Sheriff says Heinrich investigation quickly went 'off the rails'

By Michael Jacobson

Stearns County released the Wetterling case files last week, including a long, detailed breakdown explaining why the Heinrich case was never solved.

On Friday, the sheriff’s office released 308 pages of documents concerning the 1989 abduction of Jacob Wetterling. The documents include a list of the evidence that was collected, the interviews with suspects, and the case files that were sent to other law enforcement agencies.

“Overall, the investigation was well run,” said Sheriff Jim Gudmundson. “But in the end, it’s not good enough for the families. They deserve justice.”

The Wetterling case was one of the most tragic and complex investigations in Minnesota history. The abduction of Jacob Wetterling on Oct. 22, 1989, was the subject of a massive manhunt that lasted for weeks. The investigation involved over 500 officers from multiple agencies, including the FBI.

The case was initially classified as a missing person case, but when Jacob’s body was found on Nov. 22, 1989, it was turned into a homicide investigation. The suspect was identified as Danny Heinrich, who was later convicted of second-degree murder in the case.

The sheriff’s office released the case files in response to a court order, but many of the documents were redacted to protect the Privacy Act. The sheriff’s office is still working to release the rest of the documents, including some that were withheld from the public.

The sheriff’s office also released a list of the evidence that was collected, includingphotos of the suspect, DNA samples, and fingerprints. The case files also include interviews with witnesses and suspects, including Danny Heinrich.

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