Butch Wilson Alive And Well In Mexico; U.S. Officials Not Sure How To Proceed



Toledo fugitive reportedly resides in one of these buildings at Puerto Marquez, a suburb of Acapulco

By JOHN NICHOLS
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Butch Wilson's sister was relieved to see that he was doing well, the FBI was interested but unsurprised, and the assistant U.S. attorney said Acapulco looked "gorgeous."

Paul L. Wilson, Jr., also known as Butch, who authorities believe ran one of the largest sports-betting operations in America out of a Toledo bar before fleeing to Mexico, showed up — on tape — on the 6 p.m. newscast of WTOL-TV [Channel 11] last night.

For lots of folks, he was must viewing.

"Of course I watched. Didn't everybody in Toledo?" asked Joan Ward, Wilson's sister. She said she had not seen her brother since he jumped bail in May after posting a cash and property bond of more than $600,000.

The interviews with Wilson began airing on Channel 11 last night. A tan, healthy-looking Wilson said he had been living in a condominium in Puerto Marquez, a suburb of Acapulco, since leaving Toledo.

Asked why he jumped bail, Wilson said it was because of constant FBI surveillance. "They hold you hostage. I felt like a hostage."

9 Convicted In Case

Authorities say Wilson ran a bookmaking operation that spread from Toledo into several other states and grossed more than $20 million over a 2½-year period. Nine people believed to have been involved in the gambling operation, including Mrs. Ward, were convicted in the case.

The whereabouts of Wilson, who faces 15 felony charges, were officially unknown until the television station reported late last week that he was in Mexico.

It was suspected that Wilson had fled to the Puerto Marquez condominium, where he had entertained several Toledo politicians in the past. But the Federal Bureau of Investigation said he was unaccounted for.

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— Blade Photo

Fugitive Butch Wilson, described as happy to talk, relaxes in taped interview shown on WTOL-TV

Bail Jumper OK

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After viewing the television program, Douglas Domin, the senior resident agent in the FBI's Toledo office, said he already knew Wilson was there.

"This puts me in kind of an awkward position because this is an ongoing investigation," he said. "Certainly, this comes as no surprise to us. We were aware that he was in Mexico."

Mr. Domin indicated that Wilson's television appearance might make the fugitive vulnerable to former associates, but he declined to say why or how. There has been speculation that Wilson left debts when he disappeared.

He would not say how long the FBI had known Wilson was in Mexico, but as recently as Nov. 14, Mr. Domin said he had no idea where Wilson was. He said this morning that Federal law and FBI rules and regulations prohibit him from commenting about ongoing fugitive investigations.

Trying To Bring Him Back

"Obviously, we are using every legitimate means to bring him to justice," Mr. Domin said when asked what the FBI was doing to bring Wilson back to the United States.

U.S. Magistrate James Carr, who set the bond that Wilson jumped, said he did not see the interview. When asked what he thought should be done to bring Wilson back, Mr. Carr said it would be improper for him to comment because charges are still pending against Wilson in federal court.

Assistant U.S. Attorney David Bauer, who was a prosecutor with the Justice Department's organized crime strike force in Cleveland, said there were ongoing efforts to gain Wilson's return.

But he said Mexico probably would not send Wilson back.

"As a practical matter, I would say that extradition is impossible," he said. "There is an extradition treaty with Mexico; however, it has been ineffective since 1897."

Mr. Bauer said he gained no new information from the broadcast, except that "I learned that I'd like to be [in Acapulco] right now. It's a gorgeous place."

Wilson said he missed Toledo and that he was "fat as a pig."

He talked about his departure in May and described gambling in Toledo.

"I just wanted to be a bookmaker. I thought I kept it pretty low-key," he said.

Seemed Happy To Talk

Rick Gevers, the WTOL news director who conducted the interview, said he went to Acapulco with information about where Wilson was staying. He said the fugitive seemed happy to talk.

"His only fear was that it might hurt others, and I don't think he said anything that would harm anyone," Mr. Gevers said.

Mrs. Ward said it didn't matter what her brother said. She was just glad to see him.

She said she had not heard from her brother since he left. She said he had probably not contacted her because he realized she might face questioning by authorities.

"I think we both knew that if I knew anything, I could be asked questions. And I wouldn't be able to lie," she said.

"I was just glad that he looked so good," she added.