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Jenner beach killings suspect is slain

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(07-21) 14:14 PDT JENNER -- Sonoma County investigators are looking into whether a burglary suspect who was living in the wild before he shot and killed a sheriff's deputy in New Mexico last week was responsible for two of the Bay Area's most mysterious unsolved killings.

The investigators want to know whether Joseph Henry Burgess, 62, who was killed in Thursday's shootout at a mountain cabin, shot a young couple from the Midwest who were camping on a beach in Jenner in 2004.

Sgt. Tim Duke, a spokesman for the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department, said Tuesday that Burgess had been "up near the top" of a list of suspects in the slayings of Jason Allen, 26, of Zeeland, Mich., and Lindsay Cutshall, 22, of Fresno, Ohio.

The couple, who were engaged, were on a break from performing Christian ministry at a camp in El Dorado County when they camped on a beach at the mouth of the Russian River.

Their bodies were found Aug. 18, 2004. They had been shot to death with a .45-caliber Marlin rifle that was never found.

Burgess came to investigators' attention about a week after the killings, Duke said, because he had Northern California links and was wanted in a similar case: the 1972 killings of two campers on a beach on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Like Cutshall and Allen, the victims in British Columbia - Leis Carlsson and Ann Durrant - were young, unwed activist Christians, and were shot in the head as they lay in sleeping bags. Carlsson and Durrant were shot with a .22-caliber rifle.

Police have described Burgess as a religious fanatic who moved to Canada from New Jersey in the 1960s to avoid being drafted. Sonoma County detectives speculated that Burgess may have disapproved of Cutshall and Allen's relationship.

The couple's killer "may have had contact with them earlier," said sheriff's Capt. Matt McCaffrey, "or may have theorized about their relationship when he saw them" on the beach.

Burgess was arrested in the late 1960s for "failing to be inducted into the U.S. Marine Corps," and

his fingerprints were later matched to the Canadian killings, said Lt. Eric Garcia of the New Mexico State Police, which is leading a probe into last week's shootout.

Authorities in Canada and California did not know until last week whether Burgess was still alive. Now, Duke said, Sonoma County may be able to compare evidence from the Jenner crime scene to Burgess.

"We need to rule him in or out," Duke said.

New Mexico authorities say Burgess was suspected of being a burglar known as the "Cookie Bandit." For the past 10 years, the bandit has broken into cabins in the Jemez Mountains near Albuquerque and stolen canned goods, cookies, warm clothing and other items that would help someone survive in the wilderness.

On Thursday, Garcia said, two deputies were staking out a cabin that had a view of other homes where past break-ins had occurred. At about 4:30 a.m., Burgess happened to break into the cabin where the deputies were, Garcia said.

Sgt. Joe Harris and Deputy Theresa Moriarty tried to arrest Burgess, who opened fire. The officers shot back, killing Burgess after he fatally wounded Harris, Garcia said.

Lindsay Cutshall's father, a pastor in Ohio, said he was disappointed Sonoma County authorities would never get a chance to question Burgess.

"We'll see what the next week or so brings," Chris Cutshall said of the investigation. "There was a time when we would have those mountaintop experiences and then rush down to the valley, but we're pretty much beyond that now."

He added, "This is more of a reminder of our great loss. That's a constant anyway, but it comes to the forefront of our minds and hearts. We just miss our daughter and Jason a great deal."

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