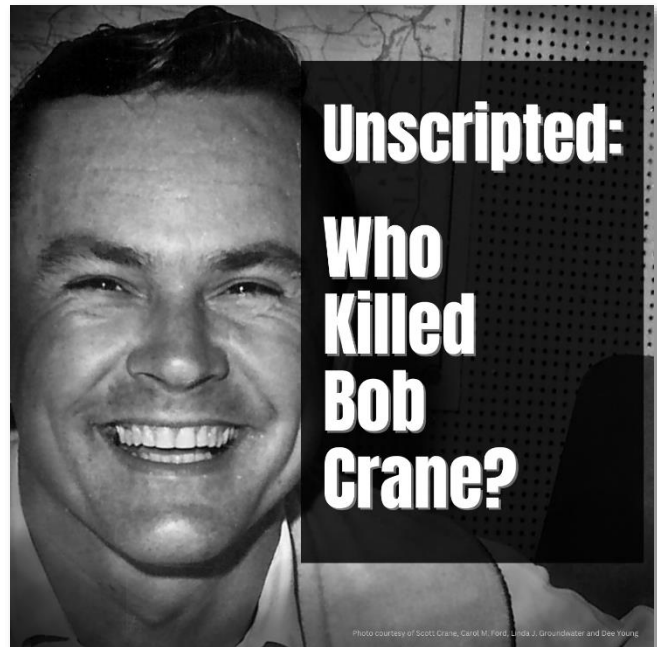


## Unscripted – Who Killed Bob Crane?

The death of Bob Crane monopolized headlines 46 years ago when he was brutally murdered in Scottsdale, Arizona. Crane is widely known for his portrayal of the wise cracking Col. Hogan in the 1960's television series Hogan's Heroes. The show, which still airs today in syndication, ended in 1971. But in June 1978, Bob Crane was in Arizona performing in the play *Beginner's Luck*. While in Scottsdale he stayed at a guest condo on East Chaparral Drive, a space reserved for actors of the Windmill Dinner Theater.

### *Solved; Unsolved?*

Some would argue that this case was solved long ago – it is not currently listed on the Scottsdale Police Department's website with other open murders. Perhaps because police believe that they already identified their suspect – someone who was arrested and prosecuted for Crane's murder. But, that man – John Henry Carpenter - was found not guilty after a trial. The jury said that the evidence just wasn't there. So, if Carpenter was not the killer, who was? There are plenty of theories surrounding possible suspects. It's a question that has been the focus of much speculation.



Bob Crane was one of Hollywood's most famous actors of the day, and when his sexual proclivities became known after his death, those scandalous stories continued to garner media attention.

### *Bob's Early Career*

Who was the real Bob Crane? According to biographer Carol Ford, Crane was born in Waterbury, Connecticut and grew up in nearby Stamford. He had an older brother who served in the Navy, and Bob enlisted in the National Guard. But, says Ford, it was Crane's love of drums that launched his radio career. His first job was at WLEA in Hornell, New York and then he returned to Connecticut to work at WICC. "That's where he makes it really big on the east coast," said Ford.

Crane married his first wife, Ann in the late 1940's. Then in 1956, he gets his big break in radio when he is hired by KNX Radio in Hollywood. "This is where his radio career explodes because

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he is at KNX doing things in radio that had rarely been done before,” said Carol Ford. “He had a component to his KNX Radio Show that allowed him to interview celebrities, so all the A-Listers of the day – actors, actresses, musicians, authors, pretty much anybody in the entertainment business,” Ford said. After 5 years at KNX Radio, Crane then began acting, performing on a couple of the biggest TV series of the day, the Dick Van Dyke and the Donna Reed Shows. Then, he is called to audition for a new television show called Hogan’s Heroes, and he is cast as the charming and witty Colonel Robert Hogan, the starring role that catapults him to worldwide fame. When Hogan’s Heroes is over, Crane continues to get other acting parts, but he also enjoyed doing community theater. His favorite play was *Beginner’s Luck*, which would tragically be his final performance.

Bob and his first wife Ann had three children: Robert David, Debbie and Karen, said Carol Ford. They divorced in 1971 and Bob married Patricia Olsen whose screen name was Sigrid Valdis, who played the role of Hilda on Hogan’s Heroes. Bob and Patricia had one son, Robert Scott Crane.

### *Bob’s Sex Addiction*

Bob’s unusual sexual activity began when he was living in Connecticut. “Bob would flirt with a lot of women, he’d talk and talk, and he was very charming, had a lot of charisma,” said Linda Groundwater, co-author of *Bob Crane: The Definitive Biography*. Crane was having sex with hundreds of women, she said, adding that his fascination with photography included the recording of every aspect of his life, including his sexual liaisons.

### *The Final Curtain*

On June 28, 1978 Bob performed *Beginner’s Luck* at the Windmill Dinner Theater in Scottsdale, Arizona. After the play he meets and greets fans in the lobby, said Ford and Groundwater. Also there was an acquaintance of Bob’s, John Henry Carpenter, a salesman for SONY and who was Bob’s contact for purchasing video camera equipment. “They were not by any stretch of the imagination best friends, but they were friends, and John was more or less and hanger-on. He would go carouse with Bob in different cities around the country looking for women. Bob would get first dibs, and he would get whoever Bob didn’t want,” said Carol Ford.

That night, after Bob finished signing autographs, he and Carpenter go to Crane’s car in the parking lot. But when they get there, they discover a flat tire. Ford said that some have speculated that the flat tire may have been the first attempt on Bob’s life. But he gets the tire fixed, and he and Carpenter proceed to Bobby McGee’s, a restaurant in Scottsdale. Said Ford, “It was reported from waitresses and others that there was a heated discussion. They do not know what was said, but it wasn’t a friendly type of exchange. It was more, stern, angry, not a pleasant

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experience for either of them.” Ford told *APB Cold Case* that some people presumed that this was the moment when Crane told Carpenter that he was going to “clean up his act” and was no longer going to be hanging out with him.

After dinner, the two men return to Bob’s condo on East Chaparral Drive. While there Bob has a phone call with his wife Patricia Olson. Carpenter would later tell police that it was an argument, a fact corroborated by neighbors said Ford. “He’s yelling so loudly he’s not going to be able to perform tomorrow, he’s going to get a sore throat, he’s going to ruin his vocal chords...”, said Ford of the neighbor’s accounts. John Henry Carpenter reportedly leaves Bob’s condo and heads off to his own nearby hotel. At some point, Bob goes to sleep.

### *Crane’s Body Discovered*

On June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1978, Victoria Berry Wells had an appointment with Crane, but he is a no-show. There’s also a scheduled luncheon that Bob is supposed to be attending, but again, he is missing. Carol Ford said, “Victoria Berry Wells goes to his apartment and finds that the door is unlocked. She is surprised, but she lets herself in. It’s completely dark.” Wells ventures inside the darkened unit, calling his name, making her way to the back bedroom. “And she sees somebody lying in bed. She thinks it’s a woman because of what she thinks is long hair that is fanned out on the pillows and the bedsheets,” said Ford. But Wells realizes the person is dead, and at 2:20 PM she calls police. It was apparently due to the massive blood loss from Crane’s head on the bedding that gave Wells the impression that it was the long, dark hair of a woman. She would later learn the details and the fact that it was indeed Bob Crane.

### *The Investigation*

Scottsdale police respond to the scene, along with the medical examiner. The official police report indicates “victim struck twice with blunt instrument” on the side of his head. The autopsy report noted the injury was behind the left ear with “abundant blood on the body and head”, along with scalp lacerations and a depressed skull fracture<sup>1</sup>. Reports also said there was “minimal aspiration of blood in the lungs”, indicating that Crane likely stopped breathing very soon after being bludgeoned. Detectives at the scene make an interesting observation about Crane – he has an electrical cord tied around his neck, fashioned into a bow. According to the Ironwood Daily Globe, a police spokesperson said, “It was put on after he was dead, but it was put on tight.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Autopsy report 78-08644

<sup>2</sup> Actor Bob Crane Slain, Police Have No Motive Yet; 6/30/1978, Ironwood Daily Globe p. 6

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Ford said there was another interesting discovery at the scene – a white flaky substance on Crane’s thigh, thought to be semen. Ford said it was assumed it could have been from a man who pleased himself after he murder had been committed.

How did someone get into Bob’s condo? There was no forced entry according to Linda Groundwater who added that Crane was known to be a very light sleeper. Said Groundwater, “So whoever it was, was either comfortable being with Bob in that place, or came in to a point where he would have just gone to sleep with them there. Or they were so knowledgeable about Bob’s habits, that being there did not wake him up.”

Groundwater told *APB Cold Case* that from the research about the murder investigation, including the review of a police video from Crane’s condo on the day of his murder, she said that police mishandled the crime scene. “They let people walk in and out without taking any protection, they let them pick up the phone, let them take things out of the condominium. They let people smoke in there.” She added, “If you look at the crime scene video... you will see that the medical examiner actually crawls on top of the bed with Bob still in it and starts to manipulate the body and do things with the body before Bob has ever been removed from the room.”

Initial reports of Crane’s homicide indicated that the possible murder weapon was a car jack or tire iron. But later reports honed in on a camera tripod, one of the many pieces of camera gear that was in Crane’s room. Groundwater said the actual murder weapon has never been found, but there is an imprint in blood on the bed sheets, consistent with the legs of a tripod. “There was much blood all over this room, not just on Bob and the bed sheets and the pillow, but on the wall, on the ceiling, over on the side on his, on his diaries. There was a lot of blood everywhere,” said Groundwater.

### *The Suspects*

Linda Groundwater said that police quickly focused their attention on John Henry Carpenter, one of the last people to have been seen with Crane the night before. Carol Ford poses the question, “Is it John Carpenter because Bob says, ‘I’m not going to hang around you anymore?’”

Others have speculated that it could have been Crane’s second wife, but according to Groundwater, she had an ironclad alibi. Any theory pointing to someone acting on her behalf is unsupported, said Groundwater who mentions another theory that has been raised – a mob hit. But, she says, the crime scene doesn’t speak to a professional rub-out. “If you’re doing this as a mob hit, you’re not going to just use whatever weapon happens to be there, you’re going to walk in with a plan,” said Groundwater. “You’re going to walk in, do your job and leave,” she added.

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What about jealousy or revenge as a motive? With the alleged hundreds of affairs that Bob had with women, could one of them been jealous – or perhaps a vengeful boyfriend or husband of one of those women? Groundwater mentioned the possibility of Victoria Berry Wells' husband, but added, she has seen no evidence pointing to him. But because of the force of the assault, both Ford and Groundwater agree that the actual killer was not a woman.

Ford said there have been an untold number of theories posed, but whoever the killer is, he was more than angry. “This crime is done by someone who has such a deep-seeded hatred of Bob, to the point that... its personal, he has to get close.” Said Ford.

### *The Black Bag?*

Could another motive have been recovery of Bob Crane's black bag? A bag reported to contain “pornographic stills” of men and women. Carol Ford said that some of the photos were believed to be of prominent men and women – people who may have been embarrassed if the pictures were discovered. Said Ford, “Those who had been with Bob knew that he had this black bag. It was something that he had with him. And, it was not part of anything in the apartment... it was not there, it was not where it should have been. So it was never found.” Ford added that some assumed that the killer took the black bag, but its whereabouts are still unknown.

### *Cold Case*

The investigation by Scottsdale Police apparently stalls, and there are no arrests or indictments. Newspaper reports from 1992 indicate that two prosecutors had declined to prosecute a suspect in the murder, perhaps a commentary on the sufficiency of the evidence they had. But as Robert Graysmith was in the process of writing his book titled *The Murder of Bob Crane*, Scottsdale police took another look at their case, said Carol Ford. “They found a photograph with what they believed was a speck of brain matter in John Carpenter's rental car. They didn't have the actual specimen... wherever it was, it wasn't where it should have been with all of the evidence” said Ford. “And they take this photograph and blow it up, magnify it a million times and look at it and say, that's got to be Bob Crane's brain, pieces of his brain matter.”

### *An Arrest*

According to the Kenosha News, John Henry Carpenter was arrested on June 1, 1992 for the murder of Bob Crane<sup>3</sup>, then 14 years after his body was found in Scottsdale. The prosecutor at the time was vague about the ‘new evidence’ but the same news report said that the criminal complaint detailed that human tissue, possibly brain matter, was found on the passenger's side door of Carpenter's rented car. That same news account reported that Carpenter's rental car had

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<sup>3</sup> Associated Press; Friend charged with 1978 murder of actor Bob Crane; Jun. 2, 1992; Kenosha News; p. 12

smears of blood on the door – said to be Type B which was Crane’s type; Carpenter reportedly had type A. At the time of Crane’s murder in 1978 forensic DNA testing did not exist. As they prepared for trial in 1992 DNA science had emerged, but required a more pristine sample than what science can identify today. The report from 1992 said that genetic testing was inconclusive.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Prosecution of John Henry Carpenter*

At trial in 1994, the prosecution argued that Carpenter had motive, saying that Crane was ending their relationship and “cutting off Carpenter’s access to women attracted by Crane’s fame.”<sup>5</sup> The prosecution’s case was described as circumstantial, refuted by the defense that alleged the prosecution was exploiting the sexual aspects of their relationship, and referring to a videotape that was apparently played during the trial showing Crane and Carpenter having sex with the same woman. The same news report also indicated that the woman who found Crane’s body, identified in other reports as Victoria Berry, admitted to having sex with Crane on two occasions.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Not Guilty*

On October 31, 1994, Carpenter, then 66 years old, was found not guilty. The jury foreman was quoted as saying, “You can’t prove someone guilty on speculation.”<sup>7</sup> Carol Ford said, “There was circumstantial evidence. But there was no physical evidence to back up the claims that he was without any doubt the one who killed Bob Crane. So they had to acquit.” Ford added that with the passage of time, including the passing of some witnesses and persons of interest, and the fact that police released the evidence to Crane’s family, there is no official interest in pursuing the murder of Bob Crane.

#### *Business Manager Embezzled from Crane*

According to Linda Groundwater, Crane’s business manager, Lloyd Vaughn was found to be embezzling from Crane. “He actually served jail time for that, and sometime later, many years later, actually, called Bob’s youngest son, Scott, and apologized for his part in that.” *APB Cold Case* asked Carol Ford if Vaughn was considered a suspect at any time during the murder investigation. “I think they looked at him briefly... he was not in Scottsdale; he had an alibi.” Ford said that the embezzlement issue brings to light the reason why Crane was always busy. “Bob was constantly working because the money wasn’t there, and part of the reason the money

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Kim, Eun-Kyung; Attorneys close cases in Crane murder trial; Oct. 27, 1994; Delaware Daily Times; p. 34

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Kim, Eun-Kyung; Crane pal acquitted of his murder; Nov. 1, 1994; Beckley Register Herald; p. 6

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wasn't there was because Lloyd Vaughn was skimming off the top and embezzling." Asked whether Crane might have been aware that Vaughn was stealing from him, both Ford and Groundwater said 'no', adding that the theft was not discovered until a couple years after Crane's death.

### *Biographer's Thoughts*

For all of the research and interviews they have done, *APB Cold Case* asked Carol Ford and Linda Groundwater who they believe committed the murder of Bob Crane. But they politely decline, saying that they do not want to skew other's interpretation of the objective facts of the case. But when asked if their suspect was discussed in the podcast – they said, "it's in there somewhere."

### *Unresolved*

The question "who killed Bob Crane" remains a mystery and will not likely be the subject of any official investigation. But the circumstances of a television star who was well-liked, who was killed, and whose hidden sex addiction became unveiled following his death, it will remain a topic for speculation and armchair-sleuthing. The television series that catapulted Crane into worldwide fame, Hogan's Heroes, will soon celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Carol Ford said that Bob Crane brought joy to millions of people through his portrayal of the witty Col. Hogan in Hogan's Heroes, a show that continues to run today throughout the world. Ford said that Crane was interviewed by a newspaper reporter in Scottsdale about a week before he was killed. "He said to that reporter, if I were to write my autobiography today, I would title it Laughing All the Way to the Grave."

Check out our show notes, including links to the book by Carol Ford and Linda Groundwater titled, *Bob Crane: The Definitive Biography*, at APBColdCase.com.

<https://apbcoldcase.com/bob-crane>

