

HED: Arrest in cold case murder of a Madisonville native
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Pfc. Amanda Gonzales was only 19 and four months pregnant at the time of her brutal murder at the alleged hands of former soldier Shannon L. Wilkerson, a 42-year-old male, who was arrested last week in Florida on suspicion of being her murderer.

This arrest comes after 21 years of being a cold case when Gonzales's body was found strangled in her barracks in 2001.

At the time, Wilkerson was a serving member of the armed forces "but was later discharged by the Army," according to a statement released by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Justice Department's statement said, "According to court documents, Shannon L. Wilkerson, 42, is allegedly responsible for the death of Amanda Gonzales on Nov. 3, 2001. The murder occurred at Fliegerhorst Kaserne, then a U.S. Army base in Hanau, Germany. Wilkerson was a member of the Armed Forces at the time of the alleged offense but was later discharged from the Army."

"Wilkerson is charged under the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act, which gives the U.S. federal courts jurisdiction over crimes committed outside the United States by, among others, former members of the Armed Forces who are no longer subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice," per the Justice Department's statement.

Wilkerson is charged with one count of first-degree murder. If convicted, he faces a maximum amount of life in prison; officially, Wilkerson has pled not guilty to this crime.

Gonzales' mother, Gloria, and her step-father Mike Bates spoke to the effect of what it was like to get the news that Gonzales' murderer has been arrested after 21 years.

"We're relieved; it's been like holding your breath and, finally, just a sigh of relief," said Gloria Bates.

The family went to visit Amanda's grave last week in Hearne to take her a new flag; Gloria mentioned that she talks to Amanda when she is there, "And I told her, I mean, she lost her dad already, so I told her to take care of her dad, and that I'm still here trying to figure this out," then Gloria stated that they got the call on Thursday, February 23.

When they picked up the phone, they were greeted by an FBI agent, who told them, "We just want to let you know that we've made an arrest in your daughter's case," Mike stated.

According to Gloria and Mike, they looked at each other then and asked the agent if he was serious. When the agent expressed that he was, Gloria admitted that the sigh of relief from her spooked her, her husband, and their other daughter.

Though it was the sigh of 21 years of not knowing who it was, the family is on a journey to seek justice for their daughter. Mike stated that the FBI was flying them down to attend meetings and to see the man who allegedly murdered Amanda.

Amanda was born in Hearne, raised in Madisonville, and even graduated from Madisonville High school; needless to say, she still has family and friends in the city. Those friends made themselves known to Gloria and Mike when the news broke out.

Since according to them, people immediately started to call them, wanting to know more but also expressing their sincere prayers for the family during this time, and most wonderful of all, even her fellow soldiers who she was stationed in Germany reached out to the family to express their feelings on her case coming out into the open after all this time.

Of course, the case is not done yet; the trial of Shannon L. Wilkerson has been reportedly set for March 27 in Pensacola. Florida