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Gunman consumed by Amber murder case

BEDFORD (AP)—A man shot dead by a police sharpshooter after he opened fire from a third-floor apartment balcony was known by authorities as a bothersome tipster who claimed to know who was responsible for the 1996 kidnapping and slaying of Amber Hagerman.

It still has not been determined what caused Matthew Wade Howard, 42, to throw furniture from his balcony on Friday and then begin shooting at Shoal Creek Apartment residents with a .357-caliber Colt revolver. No one was injured. A marksman killed Howard, a criminal defense lawyer, after a brief standoff.

"We probably will never know," Bedford Deputy Police Chief Mike Mason said Sunday. "We plan on interviewing some witnesses. We have reports that he was screaming incoherently."

Bedford Municipal Judge Tim Murphy defeated Howard in a 1995 election but considered him a friendly colleague. "He did not appear to me to be a person that had any problems," Murphy is quoted as saying in Sunday editions of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

"I would just see him from time to time at the courthouse," he said. "I hadn't seen him in the courthouse in awhile."

Police knew a different Howard, who apparently gave up his law practice about a year ago.

Howard's contact with Arlington police investigators occurred from mid-1996 to early 1998, when he said he knew who killed Amber, said Arlington police Sgt. Mark Simpson, who headed a task force investigating Amber's death.

The unsolved slaying of the 9-year-old led to creation of the "Amber Plan" — through which North Texas radio and television stations broadcast disappearances.

Task force members investigated the man whom Howard

named, but he had an alibi, Simpson said.

"The tips he had forwarded on Amber Hagerman were investigated until it was found they were without merit," Simpson said. "There was never any indication of violence or potential violence in the letters he wrote us. He never got off this individual, but he never had any information tying him to the case."

"The tips he had forwarded on Amber Hagerman were duly investigated until it was found they were without merit."

— Sgt. Mark Simpson
Arlington police

Howard continued sending letters to Arlington investigators about the case. "That upon examination were irrelevant to anything," Simpson said. Howard also began sending information to other law-enforcement agencies in Tarrant County and other counties.

"He would write long, rambling letters and had packets of paperwork sent nowhere and was absolutely obsessed with this thing," Simpson said. "But it passed over time."

When Howard began pressuring on the issue, investigators turned the focus toward Howard, Simpson said. Howard was cleared.

"He didn't kill Amber," Simpson said. "He was just a tipster."

Judy Gill, who bought Howard's Bedford house in February 1999, said he told her he was moving to an apartment to escape the rigors of homeownership, which since a divorce had come back seat to his exhaustive work as a lawyer.

Howard told Gill he was working on the Amber case. "He was working long hours and it burned him out," Gill said. "He was going to go from being a criminal attorney to computer programming. He didn't have time to do yard work or type of thing."

The officer who fired the shot that killed Howard was on administrative leave with pay. Officials said it appears that Detective Bill Pond, an 11-year veteran, acted justifiably.

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Bush's shows bipartisanship

AUSTIN (AP)—It's one thing to talk the talk, says George W. Bush, pointing to his record as Texas governor as evidence that he's the only Republican presidential hopeful who has walked the chief executive's walk.

"What Republicans need to do is elect somebody who has gotten results, tangible results that people can see, that people can put their arms around and say, 'This man's a leader,'" Bush said during one New Hampshire debate. After five years in office and signing 4,095 bills into law — everything from lowering property taxes to limiting lawsuit damages — Bush's guiding philosophy might best be described as the politics of the possible.

His two-pronged mantra: Government should do a few things and do them well, and an officeholder shouldn't squander his political capital.

As only the second Republican governor of Texas since Reconstruction, Bush picked his targets carefully and worked closely with Democrats. "I'm a conservative. I am not strident," Bush said in an interview. "I am a principled person. I stand on my ground. I know how to set an agenda. I don't try to do all things for all people."

And that may be the best way to sum up his gubernatorial record, analysts say. "He's been described as almost risk-averse. He's not ideological. He's chosen a small number of issues that are clear cut and not terribly controversial. He's shied away from controversy for the most

part," said Bruce Buchanan, a University of Texas political scientist and veteran Bush watcher.

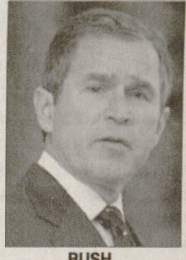
It's a pragmatic view in a state where the GOP didn't take control of a legislative chamber until three years ago, where Republicans hold only a one-vote Senate majority and Democrats have ruled the House for 120 years.

"If he had come in with a hard-right program, he would have been demolished his first six months in office by the Legislature. We don't have a hard-right Legislature, and he wouldn't be running for president now," George Christian, who was President Lyndon Johnson's press secretary, said.

"A lot of what he has done as governor is avoid the bad things," Christian said. "He hasn't been confrontational. He hasn't been dogmatic. He hasn't demagogued. He realized he had to be bipartisan or he might as well not be serving."

From abortion to welfare, Bush has compiled a track record dotted with accomplishments — and some failures — while sometimes refusing to be drawn into controversial topics.

His signal accomplishment, which he touts again and again on the campaign trail, was his push to lower property taxes. Bush called on lawmakers in 1997 to cut school property taxes by \$3 billion. To reach that goal, he proposed a series of steps that included spending \$1 billion of budget surplus; raising the sales and motor vehicle sales taxes; and imposing a business activity tax.



BUSH

Mail theft on the rise in D-FW

DALLAS (AP)—Mail theft is on the rise in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, where authorities are trying to stamp out thieves who swipe thousands of dollars worth of fraudulent checks.

Kenny D. Smith, U.S. Postal Inspection Service spokesman, said the problem of mail theft in the Metroplex has more than doubled since this time last year. Apartment complexes and other areas with large concentrations of mail are particularly vulnerable, he said.

"The thieves are looking for things with your financial information on it," Smith is quoted as saying in Sunday editions of *The Dallas Morning News*. "Before you can do anything, they've already hit your checking account."

Since the beginning of the year in October, postal inspectors have made 41 arrests for mail theft in the area, Smith said. Nineteen of those are now under federal indictment, he said. The penalties for stealing mail can range up to \$250,000 in fines and five years in prison.

In a case reported to Dallas police last month, a woman received a letter from a sales clerk at a Lewisville furniture store after someone mailed a \$2,200 purchase with one of her store checks. The next day, the thief made a \$1,700 purchase at a mall and purchases of \$2,800 and \$2,200 at other stores.

"These people have my telephone number and my address," the woman who requested anonymity because she fears the thieves, said. "I just don't know what else they could be up to and I worry about that."


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