

Legal web may have slowed inquiry into missing men

By JAMIA S. GOZD
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TAMPA — A veteran Tampa detective with a history of accusing prosecutors of corruption first filed a lawsuit stating that the Hillsborough County state attorney interfered with an investigation into the disappearance of two gay men in December.

The interference delayed the discovery of a possible suspect's residence for months, said Detective Dale "Chip" DeBlock in his suit against State Attorney Mark Ober. Eventually, federal drug agents secured their own warrant to search the residence, where they found "evidence of the kidnapping, sexual molestation, torture or aggravated battery of victims," DeBlock also stated in the lawsuit.

Since 1995, police in the Tampa Bay area have investigated the disappearance of at least five gay men. DeBlock was assigned to investigate the disappearance of Jason Galushko, formerly a Sarasota florist, and Michael Wachholz, who were both 26 when they vanished in separate parts of Tampa on Dec. 20.

Wachholz's body was found in a state jail in the back of a Jeep Cherokee in a Tampa "N Country apartment" parking lot. Galushko was not found.

Detective sought warrant

In January, DeBlock asked the Hillsborough state attorney's office to help him obtain a search warrant for a possible suspect in the missing gay men case. The suspect may have used a date-rap drug called Gamma-Hydroxy Butyrate, or GHB, in drug and kidnapping cases, then sexually abused and



Dale "Chip" DeBlock was turned down for a search warrant months ago.



From left, Jason Galushko, Michael Wachholz, and Bradley Lee Williams.

The disappearances of five gay men

At least five gay men have been reported missing in the Tampa Bay area since 1995. One was found dead.

Michael Wachholz, 26, Reported missing Dec. 20, 2003. Found dead Jan. 6. Last seen leaving his home in Tampa.

Jason Galushko, 26, formerly of Sarasota. Missing since Dec.

30, 2003. Last seen about 2:45 a.m. at a lounge in Tampa when he told friends he was leaving with two men. Authorities say they have not established a link between the Wachholz and Galushko cases.

Mark Thompson, 33, Missing since Nov. 1, 2003. Last seen leaving a pub in Clearwater.

torture them, DeBlock told prosecutors.

GHB is an odorless, colorless liquid that acts on the central nervous system as a depressant and amnesia and can cause memory loss. It is banned in the United States for other than medical uses.

Ober's office rejected DeBlock, saying he could not be a witness for a search warrant affidavit because he was not credible.

Ober denies that he hampered DeBlock's investigation and declined to be interviewed for this story. His attorney, Thomas Gonzalez, said Ober has a long-standing policy not to use DeBlock as a witness because of DeBlock's credibility issues.

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DeBlock surreptitiously recorded conversations with the prosecutors to gather evidence against another.

Gonzalez also said that Ober informed the Tampa Police Department that any detective, besides DeBlock, could swear out an affidavit in the missing men case.

Tampa police Maj. Jane Siling, who supervises detectives, said DeBlock was the only detective assigned to the case and only he could have signed the affidavit.

The search

During the past two months, Tampa police and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents searched the suspect's house using a federal search warrant, Siling said.

Scott Abrecht, a DEA agent assigned to the case, said DeBlock's assertion that there was evidence of kidnapping, sexual molestation, torture or aggravated battery at the suspect's residence was overstated.

Abrecht said a more accurate description would be that

members of the gay community to get leads. "We're disappointed with the lack of results from our investigations," Winfield said.

A Galushko friend, Joel Edwards of Columbia, set up a Web site, www.findgalushko.com. He said he wasn't surprised by DeBlock's allegations.

"It's clear if these allegations are true that people's eyes got in the way of the greater good," Edwards said.

"James M. Shanahan, 31, Missing since Oct. 19, 2003. Last seen at a cafe in downtown Tampa.

Source: Tampa Tribune archives, Florida Department of Law Enforcement

Less of trust

DeBlock first filed a lawsuit against Ober in 2003, claiming that Ober dandered him and interfered with his job. On June 30, Ober's office filed a lawsuit to compel outlining parts of the missing gay men investigation.

DeBlock has been taken off the case because of his problems with Ober, Siling said.

The DEA, the Hillsborough Sheriff's Office and the Tampa police are now jointly investigating the missing person case. Ober has also referred DeBlock's chief of file, Siling, to the missing gay men to the U.S. attorney's office for a possible criminal investigation into leaking information about an ongoing investigation.

Laura McClroy, spokeswoman for the Tampa Police Department, chief Stephen Hogue was upset over DeBlock's revelations about the investigation.

DeBlock said Hogue did not know that Ober had banned DeBlock as a witness until DeBlock applied for the search warrant for Ober's house.

Former Tampa police Chief Bonnie Holder had pressed Ober in 2003 that DeBlock would not handle cases where he would be abused, Ober's spokeswoman, because of Holder's actions. DeBlock used the Tampa Police Department. That suit, and the one against Ober, are pending.

DeBlock is now assigned to a squad that investigates gang and gangs. His job is to trace guns used in crimes. He has no contact with the Hillsborough state attorney's office, McClroy said.

DeBlock has worked for the Tampa Police Department for 21 years. Despite his problems

with the prosecutor's office, he has received excellent annual reviews from his superiors.

"Detective DeBlock is always professional in his treatment of complainants and suspects. Det. DeBlock gets along extremely well with his co-workers and his supervisors," Sgt. D.E. Elyse wrote in DeBlock's recent last year review.

DeBlock is a strong supporter of Ober's political opponent, Robin Fourn, in the upcoming Florida 11 Republican primary.

In 1996, DeBlock was assigned to the department's criminal intelligence bureau, a position he held until May 2001 when he was transferred to investigate missing person cases because Ober had told Holder that DeBlock could not be used as a witness, according to a deposition Holder gave in DeBlock's lawsuit against the department.

Missing person investigations are less likely than murder cases to be investigated or called search warrants and lead to such as prosecution witnesses.

DeBlock's problems with the local prosecutor's office began in 1997 when he reported to the U.S. attorney's office, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement that State Attorney Harry Lee Cox III had sex with a prostitute and agreed to a sworn deposition he gave in his lawsuit against Ober, Gonzalez said in the U.S. attorney's office denied to investigate Cox on the word of a prostitute.

In 1999, DeBlock accused former prosecutor Ellen "Duffy" Giesendanner of tipping off John Brotherton, the owner of a lingerie shop, that Brotherton was under investigation. DeBlock recorded his telephone conversations with two other prosecutors in his attorney's office denied to investigate Giesendanner and gave the tapes to the FDLE.

Giesendanner, who also at the time prosecuted prostitution cases against massage parlors, strip clubs and lingerie shops, knew Brotherton and received himself from Brotherton's cases, according to sworn statements from his supervisors.

DeBlock was investigated for illegally taping the conversations and said he was doing it on behalf of the FDLE. FDLE agents said he was not. Based on the FDLE's response, Gonzalez said, Ober decided that DeBlock could not be used as a witness because his credibility was questionable.