

SUSPECT'S DEADLY TRAIL SPANS GLOBE , COPS SAY EX-SAILOR HELD AFTER ADMITTING TO 4 METRO KILLINGS

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A former sailor in police custody may have left a **trail** of slain women stretching from southwest Detroit to ports around the world.

Detroit Police Chief Benny Napoleon said Wednesday that John E. Armstrong, 26, of Dearborn Heights, told detectives he killed four women in metropolitan Detroit as well as women in Norfolk, Va., Washington state and Thailand.

He is a suspect in killings of prostitutes in Hawaii, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Tel Aviv, Israel. All the victims were strangled.

Napoleon said Armstrong, a former crew member of the Navy aircraft carrier USS Nimitz, admitted killing and dumping the bodies of three women found Monday along railroad tracks in Detroit. He also admitted the January slaying of a woman found in the Rouge River in Dearborn Heights, Napoleon said.

John E. Bell, FBI special agent in charge of Michigan, based in Detroit, said of prostitutes, "They're easy to target because they place themselves by virtue of their occupation in vulnerable positions."

The overseas slayings were allegedly committed while he was assigned to the Nimitz and the ship was docked in those nations.

Armstrong is married and has a baby boy.

"This guy has created terror around the world," Napoleon said. "He is no longer in a position to kill."

Armstrong has not been charged in any killings. But Richard Padzieski, the Wayne County prosecutor's chief of operations, said a prosecution team is working with homicide investigators.

"They are going over files together," he said. He would not comment further.

Armstrong was already a suspect in the Dearborn Heights killing, but prosecutors declined to seek a warrant because evidence -- including DNA test results from semen recovered at the scene -- was incomplete.

Investigators are wary of false confessions -- drifter Henry Lee Lucas created sensational headlines in the 1980s by claiming to have killed dozens of people across the country, only to have most of his confessions debunked. However, police said they think there is strong evidence linking Armstrong to crimes in the many cities.

Investigators said they have forensic evidence tying him to slayings in Thailand, Norfolk and Washington state.

"The information we have gathered is much more extensive than imagined, obviously, when we started this investigation. The process might take longer than we anticipated because now it's become extremely global," Napoleon said.

"He's a serial killer. He's a sick person," the chief said. "We have the killer. There's no doubt."

Armstrong was arrested at 12:30 a.m. Wednesday morning while cruising the Michigan Avenue and Livernois corridor, a known hangout for prostitutes, in a black 1998 Jeep Wrangler. Police said he may have been looking for his next victim.

FBI agents in Quantico, Va., had helped Detroit police create a profile of the serial killer. Thinking the suspect would keep returning to the same location to find victims, police concentrated in that area.

Three prostitutes who reported having encounters with Armstrong came forward with a description of him and his car. In each case, the women said he lured them into his car by holding out cash, had sex with them and then hit them in the face or tried to strangle them.

The women all managed to escape.

Armstrong was discharged from the Navy last April. Navy officials could not immediately provide details Wednesday about his length of duty aboard the Nimitz, a 95,000-ton carrier with a 4.5-acre flight deck. The Navy says it is the largest warship ever built. It is based at the Newport News Shipbuilding center in Virginia for a modernization overhaul, the ship's Web site said.

The Naval Investigative Service is checking Nimitz deployment schedules to see whether the ship was in ports where unsolved murders may be linked to Armstrong.

Fourth Precinct Police Officers Rodney Durham, on the force for a year, and Bradford Bullock, spotted Armstrong's black Jeep on Michigan Avenue in Detroit early Wednesday.

A prostitute who told police Armstrong assaulted her five days earlier, gave them a description of him and his Jeep.

Bullock said Armstrong seemed nervous, but cooperated when they pulled him over.

After they realized who they had, they brought Armstrong to headquarters to be interviewed by task force members.

Napoleon said he expects there may be far more than the 13 deaths already linked in some way to Armstrong.

"Our charge now is to find out how many victims are out there," Napoleon said. "He has killed all over, but he chose the wrong city when he picked Detroit."

Armstrong, originally from North Carolina, moved to Dearborn Heights about eight months ago, police said.

In January, Dearborn Heights police began eyeing Armstrong in connection with the death of Wendy Jordan, 39, of Dearborn Heights. Her body was dumped on Jan. 2 from a bridge over the Rouge River.

Armstrong reported finding the body.

Deputy Chief Michael Gust of Dearborn Heights said investigators thought it was suspicious that Armstrong found a body that had been freshly dumped. Her body had only been there about 12 hours, Gust said.

Gust said Armstrong told police that he lived two blocks away and was out walking when, suddenly, he felt sick and went to throw up over the bridge. He told police he looked down and saw the body.

In February, investigators collected DNA samples from the man and sent it to the Michigan State Police lab for analysis. The report is pending.

Dearborn Heights police had earlier contacted the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, Gust said, but the prosecutor assigned to the case wanted more evidence before seeking a warrant for charges.

Gust said his department had no evidence suggesting that Armstrong might be linked to other killings. "We couldn't just go out and arrest him without a warrant," Gust said.

Dearborn Heights Police Captain Robert Niemczewski said of the wait for DNA evidence: "It's very unfortunate that things didn't move faster."

Neighbors of Armstrong said police had been to the tidy two-story bungalow on Fairview Street where he lived with his family and some in-laws to question Armstrong about the murder investigation.

Regina and Aldo Alvarado, who live across the street from Armstrong, said they had spoken to him about the police questioning.

"He told me he felt that the police were harassing him," Regina Alvarado said. "He said they seem to follow him a lot. But none of us suspected him. As a matter of fact, we told him, 'No way, No way' when he told us about the police following him and thinking of him as a suspect."

The Alvarados said Armstrong told them he had found a new job two months ago at Detroit Metro Airport after previously working at a Target store in Dearborn Heights.

No one answered a knock on the door at Armstrong's home, but a woman closed the shades in the front picture window.

Jordan's sister, Bonnie, said the last time she saw Wendy was around 9 p.m. on New Year's Day. Wendy Jordan told family members she was going out, her sister said, but she never returned.

Two days later, a Monday, Dearborn Heights police informed the family that her body had been found in the Rouge River near Ann Arbor **Trail** .

Bonnie Jordan said her sister was not a prostitute.

"She may have been in that in the past when she was doing drugs, but not when she died," Bonnie Jordan said.

She said Wendy Jordan grew up in Detroit, with four sisters and a brother, and graduated in 1978 from Pershing High School. She went to New York state to attend college.

When Wendy Jordan returned to Detroit, she worked briefly as an executive secretary to the president of an area bank, but probably lost the job because of her deepening involvement in drugs, her sister said.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, while Jordan was in and out of rehab, her sisters raised her children. One son is a senior at Michigan State University. Her 12-year-old twins are living with another sister, Judy, in Detroit.

At the time of her death, Wendy Jordan was managing a gas station at Woodward and 12 Mile in Royal Oak, Bonnie Jordan said.

"She had been clean for two years," Bonnie Jordan said.

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Washington bureau contributed to this report.

A KILLER'S TRAIL

John E. Armstrong claims he's killed five Detroit prostitutes in the last year and 13 others since 1991. Police have direct evidence linking him only to the five in southeast Michigan. has confessed to killing 18 prostitutes, though police said Thursday they have confirmed only 10 of the murders.linked him only to 10 metro Detroit, one in Norfolk, Va., one in the state of Washington and one in Thailand.

Metro Detroit victims:

Kelly Hood, 33, of Detroit, dumped near train tracks in southwest Detroit three weeks ago.

Detroit woman, whose identity was withheld, dumped near those tracks four weeks ago.

Detroit woman, identity also withheld, dumped near the railroad tracks Monday.

Wendy Jordan, 39, of Detroit, discovered Jan. 2 in the Rouge River in Dearborn Heights. Armstrong called police and reported finding the body.

He is also a suspect in unsolved killings of prostitutes during the eight years he was in the Navy and his ship, the USS Nimitz, was docked in Singapore, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Tel Aviv, Israel.

Caption: Photo

Kelly Hood, left, and Wendy Jordan were found dead in the Detroit area.

Memo: SEE ALSO METRO FINAL EDITION PAGE 1A. SIDEBAR ATTACHED.

Edition: STATE EDITION

Section: NWS

Page: 1A

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