

INTERNET ACTIVITY TRAIL SPRUNG ACCUSED COP

INVESTIGATORS FOUND OFFICER'S ALIBI, A DETAIL HE DIDN'T MENTION

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Will County investigators thought Lynwood police officer Brian Dorian was the man responsible for a shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana, but they weren't completely sure.

That's why Will County sheriff's investigators spent the days between Dorian's arrest and subsequent release late Tuesday deconstructing the electronic labyrinth on his computer hard drive and re-creating his possible paths by following the digital bread crumbs his cell phone left behind Oct. 5.

Eventually, computer forensics experts within the department unlocked the ultimate clue to Dorian's liberation -- his Internet surfing.

Initially, Dorian told police he had been at home on the Internet until about 10 a.m., before logging off to watch TV -- ESPN and some news.

About 10:30 a.m., a man opened fire on a group of men working on a home in Beecher, killing one and wounding another. Forty minutes later, the gunman resurfaced in Lowell, Ind., shooting a farmer multiple times. The farmer lived.

A couple of hours later, police stopped Dorian in his truck in Schererville, Ind. They let him go, but he soon became a suspect in the shooting.

In the days following, one of the victims of the shooting in Beecher picked out Dorian's picture, telling police the shooter was the man in the photo, only older, Will County Sheriff Paul Kaupas said.

The picture later checked out to be Dorian's driver's license photo from eight years ago, Kaupas said.

Another person told police Dorian's light blue pickup truck was in the shop getting two new tires -- just after police said publicly they were trying to use tire tracks to find the shooter.

And two former Will County Board members came forward to offer that Dorian had once inquired about raising honeybees as a way to get a tax exemption, Kaupas said. The Indiana farmer who was shot told police the shooter asked him about honeybees before opening fire.

Enter Will County's Computer Forensics Lab -- a team of deputies with extensive training -- which Kaupas launched in 2006.

Cell phone records police obtained from Verizon and Nextel showed Dorian's cell signal bounced off towers in the vicinity of the crime scenes during the time frame of the shootings, Kaupas said.

At one point, police blocked a stretch of road and had a squad car -- lights and sirens blaring -- race along U.S. 41 to time how long it would have taken the shooter to get from Beecher to Lowell, Ind., and compared it to Dorian's electronic path.

The computer forensics team turned to Dorian's computer: Keystrokes, time stamps, hard drives.

At 7 a.m. the morning of Dorian's release, the head of Will County's computer forensics lab started reviewing Dorian's computer hard drive. Hours later he found what would lead to Dorian's freedom.

Turns out, Dorian logged back on to the computer minutes before the shootings in Beecher began, Kaupas said.

"He didn't say anything about going back on his computer" when they interviewed him after his arrest, Kaupas said. "He logged on about 10:20 or 10:25 a.m., without telling us, and that's when we found all these other websites that needed passwords."

When investigators and prosecutors met with him after his court hearing, Dorian was able to confirm the sites and passwords he used in that later computer surfing session, giving him an alibi.

"Is that to say somebody else couldn't have been in the house and used his computer? That's always a possibility," Kaupas said. "But we were satisfied with what he said in the interview that we were able to confirm that alibi."

Cyber forensics experts say it's possible, but highly unlikely, a suspect could fake being on the Internet to create an alibi like Dorian's.

Marc Rogers, director of the Cyber Forensics Program at Purdue University, said investigators likely had to look at time stamps on Dorian's computer and on other servers, such as one that hosts Dorian's e-mail account, or any sites he visited.

"You can change the time on your computer to whatever you want," Rogers said. "So you really want to verify that to an external server just to be 100 percent sure."

Without an accomplice, someone could not create an alibi by just checking a browser history or time stamps and making changes, said J. Stott Matthews, a Michigan cyber forensics expert.

"It would take above-average knowledge to do that, No. 1, and No. 2, there would be a [electronic] fingerprint of that happening," Matthews said.

In other words, if someone did try to go back and build an alibi later, the computer would show that.

Kaupas said Dorian's ability to corroborate his Internet activity was what convinced prosecutors he wasn't the shooter.