

STRANGE CASE of the "DEAD MAN in the DESERT"



One of the queer features of a queer case—Papadopoulos' watch, found under his pillow, displayed by deputies E. Z. Harris, left, and W. T. Allen.



"Eventually they played a hunch . . . and searched the dead man's cabin. They found a .38 caliber revolver, two of its chambers empty."



A posed photo showing how Harry Papadopoulos was found in the desert—nude except for a pair of shorts, wrapped in a blanket, his head resting on a pillow.

By Oren Arnold

ONE of the things that help make the southwestern desert a weird region of mystery and sensation is that so many peculiar murders are committed there. Almost any officer of the law there could name 50 cases offhand, in which the spell of the cactus country played some part. But he couldn't name one more strange than the killing of Harry Papadopoulos, the Greek athlete, near Phoenix, Ariz., or one that leaves more unanswered questions in the public's mind, even though the records now have been closed with a life term in prison.

Papadopoulos was manager of a prosperous automobile tourist court. Not over 30 years of age, he was physically fit, and maintained a hobby interest in athletics. He may have done what many another athlete often does—go frequently onto the open desert to sunbathe and work out in the clean, invigorating air. This, at least, is the only logical explanation of his being naked, save for shorts, when sheriff's officers first saw him.

It was early one Sunday morning when the officers were first invited to do something about him. The camp owner had called them and reported his disappearance.

Sheriff J. R. McFadden and W. T. Allen, a deputy, drove out to the Far West Camp to look into the matter.

The first man the officers encountered was James S. Carpenter, a native of Turkey and a cousin of the missing man. He, too, was worried about Harry's absence.

The officers bade him goodbye, and went away. Nothing else was done about it that Sunday morning, mainly because there was nothing else to do.

Until mid-afternoon the officers at the sheriff's headquarters did some plain and fancy loafing. Then the telephone rang.

An excited voice directed the officers to an abandoned shack on the desert eight miles from Phoenix. There Deputies Allen and E. C. Harris found the body of a man, apparently nude, lying on a blanket.

THE officers pulled back the blanket that covered the body (only the feet were protruding). They saw a swarthy face, an athletic figure, a mop of dark hair, and wounds in the cheek.

"That's Papadopoulos!" exclaimed Mr. Allen. He knew the Greek athlete casually.

For clothing the body had only gym trunks, or perhaps they could be called plain white drawers. The head was on a pillow.

Now began to pile up the questions in the officers' minds, many of which are not answered even yet.

Where were Harry's clothes? They were found stuffed under the cement porch. Why was Harry out there nearly naked? No answer, unless he could have been doing some exercising or sun-bathing.

Then the officers lifted the pillow. Under it was a gold watch. Why was the watch there? No answer has ever come.

They reached Harry's clothing and found all his money was gone. He was known to have at least \$150 when he disappeared the day before, and somebody had taken it. But if the motive was robbery, why had the robber left behind a gold watch worth nearly \$100?

And about the shooting—how was it done? Two bullet wounds showed in the head.

James Carpenter, Harry's cousin, appeared heart-broken at the news. It was terrible that his partner should be thus killed. He sobbed miserably.

Twenty-four hours later no clew had been found. Citizens were excited about the newest desert murder mystery, and mystery it was, so far as the officers were concerned. Officers were on the spot.

EVENTUALLY they played a hunch.

They went back to the auto camp and searched the dead man's cabin. They found a .38 caliber revolver, two of its six chambers empty.

"That's a coincidence," murmured one officer. "Harry was killed by two shots from a pistol, too. But that was

eight miles from here."

The officers suggested that Carpenter go with them to the sheriff's office for some more friendly questioning. He demurred, protesting that he had nothing whatsoever to tell, no light to throw on the murder.

"Well, I tell you, Mr. Carpenter," said Deputy Allen, "I don't quite get one little point. Your lawyer has started probate proceedings, seeking administration of Harry's estate by you, here even before Harry is buried. What was the hurry?"

Carpenter couldn't answer that satisfactorily, but they didn't bother him any more just then. They went out and found a woman named Lillian Suhr, nominally the housekeeper for the auto camp.

Mrs. Suhr didn't want to talk, but she let several points slip. She said James Carpenter and Harry Papadopoulos had left camp together on the morning Harry disappeared. James had told of seeing Harry go away alone.

In due course they had enough to hold Carpenter under \$20,000 bail, which he couldn't make, on a charge of first degree murder. And within a month, to the exact minute, after Harry was found dead, James Carpenter was on the stand in court being tried for the killing.

Mrs. Suhr talked more and more. "Jimmy told me where I could find a .38 caliber revolver in a cardboard box," she said, "and I was to hide or bury it."

Mrs. Suhr hadn't obeyed him. However, in court Jimmy had an answer for that, too. He said he had only

feared that he might be suspected, if officers found the gun.

He added that he had purchased it at Papadopoulos' request several weeks before.

The state had nothing but circumstantial evidence. However, Renz Jennings, the county attorney, sprang a dramatic surprise when Carpenter himself was on the stand.

"Didn't Harry Papadopoulos have an insurance policy totaling \$10,000, naming you, the defendant, as beneficiary?" the county attorney shot at Carpenter.

Carpenter trembled a little and said yes.

MRS. SUHR let some more things slip that hurt Carpenter. She identified the blanket and pillow on which the body was found, as having come from the camp. She testified that she saw Carpenter return on that Saturday and immediately change his trousers and shoes. She insisted, however, that she saw no blood or other marks on his discarded clothing.

The state then sprang another Grade-A surprise. Spencer Moxley, ballistics expert from Los Angeles, was brought to the stand. He swore the dead man had been killed by a bullet from the gun that the deputies had found in the camp.

The jury got the case late one afternoon, and next morning announced a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree, with punishment set at life imprisonment. Carpenter screamed when he heard it.

"I am innocent! I swear I am innocent!"

The convicted man reiterated his innocence when Judge M. T. Phelps pronounced sentence. Then followed the last big surprise of this strange case.

"No, your honor," the miserable prisoner almost whispered it, in response to the judge's query, "I do not wish my case appealed to the Arizona Supreme Court."

"Why?" The judge was incredulous.

"I have no money."

"That will not stand in your way, in the way of justice."

"No, I do not wish it." Carpenter shook his head. "I am innocent of this crime. I swear I am innocent. I have never been in jail before. I do not know who did it."

The court then spoke dramatically and decisively.

"Should it ever develop that what you now tell me is true, so far as I am concerned there will be no stone left unturned in your behalf. However, the jury was justified under all the evidence in the verdict it returned. I do not think I have ever seen a circumstantial case more strongly presented."

Most people agreed with that.