

[Transcript] Casefile True Crime / Case 255: Rudolf Rupp

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52-year-old Rudolph Rup was a creature of habit. On the evening of Friday, October 12, 2001, the married father of two finished work for the day and headed to his local drinking spot, the BSV Neuburg. By day, the BSV was a popular sporting ground for residents of Neuburg under Dunau, a small Bavarian town in southeast Germany. Boasting two soccer fields, seven tennis courts, and a gymnasium, it provided a welcoming space for locals of all ages to participate in group fitness activities. By night, the clubhouse offered a casual pub-like atmosphere for members of the community to socialise over drinks and dinner. Rudolph Rup was a regular at the clubhouse, as it was only a few minutes drive from the Rup family's farm. After parking his beloved Mercedes outside, Rudolph took a seat at his regular table, which was off to the side away from other guests. As usual, he had come straight to the clubhouse from the barn without stopping to change his soiled overalls and gumboots. The stench ensured other patrons kept their distance. But it wasn't the only reason they avoided Rudolph Rup. After a few beers, he was known to become argumentative

and obnoxious, and he had a reputation around town for being a brawler. Over the next few hours, Rudolph sat drinking wheat beers and smoking cigarettes. The clubhouse slowly cleared out, and by 1am, he was one of three patrons left. The pub's owner, Werner Stegger, was ready to close for the night. He offered to give Rudolph a lift home, but Rudolph declined, saying he had his Mercedes out the front. Anyone who knew Rudolph knew that his E230 model Mercedes was his pride and joy. Werner walked his three lingering customers outside. Rudolph got into his car and reversed out, narrowly avoiding hitting a flowerpot on the way. At the car park exit, he made a right turn towards his home. The headlights of his Mercedes slowly fading into the darkness.

Later that same day, Saturday October 13th, 49-year-old Hermina Rup approached one of her neighbours in tears. Hermina explained that her husband hadn't come home the night before, and she didn't know what to do. She asked her neighbour if they had a phone book she could borrow. She wanted to call the BSV Neuburg to see if anyone there could shed any light on Rudolph's whereabouts. Hermina contacted the club and spoke to the owner, Werner Stegger. Werner was taken aback to discover that Rudolph hadn't made it home. He recalled that Rudolph had

been a little unsteady on his feet when he left the previous evening, but had otherwise seemed fine. There had been no incidents at the clubhouse to suggest Rudolph could have found himself in any trouble. As hours passed with no signs of Rudolph, Hermina eventually contacted the police to report

her husband missing. A check of Rudolph's tab at the BSV revealed that he'd drunk eight beers throughout the course of the evening. This suggested a blood alcohol reading well over the legal limit. The obvious possibility was that Rudolph could have gotten into a car accident. The Rulp family lived less than two kilometres from the BSV. A search of the roads in the area revealed no sign of Rudolph, his prized Mercedes, or any evidence of a car accident.

This wasn't the first time police had been called to the Rulp residence.

Rudolph and Hermina lived on the farm with their two daughters, 15-year-old Andrea and 16-year-

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old
Manuela. Both teens had mild intellectual disabilities and were required to attend a special needs high school. However, they rarely attended, which prompted visits from the authorities to check on their welfare. In the past, police had also been notified of noise complaints stemming from the property. The Rulp family farm left a lot to be desired. Rudolph inherited the property from his parents, but after his mother's death in 1997, he struggled to maintain it. Everything had become run down and the agricultural endeavors barely turned a profit. To make ends meet, the Rups rented the upper level of their farmhouse to a tenant. When questioned, the tenant described conditions in the Rulp home as anti-social. They said that the family argued often and Rudolph was constantly drunk. The tenant mostly went out of his way to avoid Rudolph. It was a sentiment shared by other associates of the family who described Rudolph as a bossy and domineering alcoholic. Some considered him a tyrant who seemed to enjoy humiliating his family. One relative said they were ashamed to be associated with the Rups. Yet another described Rudolph as a helpful and generous father. He tried his best to give his daughters whatever they wanted, including two pet horses and video games. There wasn't anything at the Rulp home to indicate that Rudolph had packed up and left on his own accord. His farm work was left incomplete and he hadn't tried to tie up any loose ends. It didn't seem likely that he'd choose to up and leave without a word. A check of Rudolph's finances revealed that the Rup family were living well beyond their means. Rudolph had once owned several properties, but with the farm failing to return a profit, each of these properties had since been sold. In 1999, the Rup's farmhouse had been placed into foreclosure and visits from a bailiff were commonplace. To support his family, Rudolph had reluctantly resorted to selling off his farmland. In the lead-up to his disappearance, he'd sold a plot of land for around \$1 million, the equivalent to around \$857,000 at the time. It was unclear what the money from the property sale had been spent on, but it didn't appear to have helped the Rup's financial situation. At the time of Rudolph's disappearance, he owed roughly \$882,000, which included \$80,000 in income tax. Less than two weeks prior to his disappearance, Rudolph had been summoned with an affidavit regarding unpaid debts. With the farm and rental property only bringing in a meager income, the only option Rudolph had left was to sell more of his land. Then there was the issue of Rudolph's health. Rudolph had type 2 diabetes, the symptoms of which were exacerbated by his unhealthy lifestyle. If he didn't make some changes, doctors had warned Rudolph that one of his legs would have to be amputated. Considerations led to the belief that Rudolph might have taken his own life. Those who knew him denied this possibility. While Rudolph was in a rough place financially, he felt he had things under control. His diabetes didn't seem to bother him too much either. He'd never shown any signs of depression or voiced the desire to end things. Other guests who interacted with Rudolph at the BSV Neuburg on the night before he disappeared said he'd seemed like his usual self. There was no evidence such as a suicide note or the wrapping up of affairs to support the suicide theory either. Regardless, investigators weren't prepared to rule out that Rudolph had been keeping some dark thoughts to himself and made a rash decision in his drunken state. There was just one problem. If Rudolph had gone away somewhere to

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kill

himself, it didn't make sense that his Mercedes had vanished with him. The Rupes farm was situated within close proximity to the Dunau River, the second largest river in Europe. It could be reached by car from the BSV Neuburg in less than 15 minutes. Other bodies of water, such as Seller Lake and

Eagertimer Ponds, were also less than 10 kilometres from the BSV. A cursory search of the waterways

didn't indicate any cars had driven over the banks. Police divers took to the waters,

but no sign of Rudolph Rupe emerged. As the months passed, search efforts intensified.

Authorities were advised to be on the lookout for Rudolph's Mercedes with the license plate

NDAE 265. Neuburg under Dunau was surrounded by lowland forests. Police helicopters repeatedly scanned the woods to no result. No confirmed sightings of Rudolph came through, nor did he touch his bank account, making it less likely that the farmer had up and left. But there was also no crime scene and no evidence of foul play. Rudolph Rupe had disappeared into thin air.

Intermittent searches of the Dunau River continued. By 2003, police had spent 23 days examining the waterways surrounding Neuburg. No sign of the missing farmer or his car emerged.

In November that year, a public prosecutor was assigned to re-examine the two-year-old cold case.

If there had been an accident or suicide, the prosecutor felt something would have surfaced

by now. Feeling 100% certain that Rudolph Rupe wasn't in any body of water within a 5km radius of where he was last seen, the prosecutor started considering a new theory.

The mysterious disappearance of Rudolph Rupe had become somewhat of an urban legend for locals of Neuburg and Dunau. Just before he went missing, Rudolph's eldest daughter, 16-year-old Manuela,

had become engaged to a young man named Matthias, who moved into the Rupes farmhouse. It was common

knowledge that Rudolph and Matthias didn't get along. Like Rudolph, Matthias had a proclivity for alcohol and could turn violent when under the influence. According to a neighbour, Matthias had once showed up at her house drunk and threatened to kill her son. Shortly before his disappearance, an enraged Rudolph had apparently chased Matthias off his property.

Gossip spread around town that Rudolph's wife, daughters and future son-in-law could have reached their breaking point. Tired of Rudolph drinking their remaining money away and running the farm into the ground, they could have hatched a plan to get rid of him. Although investigators had caught wind of these rumours early on, there was no evidence to suggest there was any truth to them.

Upon reviewing all the evidence, the public prosecutor wasn't so sure.

Without Rudolph around to work on the farm, his wife, Hermina, had been left with no other option but to sell more of the family's farmland. This was something that Rudolph had been deeply opposed to. It raised some questions. The prosecutor considered an angle that hadn't been explored during the initial missing persons investigation. The prosecutor, who had been accused of

an angle that hadn't been explored during the initial missing persons investigation.

What if the family was lying when they said Rudolph never came home that night?

At 6am on Tuesday, January 13, 2004, a team of investigators arrived at the Roops farm armed with a search warrant. Outside, the property was in disarray. Rubbish, old furniture and pieces of household junk were strewn about and several large dogs roamed around. The inside of the house was neglected and dirty with a terrible stench permeating the air. Hermina, Andrea,

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Manuela and Matthias were all still sleeping. Officers shook them awake and ordered them outside as a search of the house commenced. Investigators made their way to the basement downstairs. The smell was terrible. There they found cages filled with chinchillas and ferrets.

A neglected dog appeared to be on the brink of death. Meanwhile, the residents were taken for questioning. At this point, they were only being treated as witnesses. The main aim for investigators was to establish once and for all whether Rudolph returned home in the early morning hours of October 13, 2001. If they could clarify this detail, they could figure out where to go from there. The now 18-year-old Manuela Roop firmly denied that her father had ever come home.

Her mother Hermina also denied this, but investigators weren't convinced.

They pressed Hermina and before long, she admitted that her husband had indeed come home from the BSV clubhouse that night. According to Hermina, she and Rudolph were standing at the top of the basement stairs when a heated argument broke out between them. Hermina pushed Rudolph

and he fell down the stairs. The fall was fatal. Manuela's fiance Matthias helped Hermina carry Rudolph's body outside and into Rudolph's Mercedes. Under the cover of darkness, they drove the car

to the nearby Igotsoma pond and pushed it into the water. After a few days of questioning, Manuela Roop caved and corroborated the version of events provided by her mother, admitting that Hermina had accidentally pushed Rudolph down the stairs.

Andrea Roop was now 17 years old. When questioned by police, she said she didn't know if her father

had come home that night. It was only when they told her that her mother had confessed to killing Rudolph that Andrea changed her story. It was a watershed moment. Andrea admitted that Rudolph had come home after drinking at the clubhouse, but she added a significant detail. She claimed that her father had been sexually abusing her for years. It happened again that night.

Afterwards, a fight broke out between her parents and her mother pushed Rudolph down the stairs. Armed with these confessions, an extensive forensic search was carried out at the Roop's farmhouse. According to Hermina, when Rudolph landed at the bottom of the stairs, a pool of blood formed under his body which she had cleaned up. Yet, the search of the farmhouse failed to uncover a single trace of blood. Case file will be back shortly. Thank you for supporting us by listening to this episode's sponsors. This episode of Case File is sponsored by BetterHelp.

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Manuela's fiancée, Matthias, whose surname has been withheld from the public due to Germany's privacy laws, was now 20 years old. Matthias initially denied knowing anything about Rudolph's disappearance, but it only took him a few hours to crack. He admitted that Hermina had killed Rudolph and that he'd helped her dispose of his body and car in that eager time at Pond.

However, Matthias made no mention of Rudolph being pushed down the stairs.

He said Hermina had beat Rudolph to death with a club. Not only did this contradict the statements from Rudolph's wife and daughters, it made the lack of blood spatter in the Rupf farmhouse even more

perplexing. Despite the lack of forensic evidence, the confessions couldn't be ignored.

Hermina, Manuela, Andrea and Matthias were all charged with manslaughter and held in custody as the prosecutor continued building his case against them.

One week after her original confession, Hermina Rupf spoke to the investigators again.

This time, she withdrew her entire confession. Hermina adamantly denied that Rudolph had ever come home on the night he went missing and maintained that she had no idea what happened to him.

Two days later, Andrea also retracted her story about her mother pushing Rudolph down the stairs.

According to Andrea, what really happened was that Hermina and Matthias had beaten Rudolph to death with a club. She later changed her story again, saying it wasn't a club, but a hammer.

Investigators weren't sure what to believe. Each confession contradicted the other.

The lack of blood at the property seemed hard to believe given the level of violence described in each variation of the story. The Rupfs were taken to their farmhouse to participate in a videotape to reconstruction of the crime scene in the hopes a clearer picture of the truth would emerge. On camera, Manuela made a sudden switch from her original story. Instead of describing how her mother had pushed her father down the stairs,

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she claimed that her fiance Matthias had beaten Rudolph to death with a wooden club. At first, Manuela said that Matthias was the sole perpetrator. Later that day, she said her mother had also participated in the beating. Using a police mannequin, Manuela demonstrated the way Hermina had whacked Rudolph in the head several times before Matthias took over. She didn't know how many times Rudolph was struck overall, but one thing she was certain of was that there was a lot of blood. Then in mid-February, Manuela changed her story yet again. She claimed that her mother had nothing to do with the death of her father and that Matthias had acted alone. After beating Rudolph to death, she said Matthias cut up Rudolph's corpse and fed it to their pet dogs, which included dobermans, a bull terrier, and a German shepherd. It wasn't long before Andrea also submitted another version of events. She maintained that her father had come home and sexually abused her, but this time she added that Matthias found out what was going on and came to her defense. According to Andrea, Matthias threw Rudolph down the stairs, killing him. He then disposed of both Rudolph's body and vehicle. A month later, Andrea said this story wasn't true either. She said that Hermina and Matthias had attacked Rudolph on the staircase, after which they cut his corpse into pieces and fed it to the dogs. Investigators struggle to make sense of all the stories. Of the foursome, Matthias was the only one who stuck by his initial version of events, that Hermina had beaten Rudolph to death with a club, after which he'd helped push Rudolph and his car into the eager time upon. That was until three months later, when Matthias admitted he'd been lying all along. According to Matthias, when Rudolph returned home in the early hours of October 13, 2001, he approached his future father-in-law in the stairwell. Using a wooden club, Matthias hit Rudolph from behind, and then dragged his body down into the basement. Matthias was sure Rudolph was dead until he saw his leg twitch. That's when he grabbed a hammer and repeatedly smashed it into Rudolph's temple. He only stopped when it became stuck. From there, Matthias dragged Rudolph onto a piece of timber. He used a hacksaw and a hand axe to sever Rudolph's arms and legs. He cut Rudolph's body open, removed his internal organs, and used a margarine container to scoop all of the blood into a bucket. He wrapped the body parts in a garbage bag and carried them out to the tool shed. Matthias then boiled up a pot of water and placed Rudolph's head inside. One investigator asked him why. Matthias responded, because I thought it might fall apart easier to hack it. Once the skull was boiled, Matthias claimed he smashed it into pieces and mixed it into the manure pile on the property. The remaining body parts were fed to the pet dogs. Matthias told interviewing officers, the truth had to come out so that I could be free. Even now in the cell, I can still see these images in front of me.

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Even when using the most advanced technology available, investigators were still unable to uncover any traces of blood or other forensic evidence anywhere in the Rupp's farmhouse. Matthias provided an explanation for this. When he fatally hit Rudolph in the head, he claimed it didn't create an open wound.

Investigators repeatedly asked him, did you see any blood?

Matthias shook his head.

The investigators pressed on, asking, not at all.

Matthias shook his head again, reiterating, no, there was no blood.

The manure from the farm had been sold to a neighboring farmer who had since used it to spread over his fields. A search of the farmer's property turned up 150 pieces.

None were determined to be human.

Over the coming months, things only got more complicated. Matthias claimed that both her Mina and Manuela had encouraged the attack while also participating in the beating.

He then retracted this, saying he'd acted alone.

Manuela later said she was the one who had killed her father by beating his skull with a hammer. She claimed Matthias then got rid of Rudolph's body by burning his remains.

Manuela flip-flopped between several versions of events,

also stating that her father had been sexually abusing her since she was 12 years old.

By October 2004, 10 months after being taken into custody, the stories of all four of the accused finally aligned, but not in the way investigators were hoping.

Hermina, Manuela, Andrea and Matthias had all sought proper legal counsel.

All four of them now claimed the police had pressured them to submit false confessions.

Afraid of the repercussions, they complied. Hermina, Manuela, Andrea and Matthias all denied having anything to do with Rudolph's group's death and formally withdrew their confessions all

together. The whole situation was a complete mess for investigators. Although they didn't know which version of events was the right one, they had no doubt that the group was responsible for Rudolph's death. Matthias had provided some insight regarding the conflicting confessions. He said that after killing Rudolph, the group sat down and discussed what to do if the police came poking around. They agreed to say that Rudolph had never come home after drinking at the BSV. If police didn't believe them, they would say his death had been the result of an accident.

It was possible that the varying confessions had become a confused combination of the fabricated stories and the truth. There was also the question of motive. Rudolph had no life insurance, so no one in his family stood to benefit financially from his death. Piecing together the circumstantial evidence, investigators ultimately deduced that things had become unbearable in the Rube household.

Rudolph was constantly drunk and unpleasant to be around. The financial problems were causing a great strain on Rudolph and Termina's marriage, which was exacerbated by Rudolph's hesitation to sell off more of his farmland. For Rudolph's daughters, they could no longer endure the ongoing sexual abuse, which continued even after Matthias moved in with them. The fact that Rudolph

didn't get along with Matthias was the final nail in the coffin. It didn't matter that they wouldn't gain financially, the family simply wanted Rudolph out of the picture. Prosecutors believed that the most likely scenario was that Rudolph's family had waited for him to return home from the

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BSV clubhouse that October night. Once he was inside, Matthias ambushed Rudolph in the stairwell, hitting him from behind with a wooden club. Hermina, Manuela and Andrea stood nearby, cheering Matthias on while also hurling abuse at Rudolph.

As Rudolph laid defenseless on the ground, Hermina also hit him in the head, while Manuela and Andrea kicked him in the body. Once they thought he was dead, the group heaved his body into the basement, only to realize he was still alive.

Matthias took care of this by hitting him in the temple with a hammer.

They left his body there until the next morning, at which point Matthias and Hermina dismembered his body and disposed of his remains before reporting Rudolph missing.

This just left one question. Where was Rudolph's Mercedes?

Igatayma pond was a popular recreation spot for swimming, kayaking and sunbathing.

Its murky waters had been explored during previous searches for Rudolph, but nothing was found. Matthias pinpointed the location where he and Hermina claimed to have pushed the vehicle in, but the car wasn't there either.

In another version of his story, Matthias said that he'd disposed of Rudolph's Mercedes in a scrapyard. Although he didn't say which one, investigators suspected they knew.

Ludwig Hecht was a scrap dealer who lived near the Rupp's residence and was known to frequent their farm. Hecht was well known to the police with an extensive criminal rap sheet dating back to the 1960s. He also owned a scrap pressing machine, giving him the means to dispose of a vehicle. Ludwig Hecht was taken in for questioning, but denied having anything to do with Rudolph Rupp's car.

Detectives weren't convinced. Hecht had once been part of a notorious criminal gang and was known to bear hatred towards the police. Given the lack of forensic evidence found at the Rupp property, the possibility that Ludwig Hecht could have helped dispose of Rudolph's body was also considered. A search of Hecht's scrapyard didn't reveal anything to tie him to the crime, but police did find that Hecht had been improperly storing a number of pollutants.

This was considered an environmental violation and carried a hefty fine.

Faced with this offence, there were hopes that Hecht might talk in exchange for some kind of deal.

He was held in custody for four months and interrogated multiple times as the prosecution continued to build their case against the accused. But Hecht never swayed from his story that he had nothing to do with Rudolph Rupp's disappearance. He was eventually released and charged with an

8,000 euro fine in relation to the misstored chemicals. In the lead up to the trial,

Hermina Rupp and her two daughters were presented with an option. Confess to the truth and they would all serve their sentences in the same prison. But they didn't budge from their story that they'd given false confessions under pressure from the police.

The manslaughter trial commenced in April 2005. The prosecution case relied heavily on the defendants' retracted confessions. Videos were played of the accused as they took police through a reenactment of their alleged crimes. Despite the fact that each story contradicted the other, the prosecution linked them to form a consistent factual event.

A forensic pathologist provided an explanation for the lack of blood spatter or DNA found at the crime scene. They explained that both the killing of Rudolph and the dismemberment could have been relatively bloodless and that there probably wasn't any spurting bleeding.

Cleaning measures would have been adequate to remove all traces. The pathologist believed

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that the descriptions of the attack originally provided by the accused sounded completely plausible, albeit lacking in detail. There was just one thing they weren't sure about. Part of the prosecution's case was that Matthias had crushed Rudolph's bones and buried them in the manure pile. According to the pathologist, if this was true, at the very least residue of the bones would have remained. The defense described any statements made by their clients as pure imagination. They blamed the false confessions on the fact that their clients were all of below-average intelligence and therefore didn't have the mental capacity to withstand the pressure of the interrogations. The four accused had IQs ranging between 53 and 71.

They were also initially questioned at length without any legal representation, making them quote, at the mercy of the police officers. These preliminary interrogations hadn't been recorded, meaning there was no way to know what was discussed during this crucial time before the official interrogations commenced. According to Matthias, it was only after the police threatened him with violence that he made up the story about dismembering Rudolph's body. Investigators testifying at the trial firmly denied this. After 23 days of testimony, the court agreed that the confessions were real and all four of the accused were declared guilty. The judge announced. The terrible act was proven by the many statements. All in all, it turns out there was a clear and essentially consistent picture so that there can be no doubt as to the truth. No one can seriously believe that the horrific descriptions were made up by the accused. Hermina and Matthias were each

handed eight-year sentences. Manuela and Andrea, who were being tried as juveniles, weren't found guilty of manslaughter but evading and abetting. They were sentenced to three and a half and two and a half years in youth detention, respectively. Following the verdict, a report handed down by the judge provided another possible explanation for the lack of forensic evidence. The report said. The court is considering the possibility that the defendant could have fed the remaining body parts to the pigs. The chamber is aware that pigs being omnivores would also eat the rest of the body parts, including the bones. It is quite conceivable that feeding the pigs constitutes an even more terrifying disposal of the corpse for the defendant than throwing it in the manure heap, since the pigs are ultimately eaten by humans as part of the human food chain.

There is a possibility that the pigs have even been eaten by the family themselves.

Four years passed, during which Manuela and Andrea served their time and began to move on with their

lives as they waited for their mother's release. In February 2009, a surveyor from a hydroelectric power plant was conducting a routine inspection of the Dunal Reservoir in the municipality of Berkheim. Using a sonar device to scan the waters beneath his boat, he detected two objects. Closer inspection revealed them both to be cars. As was routine, the police were notified so that the cars could be salvaged. On Tuesday, March 10, a police diver took to the cold waters and identified the first car to be an old opal cadet. He swam down for a second time.

Through the murky waters, he recognized the unmistakable shape of a three-pointed star, the Mercedes brand emblem. The diver swam to the rear of the submerged vehicle.

The license plate was covered in algae. He scraped it off and got a closer look.

Though visibility was poor, he could make out what it said.

N-D-A-E-265. It was Rudolph Rupp's car, and behind the wheel was Rudolph's body.

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Word of the discovery quickly reached the press.

Camera crews and reporters watched as search and rescue divers disappeared under the water to attach a rope to the rear axle of Rudolph's Mercedes. On the riverbank, a crane started hauling the vehicle out of the water. To the experienced rescue crews watching on, it was clear that the crane was lifting the car at too high of an angle.

They tried to alert the driver, but it was too late. With the front of the vehicle pointing downwards, the dense mud that packed to the inside of the car shot forwards, causing the wind screen to shatter and burst out. Masses of mud rushed back into the water, taking Rudolph's body with it. After a frantic search, divers managed to fish the corpse out of the murky waters. With Rudolph's body safe on shore, investigators were stunned. The cold water of the Dunao had preserved his remains fairly well. While some parts had been eaten by fish, Rudolph's body was mostly intact, and there were no obvious injuries. An autopsy confirmed that Rudolph's skull was completely unharmed. There was no sign of bleeding in his brain or any other head injury. Although the flesh on Rudolph's neck was no longer intact, his torso and spine were completely unharmed. There was no sign of internal bleeding or cardiac arrest. Toxicology tests revealed no traces of poison or other drugs, although it was possible that any toxic substances had been washed out after years underwater. Ultimately, it was unclear whether Rudolph had still been alive when he entered the water and to the cause of his death couldn't be determined. One thing was certain. Rudolph hadn't been beaten to death, nor had he fatally fallen down the stairs. He hadn't been shot or stabbed, and he certainly hadn't been dismembered and fed to the farm animals. In fact, not a single sign of violence was found anywhere on Rudolph's body. Rudolph's Mercedes was analysed to see if it could shed some light on what happened.

Two keys were needed for Rudolph's car, one to unlock the doors and another to start the engine. One set of keys were found in Rudolph's pocket, but there was no key in the ignition.

Furthermore, the engine showed no signs of water hammer, which is what happens when the drive unit sucks in water instead of air. This led one motor vehicle expert to conclude that the engine wasn't running when the vehicle was submerged into the river. However, this didn't necessarily mean that Rudolph's car had been deliberately pushed in. When the Mercedes was hauled from the water, the gear stick was in the park position. If the engine was off and the car was in park, it would have been near impossible for someone to push it over the embankment. The car could have been towed directly into the water from a trailer, with Rudolph's already deceased or unconscious body inside. But back in April 2004, police divers had already searched the exact spot near the Donau Reservoir where Rudolph's car was eventually found. This raised the question

of whether it could have been dumped or driven into the water elsewhere and then washed further downstream. The power plant worker who discovered the car didn't think so. The current wasn't strong

enough. They deemed it much more likely that the car had been missed by mere meters during the original search, thus sitting undiscovered at the bottom of the river for a further five years.

Three weeks after Rudolph's body was found, he was given a church burial in his hometown. His wife and daughters were not among the few family members who attended the funeral.

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A wooden cross placed on his gravesite said nothing about the events or assumed an accurate timeline of his death, stating simply, Rudolph Roop, 1949 to 2009.

The discovery of Rudolph's body was the talk of the town.

Media gathered outside the Roop's vacant neglected farmhouse.

Hermina Roop's red Audi was still parked outside, while Hermina herself continued to serve her sentence for her husband's death. Many assumed that she would be released and that all four of the accused would be acquitted. After all, the revoked confessions that had formed a major part of the original verdict had now been proven untrue, and therefore many considered them to be worthless. The discovery of Rudolph's body also raised suspicions about how the confessions came about in the first place. If the confessions weren't accurate, then how had all four defendants provided a somewhat consistent, albeit muddled, false version of events?

Hermina's defense lawyer, Klaus Wittmann, told Spiegel online, when a corpse fed to dogs suddenly sits in a car in the do now, this clearly refutes the confessions of the accused and thus the basis of the verdict in this case.

Klaus believed that a retrial was essential, saying anything else would be a scandal.

However, the regional judge stated that retrials were only permitted when newly discovered facts could lead to an acquittal. In this case, he felt the original trial had proven beyond doubt that Rudolph hadn't died by accident or suicide, but had been killed by the four accused.

It didn't matter if they relied about the way Rudolph was killed or disposed of, their motives remained the same, and their revoked confessions still supported other elements of the crime. While the autopsy report found no injuries on Rudolph's spine, the flesh on his neck was no longer intact. According to the pathologist, the possibility that Rudolph had been strangled, suffocated, or had his throat slit, couldn't be ruled out.

When Rudolph's body was initially discovered, he was kneeling in the driver's seat, facing towards the rear of the vehicle. The pathologist believed this strange position could be explained by rigor mortis having already set in when Rudolph's body was placed in the car. He also said it was possible that Rudolph's body had been kept in a freezer and then placed in the car in a frozen state. Essentially, the judge ruled that it didn't matter how Rudolph had died, it had already been proven that Hermina, Matthias, Manuela, and Andrea were complicit in killing him. Their request for a retrial was rejected.

In November 2009, the now 54-year-old Hermina Rupp was released from prison after serving five of her eight-year sentence. Her early release had nothing to do with the recovery of her husband's body eight months earlier, but was due to her being a first-time offender who was deemed to no longer pose a threat. Matthias was released shortly after.

Although this meant that all four of the accused were now free, their defense team continued to fight for a new trial. It didn't matter that they'd already served their time, many believed they had been wrongfully convicted. Without a retrial, justice wouldn't prevail and the stigma against them would remain. As Hermina's lawyer explained, my client doesn't want to be branded a murderer.

An appeal was submitted to the State Supreme Court of Bavaria, where authorities disagreed with the regional judge's ruling that it didn't matter how Rudolph was killed.

The request for a retrial was granted. Regardless of the outcome, the defendants couldn't be sent back to prison, but it gave them the chance to clear their names.

By the time the retrial began in October 2010, Matthias and Manuela were no longer a couple.

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The youngest Rupert daughter, Andrea, was heavily pregnant and unable to stand trial. The decision was made to continue without her.

The prosecution submitted that the manslaughter conviction for Matthias and Hermina be upheld. While the prosecutor admitted that not everything in this process went perfectly and that the investigation had clearly gone awry, he said there was no doubt as to what happened to Rudolf Rupp in the early morning hours of October 13, 2001.

The motives presented in the original trial remained unchanged. Rudolf Rupp was an abusive alcoholic and his family wanted him out of the picture. But the method of murder changed based on the new forensic evidence. After returning home from the BSV Neuburg, the prosecution presented that Hermina pushed Rudolf down the stairs. As he lay on the landing, Hermina and Matthias beat Rudolf with a wooden plank in the neck area.

As per the pathologist's report, it also couldn't be ruled out that they'd strangled Rudolf or slit his throat. Matthias and Hermina managed to load Rudolf's unconscious body into his car and dispose of it in the Duna River. The E230 model Mercedes didn't require the key to be in the ignition or the brake to be applied for the gears to be changed. The gear stick was also able to be moved very easily during the rescue mission. Therefore, it was suggested that the gear could have moved to the park position after the car was already in the water.

Andrea and Manuela likely knew that their father was attacked but didn't know whether he was dead or alive. Regardless, all four of the accused agreed to lie to detectives if they came sniffing around. The prosecution agreed that the daughters be acquitted even if their knowledge of the crime remained questionable. The defence team argued that all four of the accused be acquitted and compensated to the sum of 100,000 euros combined for their years of wrongful imprisonment. It wasn't the defence's job to prove how Rudolf died but simply to prove that their clients weren't involved. Based on the evidence, they believed a drunken accident or suicide couldn't be ruled out. When the car windscreen had smashed during the rescue mission, any other evidence that might have been mixed in with the mud had disappeared into the river. Therefore, it was possible that the key had been in the ignition but had been ejected over time and was lost in the mud.

The only other items found in Rudolf's Mercedes were his mother's death certificate and a letter from the tax office. The defence team believed this added weight to the theory that Rudolf had taken his own life. Diaries owned by Andrea and Manuela had been taken by police during the initial murder investigation. There was nothing to indicate either of the girl's guilt in their father's death. On the contrary, in one entry, one of the Rube daughters had written, Dad, we need you, please come back. Forensic experts concluded that blows to the neck would have only caused a brief loss of consciousness a few minutes at most. One defence lawyer said, This would hardly allow, under the specific circumstances, to drive a person to the do now in a car and to drown in an unconscious state. The defence also counted that if any weight was going to be placed on the since retracted confessions, at no point in any of those statements did any of the accused mention a beating to the neck region.

Nor did they ever mention the do now river as a dumping ground. As the defence pointed out, the crucial point in the case was whether or not Rudolf Rube returned home on the night in question, and this couldn't be proven. Therefore, an accident or suicide could not be ruled out. The tactics used by police to elicit confessions from the accused were heavily criticised.

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The defence argued that the original investigators were so convinced they had the right people, they'd asked leading questions in order to extract statements that supported their belief of what happened to Rudolph. In none of the original interrogations, did any of the accused mention Rudolph falling down the stairs or being fed to the dogs. It was only after investigators put these scenarios to them that they began to say those events had happened. The fact that the confessions had come out in dribs and drabs and changed over time was proof to the defence of their inaccuracy. One defence lawyer said, In my view, the only conceivable way the accused could have come up with these details is that the details were made known by the interrogating officers.

A police officer who had obtained Matthias' first confession was asked why a three hour in-depth preliminary conversation hadn't been recorded. The officer explained that they'd just been getting to know each other. It was only when Matthias admitted that Rudolph Rupp had come

home on the night in question that the official interrogation began and things were formally documented. Interrogation records presented in court showed just how much Manuela's statements contradicted themselves. Sometimes she said her mother beat her father, other times she made no mention of it. Manuela testified that she'd only provided these details after the lead investigator provided her with this version of events. This particular investigator was excused from testifying on the grounds that they were suffering from psychological problems and that being put under intense questioning could trigger severe depressive symptoms. Later speaking about this decision to the press, Manuela's lawyer said, Who thought about the traumatization of my client?

The accused mostly sat through the proceedings without showing any emotion.

That was until a former cellmate of Hermina Roup took the stand.

She alleged that Hermina had confided to her in prison that Matthias had killed Rudolph using a baseball bat. Hermina, who was in ill health and required a walking frame, got up and left the courtroom in a rage, saying, I'm going now. This is all too stupid for me. When she returned, she denied having ever spoken to the woman, calling her a lying pig.

The former owner of the BSV Neuburg who had been the last to see Rudolph Rupp alive testified that after Rudolph went missing, Hermina came to the clubhouse to pay off her husband's tab, but didn't ask anything about his whereabouts. This was in direct contrast to an earlier statement provided by the owner, in which he said Hermina did ask about Rudolph.

Hermina launched forward in her chair, wildly shaking her head and finger at this inconsistency. For the prosecution, the fact that Hermina was getting restless was used as further proof of her guilt. Ludwig Hecht, the scrap dealer who'd been accused of disposing of Rudolph's Mercedes, also took the stand as a witness for the defense. According to Hecht, the police had pressured him to admit he was involved in the crime. When he refused to sign a statement admitting to this, Hecht alleged that one officer in the presence of others held a gun to his head and threatened him, saying, This is about murder. We're allowed to do anything. When he still refused to sign it, Hecht alleged that the lead investigator offered him a deal, admit that Rudolph's Mercedes had been in his scrap yard and the environmental violation against him would be dropped.

The verdict was delivered in February 2011. Based on the kneeling position of Rudolph's body when his Mercedes was found, presiding judge, Theo Ziegler ruled out the possibility that Rudolph had died by accident or suicide. The fact that his car or wallet weren't stolen were proof that he hadn't been the victim of a random opportunistic attack, but a targeted homicide.

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Judge Ziegler defended the investigators who had obtained the revoked confessions and denied the accusation that they'd used unethical tactics or applied unnecessary pressure. He believed the accused were pretending to be less intelligent than they really were and could provide no explanation for why they had provided false statements. Judge Ziegler concluded that someone in the Rulp household had killed Rudolph, he just couldn't be sure exactly who or how. Therefore, Ziegler said he had no choice but to acquit each of the defendants. However, he denied their requests for compensation. As far as Judge Ziegler was concerned, Hermina, Matthias, Manuela and Andrea had chosen to make their false statements. Therefore, they only had themselves to blame for their convictions. For the defense team, the verdict was only half a victory. Outside court, one of the lawyers told the press, we won and we lost. In the wake of the verdict, Scruptila Ludwig Hecht was charged with making false accusations against the police. At his trial, a representative for the public prosecution labelled Hecht the scum of humanity and called for a prison sentence of 20 months. The judge acquitted Hecht, citing reasonable doubt as to whether he had fabricated the allegations. Over the years, lawyers for Hermina, Matthias, Manuela and Andrea continued to fight for financial compensation for the time their clients spent in prison. They argued that the accused didn't invent the false confessions that led to their convictions alone but under pressure from the interviewing officers. Their appeals have all been denied. Professor Gunther Konkan is an expert on false confessions. He examined the video footage of the accused giving their statements to police for a television special on the Spiegel-Panorama network and was shocked by what he saw. To Professor Konkan, it was obvious that the video recordings were intermittently turned off, at which point new information was given to the accused during undocumented conversations. When the camera started recording again, the accused would then suddenly reveal information that they'd previously been denying. At no point in the footage did any of the authorities address these discrepancies. To understand how someone could give a false confession, Professor Konkan urged viewers to consider the whole picture and not just the final outcome. He explained that in this case there were a variety of factors at play, including insecurities, low IQs and possible mental illness, factors which were exacerbated by isolation in custody and illegal questioning over several weeks. Watching the footage, Professor Konkan stated, I'm at a loss for words. Speaking to the same program, the public prosecutor who had spearheaded the original conviction against the four accused was asked how he felt when Rudolph Rupp's body was recovered from the Dunau River. The reporter asked, did you think, oh damn it, now I've got a problem. The prosecutor responded, no, why would it be a problem? The case gained massive media attention in Germany, not just because of the bizarre circumstances, but because it shattered the long-standing belief that the German legal system does not produce wrongful convictions. After the retrial, the judge from the original trial defended the original verdict, saying, I never want to sentence anybody unjustified, but on the other hand, you also need to see that we are only human, and therefore we can also be subject to human error. The truth about Rudolph Rupp's death remains a mystery.