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WILLIAM DATHAN HOLBERT

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1. Introduction

Bocas del Toro, Panama, often portrayed as a tranquil haven, has a disturbing undercurrent. This report delves into the grim story of William Dathan Holbert, also known as "Wild Bill," who transformed this paradise into a scene of horror.

This is a tale of a man's descent from petty criminal to serial killer and how he exploited a system, and a community, for his own gain.

This report aims to provide a detailed overview of the events surrounding Holbert, the context in which they occurred, and the lessons that can be learned from this chilling case.

2. The Lure of Panama and Bocas del Toro

Panama, known for its economic stability and international connections, draws many expats seeking a fresh start. For some, it's a chance to escape debts, legal problems, or troubled relationships. Bocas del Toro, in particular, attracts those seeking an **adventurous, low-cost lifestyle**.

However, this idyllic image masks a darker reality, as the area is described as occupying an "uneasy space between surfers' hangout and drug den". It's a place where people can disappear, and it seems that some people prefer to live off-grid and off the radar.

3. The Rise of "Wild Bill" Holbert

William Dathan Holbert, once a small-time crook in the United States, became a notorious serial killer in Central America. In Bocas del Toro, he created a persona for himself, even sporting a Viking helmet.

He established the **Jolly Roger Social Club**, a bar popular with expats. This club, ironically, became the scene where Holbert befriended his victims before murdering them and taking their real estate.

4. Holbert's Modus Operandi

Holbert's method involved gaining the trust of fellow expats. He would befriend them, often at his bar, the Jolly Roger Social Club, and then murder them. His motives were primarily financial, as he aimed to take over his victims' properties.

After murdering them, he buried their bodies in shallow graves on his property. His crimes were not isolated incidents but part of a larger pattern of manipulation and violence.

5. Bearer Shares and Real Estate Fraud

A key element of Holbert's crimes was the exploitation of **bearer shares**.

- **Definition:** A bearer share is an equity security owned by whoever holds the physical stock certificate.
- **Transfer:** Ownership is transferred simply by handing over the physical document.
- **Anonymity:** This lack of registration allows for anonymity, making them useful in financial crimes, including fraud, money laundering, and tax evasion.
- **Panama's Response:** Panama has made efforts to regulate bearer shares, implementing a custodial system requiring the shares to be held by an authorized custodian.

Holbert used bearer shares to steal his victims' properties. By possessing the physical certificates, he was able to assume ownership and sell the properties without the need for lawyers, using a loophole in the system.

6. Life Inside Panamanian Prisons

Even after his capture, Holbert remained a complex and controversial figure.

- **Prison Pastor:** He claims to be a pastor within the prison, preaching a combination of Christianity and the law of attraction.
- **Social Media:** Holbert has access to social media, maintaining a Facebook group, "Friends of Brother Bill". He also produces a daily audio diary called "Life Inside Hell" on YouTube.
- **Sector C:** He was moved to Sector C, a part of the prison that he describes as a place where human rights are suspended. In this sector, inmates must pay for their food, bedding, and even toilet paper. He calls it a "Panamanian death sentence," because many people die there due to lack of care, violence from other prisoners, or suicide.
- **Prison Gangs:** Holbert has described how the street gangs on the outside of prison are structured and operate inside prison.

- **Mediation:** Holbert, despite his crimes, is recognized as a mediator among the prisoners, even having a signed waiver to protect himself from being held responsible for the outcome of the mediations.

He has also spoken about corruption within the prison system, including how police officers facilitate drug sales and provide weapons to gangs. Despite the harsh conditions, Holbert has carved out a position of relative freedom, being recognized as a chaplain and having more time outside his cell compared to other inmates.

7. Holbert's Manipulation and Media Presence

Holbert's story is not just that of a criminal, but also a master manipulator.

- **Self-Presentation:** He has actively sought to shape his public image, often presenting himself as a victim of circumstance.
- **Books:** He authored a memoir, *Long Live the King Wild Bill: The Hero is a Villain*, and is writing another book, *Concentration Camp 2000*, about his prison experiences.
- **Interviews:** Holbert has given interviews, including one with the *Daily Mirror* that resulted in his transfer to Sector C.
- **Access to an Audience:** Holbert's use of social media and his YouTube channel allows him to maintain a public profile and continue to exert influence, albeit from prison.
- **Hunger Strike:** Holbert is currently organizing a hunger strike on behalf of the prisoners in Sector C.

His ability to maintain a media presence raises serious ethical concerns, particularly given the impact on his victims' families.

8. Lessons Learned and Conclusion

The story of William Holbert and the Jolly Roger Social Club is a stark reminder that appearances can be deceptive. The allure of a tropical paradise can mask dangerous realities.

- **Due Diligence:** The case highlights the importance of thorough research and due diligence when relocating or investing in a new location.
- **Financial Caution:** It serves as a warning against the use of anonymous financial instruments like bearer shares.

- **Trust Your Instincts:** It is crucial to be cautious and trust your instincts, especially when dealing with people who seem too good to be true.
- **Complex Criminals:** The Holbert case reveals that criminals are complex, often using charm and manipulation, and are not always what they seem.

In conclusion, the story of "Wild Bill" Holbert is a cautionary tale of how a seemingly idyllic place can become a setting for unspeakable crimes. It underscores the need for vigilance, critical thinking, and awareness in all aspects of life, especially when venturing into unfamiliar territories.