

Vanishes 7 Years Ago—Now Declared Dead

By IRVING SIMPSON

Gene Whitacre vanished nearly seven years ago.

Friday he was declared dead. The Kokomo soldier walked out of a bowling alley in New Mexico on the night of July 1, 1947 and has never been seen since.

Judge Merton Stanley of the Howard Circuit Court Friday ruled that Cpl. Harvey (Gene) Whitacre, is legally dead, and appointed his brother, Ben Whitacre, The Tribune's composing room foreman, as administrator of his estate.

FBI in Case

The corporal was last seen in Albuquerque, N. M. Army authorities and the FBI searched for the missing youth, but without success. He was believed to have been the victim of foul play.

Cpl. Whitacre, who was 20 at the time, was stationed at the Sandia, N. M. Special Weapons Project. It later developed that his duty involved work with atomic bomb development.

On the night of his disappearance, Cpl. Whitacre had gone to Albuquerque with a bowling team from his base.

An above-average bowler, the

soldier was treasurer of the bowling league and carried large sums of money with him. That night it was reported he had about \$400 in bowling league funds on his person.

Search Started

The next morning (July 2) he did not answer roll call at the Sandia base. A search was started and several hours later a cap, shirt, tie and a pair of glasses were found in an alley near the bowling hall located on the outskirts of Albuquerque. They were identified as belonging to Whitacre.

Police found bloodstains on the articles and also two slashes in the shirt which indicated possible stab wounds in the back.

Further evidence of foul play stemmed from the fact that the glasses had heavy lenses. It was learned that the Kokomo youth could not see clearly without them.

That was the only evidence ever found that might lead to an explanation of Whitacre's disappearance.

Foul play was suspected immediately, army investigators reported, because of the sober and responsible reputation of the youth. His



CPL. GENE WHITACRE
... declared dead

family said Cpl. Whitacre neither smoked nor drank.

Because of the nature of his work, army officials were deeply

concerned about his fate. He was reportedly assigned to a unit whose commanding office was highly important in atomic bomb operations.

Secret Work

In addition, it was also learned that the soldier had at one time been connected with work on the highly-secret guided missile.

For that reason and because of the discovery of spy operations at the nearby Los Alamos, N. M. atomic base, the FBI was called into the case.

Although the War Department in Washington discounted the possibility that Cpl. Whitacre might have had valuable secret information, it is known that the FBI was still working on the case three years ago.

Federal investigators were reported to have checked associates of Whitacre's. They also watched his family, but those who knew the youth quickly dispelled any possibility that Cpl. Whitacre had fallen into the hands of agents of a foreign power.

His family and friends resigned themselves to the fact that Whitacre had been the victim of a robbery and was murdered.

The last time the family knew investigators were still working on the case was three years ago. Some bones were found in the desert country around Albuquerque. A skeleton was reconstructed and from this a picture drawn of how the person might have looked.

The Whitacre family studied the drawing and concluded that it could not possibly be its missing member.

That was the last the family heard of the investigation and so proceedings were recently begun to have him declared legally dead.

A state law provides that a person may be declared deceased after a period of five years. He is declared dead as of the day of his disappearance.

Attorney George Tobias, who is handling the legal aspects of the case for the family, said Friday he will start proceedings to have Whitacre's government insurance paid to his family. The soldier is also reported to be due some gratuity pay.

Surviving him, in addition to his brother Ben, are three other brothers, Raymond, Indianapolis; Ira, Kokomo, and James, Russellville.

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