

Michael Connelly:

Welcome back to Killer In The Code: Solving The Black Dahlia & Zodiac Cases. I'm your host, Michael Connelly. We are calling this season two because we've been gone for a few months, but technically it is Chapter 11. And we weren't on vacation, I can assure you of that. The investigation headed by Alex Baber and backed by a team of veteran homicide investigators and code breakers has continued and we have some interesting updates and new information and evidence to bring you over the next few episodes.

First, I think we should do a quick recap of the investigation and get up-to-date. This is such a big and sprawling story about two of the most infamous crimes in California history that it's hard to put it into a brief synopsis, but I'm going to try so we can get to the new stuff sooner rather than later.

51-year-old Alex Baber is a citizen sleuth. He runs an organization called Cold Case Consultants of America. He's on the autism spectrum, but doesn't consider it any sort of affliction. He says it gives him a mindset that brings new ideas and fresh angles to cold case investigation. It allows him to find the hidden beneath the hidden. It also means that when he fixates on a case, he becomes relentless in his pursuit of it. An amateur and self-taught cryptanalyst, he has long been obsessed with the codes left behind by the Zodiac, the serial killer that held Northern California in the grip of fear almost 60 years ago. Until now, the Zodiac has never been identified. In the wake of the five seemingly random murders attributed to him, the Zodiac sent four different ciphers to local newspapers. The first was partially broken almost immediately. The next three withstood the test of time and the best minds in cryptology until very recent years.

Baber focused on the Z13, so-called because it contained a scramble of only 13 letters and symbols. As such, it was deemed by many in the field of cryptanalytics to be unbreakable because it was so few characters, it would be impervious to traditional code-breaking methods and tools. Z13 was considered by many to be the holy grail of Zodiac ciphers because the killer claimed in his note to the media that it contained his name. Three years ago, Baber built a database of 71 million names that fit the 13-digit cipher, and then used a variety of screening tools, artificial intelligence, and government databases to whittle the list down name by name until he had cut it to double digits. A deeper dive ensued and a list of 35 names was knocked down to 14, and then 14 became seven. And eventually there was one name left standing, Marvin Merrill.

It wasn't long before Baber determined through social security records that Marvin Merrill was an alias used by a man named Marvin Margolis, a known suspect in the so-called Black Dahlia case, the infamous killing of Elizabeth Short in Los Angeles in 1947. The name was already in a database Baber had accumulated when he had previously researched the Black Dahlia case.

Baber enlisted a team of three veteran homicide investigators to check his work and let the chips fall where they may. They included Rick Jackson, who worked homicides for the Los Angeles Police Department for nearly 30 years and was now investigating cold cases for the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office in Northern California. His partner, Dave Tresmontan, also joined the Baber review, and the third addition was Mitzi Roberts, a veteran LAPD homicide investigator who retired as officer in charge of the Cold Case Unit. During the last 15 years of her career with the LAPD, Roberts also had custody of the Black Dahlia case.

All three of these seasoned investigators reviewed Baber's work and arrived at the same conclusion. Marvin Margolis, AKA Marvin Merrill, was responsible for these murders. Also added to the investigation was a team of crypt analysts led by Ed Giorgio and including Patrick Henry and Rich Wisniewski. Together, these men had more than a hundred years experience making and breaking codes for the National Security Agency. In fact, Giorgio is the only man in history to serve as both chief codebreaker and chief code maker for the NSA.

The impeccable credentials of the team Baber put together are important. If you have listened to the earlier episodes of this podcast, you know that there has been pushback from some to Baber's work and conclusions. The pushback comes from those with vested interests in other suspects they have long clinged to. If Baber's team is right, then they are wrong and nobody likes being proved wrong.

We will get into all that in later episodes of the podcast. But suffice it to say that these six highly experienced and accomplished professionals have expertise that dwarfs that of the critics of this investigation. They have reviewed and re-reviewed Baber's work and find it convincing. And through their own work, they have even added evidence that points to Merrill/Margolis and they remain unswayed by the critics. They say these crimes are solved. This is Rick Jackson.

Rick Jackson:

Yes, I'm totally still on this. And as we go, the connections between Merrill/Margolis to the cases that we've connected into get even stronger. And again, I have no doubt that this is the guy. The evidence that we've presented, the connections we've presented, is extraordinary.

Michael Connelly:

And this is Mitzi Roberts.

Mitzi Roberts:

I am fully committed to this suspect. I wouldn't be still working so strongly on it if I didn't believe that we were onto the right person, that this is 100% the lead we should be tracking down. I still say that the evidence that we have and the amount of the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming. We have more evidence in this case, I don't like to say we have less evidence in my other cases, but we have more evidence in this case than I have in several of the cases I can think of where they've resulted in prosecutions, like difficult cases that have resulted in prosecutions. This case, I believe we have more evidence even in those cases.

Michael Connelly:

Since we last posted an episode, the investigation has continued and we have widened the peer review. Ed Giorgio has convened a work group with dozens of professional cryptanalysts joining the review. So far, not one has punched a hole in Baber and his team's work on this. And these are not amateurs or hobbyists. They are pros. We have also gone out wider in law enforcement and the justice system to peer review the findings. In the episodes ahead, you'll hear from judges and prosecutors and what they think of the evidence the team has put together.

Okay, so let's get this going. One of the most significant advances in the investigation made since you last heard from us was the acquiring of Marvin Margolis's 221-page military personnel file. It contains several new pieces of the puzzle that was Marvin Margolis, new insights into this suspect's damaged psyche, and direct connections to the crimes the team is investigating. Finally, and most importantly, it allows us to hear from Margolis in his own words, a harrowing account of the traumatic and life-altering experiences he had while serving in the military during World War II. This is Alex Baber.

Alex Baber:

All right, so as far as Marvin Margolis's background, what we learned from his military file that Rick secured, we were able to get the detailed psych evaluations. Now, what this does for us, it gives us a deeper dive into his psychology.

Michael Connelly:

And this is Mitzi Roberts.

Mitzi Roberts:

It's the closest I think we could get to talking to him with him not being here, but being able to like have his words and kind of have a pretty clear picture when he left the service of his mindset with the PTSD. He definitely left the service being in a dark, dark place, not a healthy mind state at all.

Michael Connelly:

Getting the file was no easy task. As a homicide investigator who has worked cases across five decades, Rick Jackson has often had to run down the military service of suspects, victims, and witnesses in cases. The place you start is the National Personnel Record Center in St. Louis, Missouri. The NPRC is one of the largest federal archives in existence. The building alone covers seven acres and holds more than a hundred million military and civil service personnel files. While digitizing began in the '90s, finding a singular hard file dating back to the 1940s is not like finding a book in a library. It's more like finding a needle in a haystack. Military records are divided by branch of service and date of enlistment or discharge. Added to that, a massive fire in 1973 destroyed millions of military files while leaving much of the rest in disarray. But over the years as a homicide investigator, Jackson learned who to go to and what to ask at the NPRC.

After a lengthy search, a hard copy of Margolis's full file was found and shared with Jackson.

Rick Jackson:

As a veteran homicide detective, I mean, you always want to throw out the biggest net you can to get information on where you're going in an investigation, whether it's a suspect or whether it's witnesses that you have issues with. But with a suspect, you really want to do that because you want to learn everything you can about somebody. And time and time again, some things may lead you away from something. In this case, it was leading me more and more toward Marvin Margolis as a suspect. And that's just what you do. That's part of your training. You want to get information no matter where it ends up leading. That's part of your mandate as a good investigator.

Michael Connelly:

The file contains a lot to go over and many of the documents you can see on our website, killerinthecode.com. As we established in the first season of the podcast, records from early investigations by the Los Angeles Police and the LA County Grand Jury found that Marvin Margolis knew Elizabeth Short and even lived with her briefly just three months before her tortured and severed body was found in a trash-strewn lot the morning of January 15th, 1947. Police records refer to Margolis as the last known boyfriend of Elizabeth Short.

He was a pre-med student at the University of Southern California at the time of the murder and had served as a combat medic attached to a Marine unit that fought on Okinawa during World War II. It was thought by authorities at the time that whoever killed Elizabeth Short had to have had a degree of medical skill to conduct the bisection of her body.

All of this made Margolis a key suspect in the early going of the case. He was interviewed twice by detectives and was deemed deceitful each time, primarily because he first lied about even knowing Elizabeth Short. But Margolis was never arrested or charged at the time. The lead detective on the case would later testify under oath to a grand jury that Margolis was a top suspect. He also said Margolis

couldn't be ruled in or out as the killer. There just wasn't enough evidence to charge him or clear him. At the time of that detective's testimony, they had lost track of Margolis. He had left Los Angeles and returned to his native Chicago. Subsequent efforts by the investigators from Los Angeles and Chicago to find him there failed. There were no computers and digital connectivity back then, and they'd apparently missed their chance when he was arrested and briefly detained on a fraud charge.

But shortly after that, he left Chicago, changed his name to Marvin Merrill, and began a series of moves as well as career and name changes that took him from one side of the country to the other before he landed permanently back in California in the early 1960s. He died in Santa Barbara in 1993. He was buried in a veteran's cemetery under his birth name, Marvin Margolis. Witnesses interviewed during the initial investigation of Elizabeth Short's murder, as well as a police woman who said she encountered her the night before her murder, said that she was fearful of a former boyfriend who was an ex-Marine. The military records we all obtained confirmed that Margolis was not a Marine. Though he would claim at times after the war to have been a Marine, he was technically a Navy Corpsman or medic assigned to the First Marines, the combat division that made the first landing on the Japanese island of Okinawa and engaged in one of the bloodiest battles of the war.

According to his service file, Margolis walked into a Navy recruiting office in Chicago and enlisted on March 11th, 1943. It was two weeks before his 18th birthday and his father, Isadore, had to sign off on his enlistment because he was underage. Margolis was then sent off to bootcamp at Naval Station Great Lakes located on the Illinois side of Lake Michigan. At the Great Lake space, Margolis requested training as a medic, and the request was approved by the base's commanding officer, Captain Robert Emmet. This leads us to a potential connection to the Zodiac case. The first cipher composed and sent to the media by the Zodiac in 1969 was called the Z408 because it was 408 characters long. It was quickly decoded for the most part by a high school teacher and his wife who saw it in the local newspapers. I say for the most part because the couple decoded all but the last 18 digits of the cipher.

Those last characters, which then became known as Z18, were thought to possibly just be gibberish added by the Zodiac to fill out the code grid. But other amateur codebreakers and professional cryptanalysts at the time reported to police that the remaining characters were an anagram for Robert Emmet, the hippie. You have to remember, these killings took place in 1969 and '70, just after the Summer of Love in San Francisco and the birth of the hippie movement. Police investigating the Zodiac murders at the time started checking out local men by that name. One investigator was quoted in the newspaper as saying, "I am looking for Robert Emmet, hippie or otherwise." But the lead went nowhere, perhaps because the Robert Emmet they were looking for was far from Northern California.

So is it just a coincidence that our suspect in the Zodiac killings, Marvin Margolis, AKA Marvin Merrill, happened to have a commanding officer in the Navy named Robert Emmet? I know that the critics of this investigation will dismiss it as such, but remember this, Robert Emmet played a very important role in Marvin Margolis's life.

Alex Baber:

This is the guy that sent him down the road. He sent him to medical school.

Michael Connelly:

And it was that order that ultimately led to the traumatic experience that very clearly and by his own words impacted Margolis for the rest of his life. This is veteran homicide investigator Mitzi Roberts' take on it.

Mitzi Roberts:

Again, this is the reason why my mind hasn't changed on him as a suspect is because the evidence just continues to sort of... The coincidences continue to grow and like we've talked about this before, and when is it no longer a coincidence and now it's evidence?

Michael Connelly:

Ed Giorgio, the former NSA codebreaker, is also quick to point out to the critics that this is not a connection that could have been manufactured by Baber or anyone else on the team. The name Robert Emmet was part of the official Zodiac investigation and in Margolis's military record before Alex Baber was even born.

Ed Giorgio:

That's a name we're given. We didn't find that name. We're given that name. And there is a relationship that is very unlikely at random, but people will just look at it as a coincidence. That's the whole nature of this whole set of evidence is that you have to say about 40 times, "Oh, that's just a coincidence." And if any one of those 40 indicators are true, then the whole thing is true. And in order to be false, all 40 have to be false. So it only takes one to make it true, but you got to prove all 40 are false. And that's just very unlikely that you would be able to do that. So all this circumstantial evidence doesn't really stand on its own. It's only when you look at all of it together.

Michael Connelly:

Patrick Henry, another veteran NSA cryptanalyst working with Giorgio, points out that the circumstantial or forensic evidence discovered outside of the Zodiac ciphers lends significant support to Baber's work and his solution to the My Name Is cipher. Finding the name Robert Emmet in both the Zodiac cipher and Margolis's military record is just one example of how the totality of the investigation is convincing.

Patrick Henry:

There isn't enough in the cryptography to conclusively say, yes, this is the right answer. But when you add in all the forensic information, and hopefully there will be more of that coming out soon, it becomes more and more convincing. All we can say from a cryptographic perspective is that this is a plausible solution and it doesn't fall apart when you poke at it. When you poke at it, you find things that seem to reinforce the solution being correct.

Michael Connelly:

Now, if you listened to the first season of the podcast, you'll remember that an amateur codebreaker in Sweden came up with a different name when he attempted to crack Z18. He found the name Marvin Merrill, matching Baber's solution to the Z13 cipher. His work and result were then confirmed by Baber as well as Ed Giorgio and his team. So what does this mean? Is it Robert Emmet or Marvin Merrill in the decrypt? Is one solution right and the other one wrong? Well, the truth is they both work on different levels. The Robert Emmet name comes from a simple anagram while the Marvin Merrill reference comes from a more complicated encryption structure known as the transposition columnar method. Employing them both in the same cipher speaks to the author's skill as a code maker. This is Alex Baber.

Alex Baber:

I think the important thing about the Z18 having two possible solution, one being the initial solution of Robert Emmet, the hippie, which was presented by crypto experts back in 1969, August of '69. And then it was followed up by Detective Lynch of Vallejo PD seeking out any suspects that would fit that name,

the cipher, and then us discovering that later on within the military files. So what we do know is that if this is in fact the case, that Marvin was thinking on another level, he was able to encrypt not one but two names and both of them had a different purpose. One being his identity as he called it within the 408 letter to the Chronicle. He says within this cipher, meaning that section of it, his identity existed. And then for him to come back and layer his actual name or alias at that time beneath the Robert Emmet was on another level. I've never witnessed anything like that previously in any of the texts that I've read or any of the documents I've researched.

Michael Connelly:

Okay, let's go back to the military records. On Robert Emmet's order, Marvin Margolis received medical training and was then transferred to a Navy base on Puget Sound, Washington, where he was assigned to work in a hospital dispensary. By his own account, Margolis, who was Jewish, faced systemic antisemitism at the base. His military file contains an eight-page letter he wrote many years later to the Department of the Navy as well as the President of the United States. As Alex Baber says, the letter gives us a window into Margolis's mindset following the war.

Alex Baber:

So we're able to hear him from beyond the grave.

Michael Connelly:

Parts of the letter will be read here by actor Scott Klace.

Scott Klace:

"At the dispensary, when I was assigned to it, I was the most eager hospital corpsman they had. I mean, I took anything they dished out, night emergency duty, surgery, VD duty, prisoner duty, hospital duty, Marine target range duty, et cetera, et cetera. I wanted to be a good Navy man, a regular. But a Jew in that environment, amidst some of the most bigoted young men I have ever known, I was a target for deprivations and insubordinations. I took them, but they weren't enough for the bigots in power. They were adverse to my passing the examination for third-class petty officer and discussed right in front of me that a Jew in the office would not be tolerated. Then they conceived a plan."

Michael Connelly:

Margolis then went on in the letter to explain that the plan was to saddle him with false deficiencies to the point that he would be transferred elsewhere. That eventually happened when he was transferred to Camp Pendleton in Southern California and attached as a Corpsman to the First Marines, a combat division heading to the war in the Pacific. In his letter, Margolis called it a raw deal that placed him in one of the bloodiest battlefields in the war. What Margolis encountered during the battle for control of Okinawa was indeed traumatic. It was the largest amphibious assault of the war in the Pacific. It was also one of the costliest. The casualties were staggering. More than 14,000 American soldiers died on the island during the battle. Scores more were wounded and Margolis was in the thick of it. In the letter he later wrote, he described one night and day of the flight.

Scott Klace:

"On or about May 17th, 1945, at a point position along the front line, my squad encountered a lengthy mortar barrage from the enemy position, which was in the visible distance. It began at dusk and lasted into the darkness of night. As the squad's Navy Combat Medical Corpsman, it was my job to answer the

calls for first aid, to remove wounded personnel from harm's way, and to establish means for instantaneous evacuation of the injured from the line. On that day, my work seemed endless. From moments after the onset of the barrage, I was called to leave my foxhole and rush through the saturation of explosions, often being knocked down while answering to the screams for my help. And when I arrived at the site of each hurt man, there was no room for me to hide from the blast and the whirls of shrapnel. I kneeled to help the men, and I prayed to survive."

Michael Connelly:

That was one night in a battle that lasted 82 days before the allied forces finally emerged victorious. But Margolis didn't make it to the finish line. Service records show that 63 days into the battle, he was shipped back to the United States where he was diagnosed as "unable to adjust further to the demands of service."

I'm reading now from the medical records filed during Margolis's stay at a military hospital in San Francisco. "The onset of his complaints began when an enemy shell struck the top of a cave that he was in, burying all but his head. Several hours later, he extricated himself and was evacuated from the island because of amnesia, headache, tenseness, and confusion. Within two or three days after admission, his confusion cleared, but the patient continued to complain of tension headaches, and combat dreams. The past history reveals this patient was always quick tempered, had nightmares, and walked in his sleep until the age of 14 years. There was present a fear of the dark and easy excitability. Psychiatric examination reveals a calm, quiet, resentful individual who shows ample evidence of open aggression. The content of thought shows a beginning hypochondria and self-seated resentment. The mood is one of unhappiness."

This report mirrors the summaries of other psychological examinations discussed in earlier episodes of the podcast. After he was treated at the hospital in San Francisco, Margolis received a general discharge from the Navy with a mental disability pension, but he also received a presidential unit citation given to the First Marines Division that reads, "For extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces during the invasion and capture of Okinawa."

Margolis would later claim that he had been wounded in the battle for Okinawa. He said while treating an injured soldier, he was hit by shrapnel splitting open one of his thumbs. But because he was needed on the battlefield, he dressed the wound himself and continued to help others. He never filed any paperwork detailing how he was wounded. The letter he would write in 1987 to the President and the Department of Navy was a request that he receive a Purple Heart medal given to those wounded in battle.

Scott Klacz:

"I do want my Purple Heart. I feel that I want to die without the innuendo of any sort of cowardice. I bled and fought and rose in the fields of battle when Marines, brave as they certainly were, clawed the earth to reach another inch of depth in their holes. My soul deserves the recognition. My heirs should be proud. With all due respect, I request my medal."

Michael Connelly:

It seems clear in the letter why Margolis believed there was innuendo of cowardice to his service. It was because he was withdrawn from the island before the battle was over. He also wrote the following about his experiences on Okinawa and after.

Scott Klacz:

"I am proud to have served there with the brave men whose knees twitched like mine and who shared the horrors of fear, blood, and daily death. I've been ashamed all these years for the name the Navy gave my ailment, nervous condition. Which I cannot relate to, except that I am and have been suffering with intense anxiousness since I left the service. It is my firm belief that my failure to become tuned to the social world's requisite for success all these years can only be attributed to the destruction of my pride by your Navy."

Michael Connelly:

It is interesting to note Margolis's use of the word twitch. It's not all that common of a word, and yet it was used by both the Zodiac in his letters and by the killer of Cheri Jo Bates in Riverside, a case which we drew links to Marvin Merrill in season one of the podcast. In the following episodes, we will have more on the linguistic analysis conducted during this investigation. Twitch is not the only commonality that has been found. There are many.

Margolis's request that he be awarded a Purple Heart was denied by the Navy. The last document in his military file carries the rejection based on there being no evidence to support his claim of being wounded during battle.

After his separation from the military, Margolis moved to Los Angeles, where he enrolled as a pre-med student at the University of Southern California. It was while he was a student there that he briefly shared an apartment in Hollywood with a young woman named Elizabeth Short. It is unknown if she was aware that she was spending time with a man who had been diagnosed as dangerously aggressive and was collecting a mental disability pension while pursuing a medical degree he would never receive.

Alex Baber:

As far as him post World War II, he was a ticking time bomb. We know from his two psych evaluations, which are full reports within the military file. Before, we just had the summary that was in the 1949, 1950 grand jury inquest, which covered a great deal of the diagnosis, but it didn't give a full read. Now we can see beyond that and realize that you have this young man who's suffered trauma overseas specific theater. He comes back, he's not getting the treatment that he needs from the VA. They give him a 50% disability, mental, and then they start to reduce that over the next five years. But he's on the street in Hollywood, as you have said. He's walking around, he's interacting with other individuals, most of them being civilian women. And he meets Elizabeth Short and he started a personal relationship. And knowing Elizabeth Short and her background and being a free spirit, it was just a perfect storm. It was a matter of time before this came to an apex or head.

Michael Connelly:

Baber's investigation has determined that Elizabeth Short first met Margolis in July of 1946. That was barely a year from his experiences on Okinawa and less than a year after his discharge from the Navy on a mental disability. This is Rick Jackson.

Rick Jackson:

Getting Margolis's military files was huge. What you get from that is really a keen understanding of where he was psychologically when he left the military, when he left the island of Okinawa and all the trauma that he went through, and obviously what it did to him from a psychological perspective. And what you have in these military files is a showing of just how psychologically troubled and damaged he was and the danger that was part of his background now. And yet it's only a short time, like about a year later that he meets Elizabeth Short. So it's a train going out of control really. And she's in the path of it a

short time later. And it just gives us such an awareness of where this could potentially lead, not just with Elizabeth Short, but anybody he might've met back in those days right after he went through all this stuff in the military.

Michael Connelly:

There's information in Margolis's military file that may connect him to another murder of a young woman in Los Angeles more than a year before the Black Dahlia murder. We will get into that later in this season's podcast.

Perhaps what could be the most important finding in the military file is a complete set of Margolis's fingerprints taken upon his enlistment in 1943. I'm not talking about the AI-generated image of fingerprints floating around on the internet. These are the real fingerprints. And as far as the investigative team has been able to determine, these are the only prints belonging to Margolis that are known to exist. The Baber team has provided the fingerprints to all law enforcement agencies charged with investigating these crimes. Now it is a waiting game to see what they will do with them. Mitzi Roberts, who retired after a 30-year career with the LAPD, says police departments often look upon help or evidence from outsiders with a hesitant eye.

Mitzi Roberts:

There is a reluctance in law enforcement to accept information, especially when it's somebody solving a case from somebody that's not law enforcement. There is sort of a reluctance and a wall that you have to break through.

Michael Connelly:

Added to that, Marvin Margolis is long dead. And with there being no chance of a prosecution of a living suspect, these agencies prioritize active cases with live suspects over those where there can be no prosecution. But should the wall be broken through, are there prints to be compared in these cases? Alex Baber says there are prints, but they are not conclusively believed to be those of the suspect in each case.

Alex Baber:

All the fingerprints are vital to our investigation. We've been waiting for these. I sought them out myself. VA not once but twice told me they were unable to locate his records. They believe they were misplaced in someone else's file. I was able to get his WD-54, which is his withdrawal paperwork. So I knew where he was stationed. I didn't know how long, but I was able to get the muster roles right, which was separate documentation. So I was able to piece this together, but once Rick got his hands on the 221-page complete file, it opened up the door. And the fingerprints themselves allows us to either confirm or eliminate him as a suspect in some of these crimes. There's still questions based on the fingerprints surrounding the Black Dahlia investigation. They're two they identified on the package. They were on the back of the clippings that would be the primary focus.

And then the Zodiac, there's numerous fingerprints. There's ones off Paul Stine's cab, the bloody ones they believe to be from the perpetrator, which makes sense, but there's a lot of them that are blurred. They're just partials or distorted. Then you have the fingerprints from the window of Bryan Hartnell's vehicle at Lake Berryessa. We can compare those. And we also have the multiple prints that are overlaid on the Napa phone booth's receiver where he made the phone call after he left Lake Berryessa. There's plenty out there.

Michael Connelly:

Back in 1947, a Los Angeles newspaper published on the front page a photo of fingerprints it claimed were the Black Dahlia Avenger's prints. But the prints reproduced in the newspaper are not clear and our efforts through a private forensic service and an online fingerprint program used by law enforcement agencies have been unable to confirm a match. The military prints need to be analyzed and compared by forensic experts at these agencies.

Nevertheless, think about this move. Alex Baber has given these agencies the evidence he has collected. If you were a hoaxer, a charlatan, a liar, and you held in your hand the very thing that could reveal you as such, would you offer it to law enforcement and say, "Let the chips fall where they may"? These fingerprints were acquired by Rick Jackson, not Alex Baber. Yet it is Baber who said we must get these to law enforcement to have them officially examined and compared. Who knows if they will match, but I think it says a lot about the integrity of this investigation.

Alex Baber:

Instead of running from the evidence, we're hitting it head on.

Michael Connelly:

Before we wrap this episode up, I should note that there is hope that we will be able to break through the wall that separates the police and outside investigators. We have learned that because of this investigation headed by Baber, the LAPD is currently attempting to extract DNA from some of the evidence in the Elizabeth Short case. This is the first active investigative move made in the Black Dahlia case in two decades. It follows an unsuccessful effort made in 2005 to extract DNA from letters written by the killer to the media and police. At the time, the police lab could not extract a DNA profile for comparison. However, the science of DNA extraction and comparison has vastly improved in the intervening decades. It's gotten smaller, meaning less material is needed for analysis. So-called touch DNA can lead to successful analysis. That wasn't the case in 2005, and this new effort may get different results. If a profile can be obtained, it could be compared to DNA from Marvin Merrill's descendants. When we know results, we will report them and let the chips fall where they may.

We are going to finish this episode with more words direct from Marvin Margolis and his 1987 letter to the Navy, as well as President Ronald Reagan. Again, these are his own words written 40 years after the wartime experiences that shaped his world. They perhaps offer the best insight into his longstanding anguish. This is the entire postscript he added at the end of his letter.

Scott Klacz:

"Freedom is to be free of a fear to be free. My brave friends who fought and valiantly died shall never know that they gave their lives in vain. Shall never know that they could not rest their heads on soils of home and peace, though they were free to rest in fields of war. They shall never know that they are forgotten. As leaves beneath a mulch of adverse laws and beneath the living layers of vermicular veins of bureaucracy so vast and yet so interlocked, who have in fact become another singular ruling tyrant and have destroyed the free man's pride for which he fought and died. They will never know the anguish of their comrade who bled with them and lived to see that they died in vain. To see our loss of liberty, to see us fear to be free."

Michael Connelly:

Alex Baber, for one, has empathy for Marvin Merrill.

Alex Baber:

He developed a clear, what I believe to be, animosity towards the system. And there's a part of me that feels for Marvin. I hate to say it with the crimes he's committed and the lives he's taken. But again, I mean, this was a kid. He was young. He was sent off overseas and put on the front lines of one of the most brutal battles in World War II. And his job is to run out into active fire and assist other soldiers, his comrades, that are wounded. A lot of them are in pieces. He's having to do field surgery and there's this part of this that's sad about this entire story. And I think that Marvin, had he had today's medical treatment, there may never have been a Black Dahlia Avenger. There may never have been a Zodiac Killer.

Michael Connelly:

You've been listening to Killer In The Code: Solving The Black Dahlia & Zodiac Cases. We will be back next with Chapter 12. This podcast was written and produced by me, Michael Connelly. It was edited by Terrill Lee Lankford, with music and post-production services provided by Mark Henry Phillips. Thank you for listening.