

COPS SAY ACCOUNT OF SLAYING FITS FACTS SERIAL CONFESSIONS GIVEN CREDENCE HERE

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Former Navy sailor John Eric Armstrong's claims of killing prostitutes worldwide met skepticism among some investigators, but he gave chilling details of at least one other slaying beyond the five he is charged with in metro Detroit.

In hours of questioning by Detroit detectives earlier this month, Armstrong was vague about several cases but divulged details that closely match the circumstances surrounding a prostitute's death in Virginia two years ago.

Armstrong, who served aboard the USS Nimitz during eight years in the Navy, told detectives that he killed a prostitute in Norfolk, Va., in March 1998, four days after the Nimitz pulled into port, investigators said.

Police there discovered the body of Linette Hillig on March 5 of that year behind a bingo parlor. She had been sexually assaulted and run over by a vehicle.

Armstrong told Detroit police that he ran over his victim with his Jeep after trying to strangle her. He said he choked the prostitute after having sex, and left her for dead. But he saw her struggling to get up and ran her over, investigators said.

Armstrong expressed anger during questioning, investigators said, because he recalled having blood on his tires and having to clean his car before going home.

Armstrong has not been charged in the Virginia death, and police are still investigating.

But he is charged with five murders in metro Detroit.

Detroit police said Wednesday they have discovered that one woman he is charged with having killed is not who they thought she was.

Investigators initially thought the body was that of Robbin Brown, 20, of Chicago. But they have since learned that this is the name falsely given by the victim when she was arrested for prostitution in Detroit before her death.

Police said the victim's real name was Nicole Young. She was 16, from Chicago.

The teen's body was found on April 10, with two others, near elevated railroad tracks at Military and John Kronk in Southwest Detroit. Armstrong has said he killed the three and dumped their bodies.

Detroit Police Cmdr. Dennis Richardson said the teen was brought to Detroit by her boyfriend to work as a prostitute. The two split up and the boyfriend returned to Chicago, leaving her stranded here. The girl's mother lives in a Chicago halfway home.

"It's just really sad," Richardson said. "That young girl did not deserve to be killed like that."

Since claiming to have killed 18 people in various parts **of** the world, Armstrong has stopped talking to police, based on advice from his lawyer. But his story was that he killed five women in metro Detroit and 13 others in ports where his ship docked, going back to 1992.

Armstrong, 26, appeared Wednesday in 20th District Court in Dearborn Heights for a preliminary examination for a first-degree-murder charge he faces in the death **of** Wendy Jordan, 39, whose body was dumped in the Rouge River on Jan. 2.

But Armstrong's lawyer, Robert Mitchell, requested a delay so Armstrong can receive a mental competency evaluation. Judge Mark Plawecki granted the request.

Armstrong is scheduled to appear Friday in 36th District Court in Detroit for a preliminary exam in the cases **of** four other women he is charged with killing.

Mitchell said Wednesday that Armstrong is a "very distraught and very disturbed young man" who has been in therapy several times.

"He has strong emotional problems that surfaced many, many years ago," Mitchell said. "I want doctors to examine him."

Mitchell said he is not convinced Armstrong is responsible for the **slayings** and called his story "make-believe."

Law-enforcement officials elsewhere are also skeptical.

Dick Steiner, an investigator with the Washington state Attorney General's Office, said officers there have been unable to link Armstrong to any unsolved murders. Armstrong has claimed to have killed two people in Seattle in 1993, and another in Spokane in 1994.

Steiner said officials still have not been able to find any open cases **of** homicides for the dates and locations Armstrong has given police.

But Detroit police **say** are sure about the killings here.

"I think our investigation will stand the test **of** time," Richardson said. "We did a very meticulous, professional investigation, and we are confident that he is responsible for the five murders in Wayne County."

John Heil, 23, who worked for Armstrong in the laundry room **of** the USS Nimitz and who was his bunk mate, said he was shocked to hear **of** Armstrong's confessions, and wondered when his shipmate had time to commit the murders.

Heil said the sailors often used the buddy system when leaving the ship, because they were in foreign lands. And Armstrong, who was called Opie by his friends aboard ship, always seemed to have plans to go out with shipmates, said Heil, who now lives in Scottsbluff, Neb.

Heil said he never noticed any unusual behavior in Armstrong.

"It just boggles my mind," Heil said **of** the murder charges. "I just can't believe he's a murderer."

Armstrong told investigators he usually would go out carousing with ship buddies, who would get drunk in bars and pick up prostitutes. The gang would return to the Nimitz, and Armstrong said he would then leave the ship again, alone, to commit the killings.

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Caption: Photo PAUL SANCYA/Associated Press

John Eric Armstrong, charged with five **slayings** , talks with lawyer Robert Mitchell at a hearing in Dearborn Heights on Wednesday.

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