



NEWS RELEASE

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Murder charges filed in 1987 cold case

EVERETT, WA – Murder charges have been filed for the 1987 death of Everett Firefighter Gary Parks.

“After 34 years, the City of Everett will finally see someone held accountable for the loss of our Firefighter Gary Parks, who died in the service of our community,” said Mayor Cassie Franklin. “I commend our city teams for working tirelessly to crack the case and continue towards resolution in this tragic event.”

The Snohomish County Prosecutor’s Office formally filed murder in the first degree (RCW 9A.32.030) charges for the 1987 fire that destroyed the Everett Community College and claimed the life of Everett Firefighter Gary L. Parks. After decades without solid leads, detectives established probable cause for 47 year-old Elmer Nash Jr. of Snohomish, WA after his confession.

“The generation of Everett Firefighters who worked with Gary have retired, but the memory of his loss is woven into the culture of the Everett Fire Department. All Everett Firefighters, active and retired, are thankful for the progress in this case,” said Everett Fire Chief Dave DeMarco. “Our thoughts are with his family today. We are also profoundly thankful to our brothers and sisters in law enforcement for their tenacity and dedication to investigate this case.”

Just after 3 a.m. on February 16th, 1987, a fire was reported at the Everett Community College (801 Wetmore Ave). While fighting the fire, Everett Firefighter Gary Parks became separated from five other firefighters battling the blaze and became trapped inside the building where he perished. Several potential suspects, all juvenile males, were initially identified and thought to have entered the Library through an open window and deliberately started a fire in conjunction with a burglary. The fire spread out of control and consumed the building. At the time, detectives could not establish probable cause for any suspects. Throughout the years, numerous investigators reviewed the case but were unable to make substantial progress.

“Everett Police Department investigators never wavered from their commitment to help bring justice for the Park’s family,” said Everett Police Chief Dan Templeman. “We never stopped looking at this case and I am very proud of Detective Atwood’s work and his relentless pursuit of justice for the family that ultimately led to the identification and charging of a suspect.”

In 2016, Arson Detective Mike Atwood took over the case. After reviewing what steps other investigators took, Detective Atwood compiled information that led to multiple interviews with Elmer Nash Jr. It was during the interviews that Elmer discussed the fire and provided details that only someone involved would know. Eventually, Nash confessed to starting the fatal fire and expressed concern that he hadn’t intended to hurt anyone. Detective Atwood continued his investigation with interviews of other witnesses that Nash had previously confessed to.

The family of Gary Parks has worked through their loss for the past 34 years. “Gary was a good man, a trusted partner and friend you could always count on. He was there to help a daughter fix her car, help a wife put on her ski boots and never had a day he didn't show up to work his shift at the Everett Fire Department,” says wife Kathy Parks. “We are so very grateful to the detectives who never gave up on this case. Our family will always suffer knowing Gary hasn't reaped the fruits of his life, grandchildren, daughters’ successes, and a wife who will cherish him forever.”

On the night of the fire, the **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)** responded to assist with scene processing and worked in conjunction with Everett investigators. The ATF determined the origin and cause of the fire was incendiary in nature, meaning it was intentionally set. In 2020, an ATF certified fire investigator was asked to review all available material related to the fire scene and subsequent investigation, to substantiate the original classification of the fire. ATF Special Agent Dawn Dodsworth reviewed physical evidence and original reports, analyzed crime scene photographs, examined building diagrams, evaluated video and dispatch recordings, visited the fire site, and interviewed witnesses. In her conclusion, Special Agent Dodsworth confirmed the original ATF classification that the fire had been intentionally set.

Today, murder charges were filed against Elmer Nash Jr. in Snohomish County Superior Court in an arraignment hearing during which he pled guilty. The remaining legal process will be administered through the court system with inquiries about the process handled by the Snohomish County Prosecutor’s Office.

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