland, James Luttrull and Stacey Diener. What did you think of them and how they handled this case?

[Buckley 54:47]

Oh, I thought they did phenomenal. You know, I had never been to, I don't believe I had any way, a jury or any sort of hearing or trial with Nick. I know he had done several of them. I just never had the opportunity to be in there. So going into the hearings during the summer, the three days of hearings, I wasn't sure what to expect. You know, I wasn't overly worried about it, but I just didn't know what kind of litigator he would be in the courtroom. You know, and when we were done with those three days, I just was like, yeah, I mean, this guy's got it. He commands a courtroom. He does a fabulous job. He handles witnesses very well. So I was very confident in him. Stacey, I worked with Stacey Diener for, you know, a few years, especially when she was up in White County in the prosecutor's office there. So I had full confidence that she was gonna be really good at what she does. And then, you know, they brought in Mr. Luttrull. I always say Lettrell, but Luttrull. You know, I didn't know anything about him. I didn't have any reason to not expect, you know, great things. But when they were all together, it just seemed like it was such a well-oiled machine. I mean, they, the way they, you know, their poise, their demeanor, their command of what they were doing and the confidence they were exuding, almost surgical precision crosses that I saw. I mean, it was just, it was, it was something. They were very impressive, to say the least.

[Aine 58:10]

I do want to ask you about the end of the trial. And, you know, what was it like waiting for the verdict for you? And were you there when the verdict was read?

[Buckley 58:24]

Yeah, I was there. It was one of the few days that I was able to just go over and kind of hang out. So I was glad that it actually occurred that day. From my experience with juries and that sort of thing, I wasn't overly concerned that it was taking so much time. I mean, this was a high profile case. And I think and my hope was that they were just doing the right thing and they were deliberating every aspect of it. They were looking at every aspect of it.

So they made the right decision for them, whatever that decision was. So I was happy to see that and all the way through. That jury looked like they were so attentive and just hanging on every word from both the defense, the prosecution looked like they were weighing everything the way they should. So I feel like they were right there where they needed to be. And whatever decision they made, I was going to be okay with because I feel like it wasn't made in haste and it wasn't a predisposition to answer. So when it came in that they had a verdict, of course, we were all, you know, you have that nervous excitement. I always have that as part of what I enjoy about the courtroom aspect of it because you don't know. But it was when you get through the first verdict, you know, is where you kind of either have that sense of relief or the, oh no, you know, sort of thing. I think the worst thing that could have happened for us would have been a hung jury. I think going back and just retrying this over again, would have been, it would have been so mentally exhausting for a lot of the people that were involved in this. So I was just glad that we had a verdict, whichever way that it went, but I was proud of them the way that they handled it. I think that's exactly the way that our system should work.

[Aine 1:00:14]

How did you feel when you heard guilty on all counts?

[Buckley 1:00:17]

I don't get overly excited about it. It was a long time coming. Really, it's more of a sense of relief, because you work at this, you want this, you want there to be an outcome. You're hoping for the best case scenario for you. But it was just a relief that, okay, we can take a breath. My hope was that it brought peace for a lot of people. Justice being served doesn't mean that somebody is made whole again. That's not what the system's intended for. And any of these families weren't going to be made whole again. The investigators that spent all of this time and energy and mental health, pouring into this, they weren't going to be made whole again. But it gives

you a sense of, okay, now we've been able to assign somebody responsibility. And that's ultimately what we're trying to do.

[Aine 1:01:13]

Looking back with the advantage of knowing what happened, what do you think the biggest mistake in the case was?

[Aine 1:01:22]

Well, I mean, the elephant in the room would obviously be the lead being mislabe—I'm still not exactly sure of what happened. And I'm not really worried about it would be the biggest. But what we do is we never have an investigation that is completely flawless. Mistakes are made in every single investigation. Our job as investigators is to minimize the amount of mistakes, mitigate the mistakes that we do make, and correct them as soon as possible. And I think we did exactly that in this case. I would love to have gotten to Richard Allen sooner. That didn't happen for whatever reason. Doesn't matter. We corrected it once we did.

[Aine 1:02:05]

Do you think authorities would handle the social media and media aspect of this case differently? Only knowing what you know now.

[Aine 1:02:12]

You know, I can't really speak for everybody. Everybody had a different experience throughout this. For me, probably not. I mean, we use the media when we can, when we think that it's going to be beneficial. And then we hope that they tell an honest, unbiased story in the end. I will say I did gain much more of a respect for podcasters, like you all, and YouTubers, as far as being a viable, real source of news. Because I saw more journalistic integrity, I think, out of some of the podcasters and YouTubers than I did out of some of the mainstream media. You know, that's all we want. We're not asking that you take our side. We're not asking that you show us flowery and without flaw. We're just asking that you be critical of both sides, that you ask the

right questions, that you put in some common sense to what's being said, and you don't just accept it because it's the only side that's talking. And I was a little dismayed about how little of that, that I did see from a lot of the media, but at the end of the day, I mean, we can't do what we do without them. There's just no way that we can reach that many people and get that kind of information and get that kind of information out without the media. So, good, bad or ugly, I mean, we're stuck with each other. So, we got to make the best of it. And there are, and I don't want to bag on mainstream media. There were some good mainstream media there. There was, I saw some old timers. I don't want to call them out, but there were some that were, had been investigative reporters for a very long time that I have the utmost respect for. And there are times where they've completely thrashed us for things that we, and probably rightfully so. We're okay with, I mean, we're big boys and girls. We got thick skin. We know what it's like. We know, we get Monday morning quarterbacked by everybody, the public, the defense attorneys, the judges, the media. We just want to make it, use it to make us stronger, to make us better moving forward. So authentic criticism, I'm okay with. We need that. If we're not doing something the way that we should, we need to change that. If we're not satisfying the public need in some way, we need to change that. So I think those interactions are very good. So it's not a bad thing for the media to be critical of us. I want them to be critical of us because I want to make sure that we did the best job that we could.

[Aine 1:05:02]

Somewhere out there, there's investigators who are listening to this, who are going to someday in their careers, find themselves in the middle of a big case like this. I'm curious, what advice would you give them?

[Aine 1:05:18]

We got told over and over again by different outside agencies, by different authors who have written books about investigations. And the one thing that we kept hearing over and over again was trust the process. Just trust the

process. And I heard that, but I didn't really understand it until we kind of worked our way through this case. But when it comes down to it, an investigation, it doesn't matter exactly what you're investigating. It's all the same. I mean, you're talking to people, you're looking for evidence, you're evaluating evidence, you're corroborating stories or proving them wrong. You're doing that no matter what the investigation is. That's your process and you've got to stick with that. You can't get lost in the wildfires of the media and the social media that's going nuts and the public opinion, that don't really know exactly what you have or what you're looking at. You can't get lost in that. You have to stay with the process and trust it and work it to the end.

[Aine 1:06:25]

Nowadays, what do you think the biggest misconception amongst the public is around this case?

[Buckley 1:06:31]

In my opinion, it's how much evidence we had. I think there was this idea out there that we had so much more than what we really had, and we just weren't telling anybody. When I think the opposite is kind of true, we were telling them almost everything and hiding the fact that we didn't have any more. But when you sit through the trial and you listen to the evidence from the crime scene and all of that, there's not a whole lot that we were able to work with. I mean, we were getting DNA, but we weren't getting enough of it. We have all of these tools and all of these investigative trainings, and we were throwing all of that at it. But at the end of the day, we had a bullet and some eyewitnesses in the video. And that just shows you how even more important that video on her phone was, on Libby's phone, the fact that she memorialized that. It's huge. I mean, that was the single biggest piece of evidence that we had.

[Aine 1:07:30]

And I think also that underscores why it was so important to protect some of that evidence and not just give it away to the public immediately. You know, if you talk about, well, we have bullet evidence, then somebody can go throw out a gun.

[Buckley 1:07:46]

That's right. That's right. Yeah, it underscores the whole reason why we do have to keep information close to the vest. It's not because we want to ostracize the public and keep them out of it because we don't think they would understand. We want them to know eventually, but we also know that we're going to have our day in court and it's going to come out and they're going to understand at that point what we were dealing with and what we were up against. But yeah, I mean, if you tell them you give out that kind of information, everything that you could use that for goes away. So you have to keep that information and that was probably one of the few pieces that we were able to actually hold on to.

[Aine 1:08:25]

How has this case emotionally affected the investigators who worked on it in any capacity?

[Buckley 1:08:30]

Although I'm sure that it has affected them, I don't want to speak for anybody, but I will for myself. I guess I want to be able to say the knee-jerk reaction is, oh no, this doesn't affect me. This doesn't bother me. I'm okay. And you say that throughout the course of your career. But the fact of the matter is when you really do some introspection and you look back on what it is that you really dealt with, it does have an impact. There's no way that it doesn't. It's just a matter of how you're going to deal with that. And I do believe that there is a level of saturation that you kind of get to, where you've just seen so much and heard so much and been through so much. You just kind of get saturated with it. And that's when it becomes a danger point. I feel like mental health in law enforcement is still very taboo and it's

getting better, but it's still not being addressed the way that it should be. But when you see these scenes after scene and trauma after trauma, I'm not a psychiatrist, I'm not a neurosurgeon, but I just can't believe that there's not something physically changing, chemically changing whatever as a result of that. So how we deal with that, what we do with that, I think is, I think that's moving forward, that's going to be a major point for law enforcement.

[Kevin 1:09:57]

Has this case had a lasting impact on the Lafayette Post?

[Buckley 1:10:01]

Oh, yeah. We were the first to really deal with something of this size, scope, and nature. So we learned a lot of lessons moving through it, that we are hoping will help other investigative units. It's hard to really talk about Delphi or anything in our district without that case coming up. I mean, that's what everybody that's now like, that's what we're known as. And that's true for all of us. I mean, I drive up 25 North, headed towards Logansport, and I cross under that Freedom Bridge. All I can think about is I'm driving through that. And I made that trip from Lafayette to Delphi so many times. I mean, the first months, we were working 7 days a week. I would be there at 5, 6 in the morning because I couldn't sleep all night. And we would be working till 9, 10, 11 o'clock at night, getting things done, finally kind of forcing everybody to go home, get a little bit of sleep, and then we're right back at it. And when I make that drive now, it's just a different drive. I'm going back for the trial, for instance, and reliving that every time I go back there. I made this drive every morning, that kind of thing. So it does have a, I think it has an impact. And you talked to guys that worked on the case. I think they all kind of have the same sentiment. There's kind of a little bit of trauma bonding, I think, going on for all of us that were a part of it.

[Aine 1:11:31]

Yeah, actually, our next question is just, how do you view the other investigators who worked on this? Like, can you tell us more about that trauma bonding?

[Buckley 1:11:38]

You know, I got the utmost respect for all of those guys. Like I said, I mean, I worked with Steve Mullin and Tony Liggett back when they were deputies working the road and I was a road trooper in Carroll County. I worked with Steve Mullin quite a bit as a detective. When I was a new detective, he was a detective in Carroll County. So we crossed paths so much. I mean, I have so much respect for what they do and who they are as people. Then of course, I've been through the stories with Jerry. It's hard not to feel closer to somebody. When Jerry's going through some of the stuff that he's going through, being scrutinized in the media and social media, and people online are saying the things that they're saying about him, and it's hard for me not to take it personal, too. Just knowing the guy the way that I do. So I know for him, it's got to be 10 times worse. He's actually taking the brunt of it. And really, all of the investigators are the same way. When you're being criticized, when you're being whatever. I mean, there were so many of these weird YouTube things that were coming out of people making things up about these guys. But at the end of the day, I mean, I gained more respect because they were still there at the end than anything. They never let go. They just kept going. And I think that's the most respectful part.

[Kevin 1:12:56]

How has working this case changed your life?

[Buckley 1:07:30]

I don't really know, honestly. That's one of those things. Again, it's something that obviously keeps creeping in, you know. But having the opportunity to work on something that has this much attention, being able to be a part of a team the way that I was, I think, you know, it's one of those, when I look back on my career, it's definitely going to be a standout moment. And it's going to

be one of those things that I didn't do a whole lot in this investigation. These guys did all of the grunt work. They carried the heaviest load. You know, Jerry and Steve and Tony and those guys and Jay. You know, I didn't do nearly as much as they did, but the immense amount of pride that I felt, that we were able to bring this to fruition, I think was, it's something that I'll carry with me. Something that I'll definitely lean on.

[Aine 1:13:54]

And then, do you have any words for the families of Libby and Abby, or anything about what the victims in this case mean to you?

[Buckley 1:14:02]

I think, to the families, I just say thank you. I mean, you know, thank you for believing in us. Thank you for being patient. Thank you for having our back. I know it wasn't easy. There were times where they would get frustrated. They would get upset. They would feel like maybe we weren't focused the way we should be focused. Maybe we weren't doing what we should be doing because things weren't happening the way they should. But they never really lost faith in us. I think for these guys, I know for me, just being kind of an outsider on the inside, that meant a lot. The fact that they weren't going to the media and bashing us. They weren't jumping on this train of YouTubers and going around doing that sort of circuit. They stood behind us. They weren't happy with it all the time. And that's okay. But they were there. So just, I would be so thankful to them that they were able to give us that opportunity. Yeah. And gosh, every time I see the names or hear, you know, Abby Libby, it just, I don't know. You know, there's just that emotional pull that you kind of go back to. And hopefully there's all of us will take a piece of what they were, who they were with us. And that'll make them bigger, I think, in the end.

[Aine 1:15:26]

We want to thank First Sergeant Buckley for speaking with us. We really appreciate it.