

# FBI agent to admit to killing, sister says

By Rob Wells  
Associated Press

FREEBURN — Hearing a report that an FBI agent strangled a pregnant Eastern Kentucky woman and dumped her naked body off a rural road was “just like a nightmare,” the victim’s sister says.

The sister, Shelby Ward of Freeburn, and law enforcement sources say the agent has admitted killing Susan Daniels Smith, 28, a year ago during a quarrel over support of her expected child.

Though no charges have been filed, Ward and the sources said the agent had agreed to plead guilty to manslaughter. He is expected to enter the plea in Pike Circuit Court on Tuesday, a day after an indictment is expected. The agent faces a 16-year prison term.

An FBI spokesman in Washington, D.C., said Friday that the agency had no record of FBI agents ever being charged with homicide-related crimes.

(Turn to ORDEAL, B3)

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## City/State

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# Ordeal

From Page B1

Ward spoke extensively about her sister, an eighth-grade dropout and divorced mother of two, and her two-year affair with the agent.

Family members, along with The Associated Press, the Williamson Daily News in West Virginia and others have identified the agent as special agent Mark Putnam. He was transferred from Pikeville to Miami in May 1989.

Putnam was placed on administrative leave last month.

“She was possessed by him . . . madly in love with him,” Ward said. Her sister and the agent would spend hours at night talking in a car at old strip mines or by a local lake, she said.

“We tried to get her to date other people and she didn’t even want to talk about it.”

Smith, who married at age 15, had lived at the Wards’ home near the Kentucky-West Virginia border for about six months before her disappearance June 8, 1989.

Smith was an FBI informant who testified in a bank robbery case and was involved in an investigation of an Eastern Kentucky vehicle theft ring, Ward said.

Her disappearance occurred at a time when the agent had returned to Pikeville for the trial of car-theft suspects whom he had investigated. Smith left the Ward home to meet him at a Pikeville hotel the night of June 5, Ward recalled.

Ward said she had warned her sister, who was four months pregnant, to “quit threatening” the agent as part of a plan to have him pay several thousand dollars for support of the child.

“She swore that was (the agent’s) baby. She wouldn’t have had that baby if it belonged to somebody else. She was even going to name it after him, if it was a boy,” Ward said.

Smith called three times from the hotel, including twice on the day she disappeared. Her sister reported that the agent left the room crying the morning of June 8 after a quarrel over child support, Ward said.

“She wanted him to leave his wife. She was threatening to tell his wife about the baby and (the agent) was scared to death,” Ward said.

When Ward offered to drive to Pikeville to bring her home, Smith assured her the agent would drive her home that night.

Ward said she filed a missing persons report on June 12, after the agent called and said Smith had gone to Chicago with friends.

Ward said she knew “there was something wrong” when a maid found her sister’s purse, clothes and makeup at the hotel.

The agent told authorities he strangled Smith during a quarrel on their way back to Freeburn, Ward said. “He says he tried to give her CPR and bring her back but she was already dead,” she said.

The body was placed in the agent’s car, and he drove to Lexington the next day on a business trip, Ward said. During the night, he dumped Smith’s body off the side of a rural road at Harmond Branch, about five miles north of Pikeville, she said.

Ward said she and her brother recently were informed about the agent’s confession and the plea arrangement by the prosecutor for Pike County, John Paul Runyon, Kentucky State Police Capt. Gary Rose and Kentucky FBI supervisor Terry O’Connor.

She said the authorities told her and her brother, Billy Joe Daniels, that the agent “confessed to killing my sister and where he put the body.”



An FBI agent is expected to enter a plea in the killing of Susan Daniels Smith.

Skeletal remains found Tuesday at Harmond Branch are those of a white adult female, said a staff member of the state medical examiner’s office.

Ward said authorities had told her the body is her sister’s and have offered \$500 to bury the remains.

Ward said she planned to file a lawsuit next week against the agent, and possibly the FBI, to obtain child support for Smith’s two children.