

He has been without a name for 47 years': Body found in La Vergne identified after 1978 murder

Alicia Patton

6 hours ago

RUTHERFORD COUNTY, Tenn. (WKRN) — Nearly 50 years after a man's body was found near a recreation area in La Vergne, authorities say they finally know his name.

On Monday, the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office announced that DNA testing indicates that **Jessie Lee Williamson**, 52, was the man found wrapped in a smoldering blanket at the Poole Knobs Recreation Area along Jones Road on Aug. 1, 1978.



Jessie Lee Williamson (Courtesy: Rutherford County Sheriff's Office)



Jessie Lee Williamson (Courtesy: Rutherford County Sheriff's Office)



Jessie Lee Williamson (Courtesy: Rutherford County Sheriff's Office)

The 52-year-old was reportedly shot multiple times and his upper body was wrapped in a garden hose. Detectives added Williamson was partially burned and it appeared he had been killed somewhere else and dragged from the parking lot.

Although fingerprints were sent to the TBI and FBI in 1978, they yielded no results, according to the sheriff's office. Officials said an autopsy report revealed Williamson was shot five times and sustained severe burns to his arm, face, head and chest, stating that his body remained at the University of Tennessee's Anthropology Department.

Authorities said they continued to investigate the case and submitted DNA samples for testing and requested fingerprint matches from the Department of Defense in 2014, but all tests came back negative.

DNA testing helps TBI identify human remains

Then, in November 2024, a family in Portland, Tennessee, reportedly reached out to detectives after a photo of a reconstructed skull was released in an attempt to identify the man.

The family allegedly stated they believed they were related to the victim and their DNA samples were sent to the University of North Texas. However, the DNA did not match, which led detectives to continue the investigation.

In 2020, RCSO Detective Sgt. Richard Brinkley submitted an inquiry to Familytreedna.com for a DNA search.

According to Brinkley, in August 2021 the RCSO partnered with Othram — a private DNA lab — with hopes for an identification. By Oct. 1, 2025, Othram notified the sheriff's office that Williamson had been positively identified as the 1978 murder victim found in La Vergne.

During Monday's press conference, Brinkley said not much is known about Williamson, but authorities believe he was in the Navy for some time.

"We're reaching out to the veterans hospital here to see if they have some records, and that could have been a reason why he was in this area," Brinkley said. "From the understandings that we have right now, he was from North Carolina and also frequented some parts of Alabama."

Even though the 1978 murder victim has now been identified, Brinkley emphasized that the RCSO will continue to work on the case.

“He’s been without a name for 47 years, to us. For the family, they’ve always known and have wondered what happened to him, and now we’re able to give them some of those answers.”

Brinkley added there have been rumors regarding potential suspects as investigators worked the case through the years, but said nothing “substantive” came from it.

“It would be great to find a suspect and move forward with that, but anyone can do the math on this and realize that we’re probably dealing with some very limited time on even a suspect still being alive,” he expressed.

If you have any information regarding the case or any other case in Rutherford County, you are asked to contact Brinkley at 615-904-3045.

No additional information was immediately released.

Categories: [Middle TN](#), [News](#)

Tags: [Cold Case](#), [La Vergne](#), [Rutherford County](#), [Rutherford County Sheriff's Office](#)