

## ***Whitey Bulger's Fatal Prison Beating: 'He Was Unrecognizable'***

By Katharine Q. Seelye, William K. Rashbaum and Danielle Ivory

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BOSTON — The inmates who killed James (Whitey) Bulger, Boston's notorious crime boss, deliberately moved out of view of surveillance cameras in a West Virginia prison before pummeling him with a padlock that was stuffed inside a sock, law enforcement officials said on Wednesday, as investigations began into how such a murder could have taken place in a supposedly secure facility.

Despite the attackers' efforts to hide, officials said, cameras caught video images of at least two inmates rolling Mr. Bulger, 89, who was in a wheelchair, into a corner where the attack took place. Mr. Bulger was bleeding profusely when he was found by prison authorities at 8:20 Tuesday morning. Guards immediately undertook lifesaving measures, officials said, but he was pronounced dead.

A prison official identified one of the suspects as Fotios (Freddy) Geas, 51, a Mafia hit man from West Springfield, Mass. He is serving a life sentence at the Hazelton penitentiary in West Virginia for the 2003 killing of the leader of the Genovese crime family in Springfield.

Daniel D. Kelly, who has represented Mr. Geas for many years, said in an interview that he had no idea whether his client was involved in killing Mr. Bulger, who was an informant for the F.B.I., a relationship he manipulated as a cover while he betrayed and murdered rival gang members.

But Mr. Kelly did say that Mr. Geas “has a particular distaste for cooperators.” Mr. Kelly said that Mr. Geas's feelings about informants were so strong that when he was given a chance to avoid a life sentence by cooperating with the authorities, he did not take it.

*[Whitey Bulger's crew, from 'the rifleman' to 'the executioner': Where are they now?]*

Mr. Bulger's death, within hours of his arrival at the prison, raised numerous questions. Mr. Bulger, a longtime federal informer and a prolific killer over several decades, knew many who would want him dead. But how was he left vulnerable to a beating so forceful that it displaced his eyeballs?

“I'm not surprised that he got hit; I'm surprised that they let him get hit,” said Ed Davis, the former Boston police commissioner.

Mr. Bulger's eyes appeared to have been dislodged from his head, although it was unclear whether his attackers gouged them out or if they were knocked out because he was beaten so severely in the attack. This information was relayed by a senior law enforcement official who oversees organized crime cases but is not involved in the investigation into Mr. Bulger's death, and who said he had learned it from a federal official.

“They apparently tuned him up to the point where he was unrecognizable,” he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the case.

Officials said the beating was carried out at least in part with a padlock-stuffed sock, a not uncommon method that inmates use to attack one another.

At least two inmates were quickly sent to solitary confinement after Mr. Bulger was found, according to three employees of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, who requested anonymity because the investigation was not public. Mr. Geas was among those sent to solitary, according to prison documents obtained by The New York Times.

Mr. Davis, the former police commissioner, said he was baffled that the prison had not done more to keep Mr. Bulger “away from a convicted organized crime hit man from Massachusetts.”

The United States attorney's office in West Virginia said Wednesday that it and the F.B.I. were investigating Mr. Bulger's death as a homicide. It had no further comment.

Mr. Bulger was serving two life terms in prison for his role in 11 murders committed when he controlled the Boston underworld over several decades.

He was killed after being in Hazelton for less than 12 hours, after he was transferred from another facility. By then, he had already established a record of troubling activity in other prisons.



F.B.I. photos from 1984 of Mr. Bulger, who was serving two life terms in prison for his role in 11 murders. FBI, via Associated Press

At the Coleman prison complex in Florida in September 2014, he was disciplined multiple times, including once for masturbating in front of a male staff member and once, in February, for threatening a female medical staff member, according to the prison documents.

In February, Mr. Bulger told the female staff member that her day of reckoning was coming, according to a prison official with knowledge of the event. Mr. Bulger was sent to solitary confinement as a result and remained there until October when he was transferred to a facility in Oklahoma, according to the documents. On October 29, he was transferred to Hazelton.

The documents indicated he was transferred to Hazelton because he had completed medical treatment, not for disciplinary reasons.

But Mr. Bulger was said to be in questionable health. He was in a wheelchair for several years, according to Henry Brennan, one of his lawyers.

“He could stand up by himself, but he could not walk,” Mr. Brennan said in an interview Wednesday. “He was looking forward to getting out of solitary confinement to try to teach himself how to walk again.”

Mr. Brennan said that Mr. Bulger damaged his hip during his two years of pretrial incarceration in solitary confinement.

“He was continuously falling off the bed and injuring his hip,” Mr. Brennan said, adding that his inability to exercise also contributed to several health problems.

In his younger years, Mr. Bulger was a fitness fanatic who obsessed over taking care of his body and keeping in top physical condition.

Many in Boston, particularly in Mr. Bulger’s old stomping grounds in South Boston, were relieved at the news that the long, deadly saga of Mr. Bulger finally appeared over.

An 85-year-old man named Ed, who did not want to give his last name because he said he knew one of Mr. Bulger’s brothers and did not want to alienate him, spoke for many when he said that Mr. Bulger’s death represented a kind of justice.

“I hate to be morbid, but knowing the way of person he was, it’s probably a long time coming, seeing that he was responsible for so many other families’ and people’s misery over the years,” he said as he walked around Boston Harbor’s Castle Island, where Mr. Bulger frequently strolled with his associates.

“There’s an old saying, ‘What goes around comes around,’” he added.

Many of the families of Mr. Bulger’s victims did not hide their glee.

“All I really wanted to do was get that champagne bottle and pop that cork,” said Patricia Donahue, whose husband, Michael Donahue, was killed in a shooting linked to Mr. Bulger in 1982. Mr. Donahue was giving a ride to his neighbor, Edward (Brian) Halloran, an F.B.I. informant who had implicated Mr. Bulger in a murder, when he was killed in a spray of bullets intended for Mr. Halloran.

“It’s been a long time waiting,” Ms. Donahue said. “Now my family can relax a little bit, now that we don’t have to worry about hearing his name all the time.”

Steven Davis, the brother of Debra Davis — whom Mr. Bulger was said by his former associate, Stephen (The Rifleman) Flemmi, to have strangled to death in 1981 — also said he was pleased.

For one thing, he said, Mr. Bulger’s killing would provide a suitable ending to a nonfiction mini-series that he and Ms. Donahue are helping to develop, based on the transcripts of Mr. Bulger’s trial.

“He died the way I hoped he always was going to die,” Mr. Davis said.

Katharine Q. Seelye reported from Boston and William K. Rashbaum and Danielle Ivory from New York. Contributing reporting were Serge F. Kovalski from New York and Kate Taylor from Boston. Alain Delaqu  rie and Susan Beachy contributed research.

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