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WOMAN SEARCHES IN VAIN FOR BROTHER: KEESLER SERGEANT DISAPPEARED
FROM COAST IN '86
ROBIN FITZGERALD/THE SUN HERALD

OCEAN SPRINGS --- An Illinois woman left the Mississippi Coast in tears and "complete despair" on Friday, finding no clues to explain her brother's disappearance from Ocean Springs 15 years ago.

Kate Lazansky, of Antioch, Ill., spent this week driving around the Coast with boxes of files and pictures, hoping authorities could help find her brother. James Michael Welter, or "Jimmy," was a staff sergeant at Keesler Air Force Base when he disappeared within a day or two of being arrested for drunken driving in Ocean Springs on New Year's Day 1986. The Air Force declared him absent without leave four days later. Ocean Springs police reportedly filed a missing person's report and listed his name on a national crime database. His dental records were provided to authorities to help identify him, Lazansky said.

However, Lazansky said the Air Force has been unable to find its files on Welter. She's also been unable to find out why there's no record of a missing person report.

Private investigators hired by her family, which includes nine siblings, have turned up conflicting reports. One report indicates that one of the Ocean Springs police officers who arrested her brother later bought her brother's car. Another indicates that Welter may have assumed a different name and left the Coast for Shreveport, La., with a girlfriend.

The petite, 39-year-old woman came to the Coast with bulldog determination, not taking "no" for an answer as she sought to meet with various officials and reporters.

"Wouldn't you want to know what happened if it was your brother?" she asked.

On Friday morning, Lazansky checked out of a Biloxi hotel, upset because Ocean Springs police officials refused to speak with her, she said. However, she spent one day with an Air Force investigator, who promised to rebuild Welter's file, said Lazansky.

No one from either agency returned phone calls from The Sun Herald.

Lazansky found a glimmer of hope when she visited the state Attorney General's Office in Jackson on her way home. She learned there may be a way to find a copy of her brother's fingerprints. She believes it could help identify her brother if he has been found dead.

"There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about him," Lazansky said. "I can't let it rest until I know."

---Robin Fitzgerald can be reached at 896-2307 or at rfitzgerald@sunherald.com.

Memorial set for county man missing 16 years

Article from: The News Sun - Waukegan (IL) Article date: April 8, 2002 Author: Frank Abderholden More results for: missing james michael welter

Family and friends of James Welter will hold a memorial service Thursday in McHenry. A star athlete at Grant High School and College of Lake County, Welter was declared dead this year after being missing for more than 16 years.

Welter was 34 and a staff sergeant in the Air Force and had served for nine years at the time of his disappearance on Jan. 3, 1986. He vanished after going to spend a weekend with some friends in Mississippi along the Gulf of Mexico near Keesler Air Force Base.

The former Fox Lake resident left behind his checkbook and savings book, investments, passport and other personal belongings.

The Air Force initially listed him as absent without leave and then listed him a deserter.

Six months after he disappeared, his Ford Granada turned up in the hands of a convicted felon who could not remember who sold the vehicle to him.

Investigators with the Air Force and police were unsuccessful in solving the case.

"We are coming together to bring closure and remembrance for our beloved son," said a notice for the memorial service.

Visitation will be held beginning 7 p.m. at The Villa Desidaradam, 3015 Bayview Lane, McHenry.

In lieu of flowers or gifts, the family asks that donations to charity be made in memory of James Michael Welter.

Welter is survived by his parents and nine brothers and sisters.