

# Confession helped investigators piece events together

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Investigators had only a theory about how a double homicide in California, an arson in Washington and a homicide-arson in Ester two years ago were connected when they walked into a room at Fairbanks Correctional Center to interview a Tacoma, Wash., man who was being held on what was thought to be a separate assault charge.

"At that time we really had no idea who was involved with the death and the fire until the interview with Jason Wallace on the 31st," Alaska State Troopers Investigator Scott Johnson testified at an evidentiary hearing before Judge Charles Pengilly in Fairbanks Superior Court on Tuesday morning. "We still didn't know who did what to whom."

Following the two-hour interview on Dec. 31, 2002, with Wallace—who was one of a few suspects in the Ester homicide—investigators had a picture of a conspiracy to kill several people in Fairbanks. The conspiracy was linked to two men found dead along a road in California on Christmas Eve 2002.

By the end of the first interview, Wallace, 22, had confessed to killing 25-year-old Teacka Bacote in Ester and conspiring to kill several others in Fairbanks, saying Bill Holmes, a man suspected of killing the two men in California, was the mastermind behind the plot.

Wallace's defense attorney, Geoffrey Wildridge, contends the confession he gave in that interview was obtained in violation of Wallace's right to counsel and should not be allowed as evidence in his upcoming trial on murder charges. Wildridge also argues that investigators preyed upon Wallace's emotional state and concern for his wife, who was under investigation in connection with the Washington arson.

Wildridge also seeks to throw out subsequent interviews because they were tainted by what he contends was a wrongly gained confession. He's trying to get the charges against Wallace thrown out because they rely on those confessions. Wallace faces murder and attempted-murder, arson, assault and conspiracy charges.



**HEARING CONTINUES**—Court Services Officer Bill Broderson, left, holds the door open as Jason Wallace enters the courtroom Tuesday for an evidentiary hearing in the murder case for which he is a suspect. The defense is trying to suppress Wallace's numerous confessions to killing 25-year-old Teacka Bacote in her Ester apartment and setting it on fire to conceal the crime.

Holmes, 24, of Fairbanks is in jail in Shasta County, Calif., facing charges in connection with the murders of Hakeem Bryant, 25, of Fairbanks and Chris Martin, 27, of Olympia, Wash. Authorities there say the men were killed over thousands of dollars in cash the three of them were going to use to buy drugs. Holmes also is accused of driving to Centralia, Wash., to set a rental car on fire in an apparent attempt to hide evidence.

When Holmes was arrested in Tacoma on Dec. 29, 2002, police found large amounts of cash in his shoe and in box of cereal, Johnson testified Tuesday.

Wallace said Holmes threatened to kill his wife if he didn't carry out the killings in Fair-

banks, according to transcripts of the interviews entered into court records recently.

At the end of a series of interviews with Wallace conducted between Dec. 27 and Jan. 13, investigators also had details about the drug business that Bryant ran with the help of Wallace, Holmes, Bacote and others, court records state. The drug business, Wallace said, drove Bryant and Holmes apart and eventually led to Holmes hatching a plot to kill Bryant and people close to him.

Prosecutors say Wallace killed Bacote, stabbed Corey Spears of Fairbanks in the neck at a Clarkson Avenue apartment, then returned to Bacote's Parks Highway apartment and set it on fire.

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According to court documents, investigators in all three states believe Bacote was Bryant's girlfriend and Spears was considered his "adopted brother."

In addition to the slaying of Bacote and the arson, a grand jury charged Wallace with attempted murder and first-degree assault for the stabbing of Spears. Among other related charges, Wallace has been indicted on three counts of conspiring to kill three other people, including a child. The Spears case is being handled separately.

Wallace has pleaded innocent and is scheduled to face a jury trial in February.

The links between the crimes spanning three states started appearing when investigators in Alaska discovered Spears' name was one of two listed on the lease of Bacote's apartment in Ester shortly after the fire was reported. Michael Keys was also listed on the apartment lease and, along with Wallace and Spears, was considered a suspect in Bacote's death, Johnson said.

At first, Johnson said he was only investigating the alleged assault against Spears. He said when he arrested Wallace, who was at Fairbanks International Airport await-

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# HEARING: Wallace

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ing a flight to Tacoma, Wallace was wearing a knit cap that appeared to be singed, placing him as a possible witness or suspect in the Ester arson.

Between the time Wallace was arrested and his confession, Johnson flew to Washington after phone calls Holmes made to his wife in Fairbanks following the California homicides were traced to Wallace's Tacoma apartment.

Johnson talked to Wallace's wife, who was suspected in the Washington arson because she at first lied about picking Holmes up on the side of the road not far from the burned car, Johnson testified.

Still, investigators only had a theory on how everything was linked.

But during the interview with Wallace, Johnson and Investigator Lantz Dahlke let on that they knew more than they did.

"There's little bits and pieces that need to be filled in and if you don't fill them in for us, other people will fill them in," Johnson told Wallace during the taped interview.

"It's one of our interview tactics," Johnson said Monday in his

first day of testimony. "That's standard practice."

Wallace wavered during the interview, trying to ask questions about his wife and asking for advice on whether he needed an attorney, the taped interview played in court Monday revealed.

Eventually, after investigators refused to talk about his wife, Wallace waived his rights, and sobbed. Then he confessed.

The hearing will wrap up today with closing arguments from prosecutor Scott Mattern and Wildridge. Judge Pengilly will then have to decide whether to suppress the confessions that support the charges against Wallace.

Pengilly heard testimony from Johnson, Dahlke and Fairbanks Correctional Center Officer Sgt. Jerry Watson during the hearings Monday and Tuesday morning.

Watson said he put Wallace on suicide watch after overhearing a conversation with a jail nurse.

"He was discussing the fact that he was quite depressed about a friend's recent death," Watson testified Tuesday.

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