

Who's John Doe? Polk County deputies identify victim in decades-old cold case

A prison informant who gave specified details about the murder was the stepping stone to unraveling the mystery.

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ELOISE, Fla. — A tip from a prisoner and multiple rounds of DNA testing led to Polk County Sheriff's detectives cracking a 50-year-old cold case.

A body was found in 1972, and the homicide case was finally solved earlier this month.

Here's what happened and how detectives uncovered the mystery:

What happened

In 1972, deputies found a man's decomposing body in a field with two gunshot wounds to the head. A person fishing in the area found the body just to the south of the canal between Lake Lulu and Lake Ship in Eloise. For decades, Polk County Sheriff's detectives tried to identify the victim who was found with no wallet and no identification.

The man appeared to be in his 40s to 50s but the body was in advanced stages of decomposition when it was found. Detectives did not find any leads or witnesses, and the body was buried in a pauper's grave.

Prisoner tips off detectives

Two years later, an inmate in the Florida State Prison system contacted investigators and said a fellow inmate confessed to killing a man.

Charles Williams, who was in Union Correctional Facility in Raiford said in 1973, Clarence Ingram told him that he and another man, named Edgar Todd,

met a man in a bar in Winter Haven and shot him after getting into an argument.

Ingram told Williams that the three men left the bar in the victim's white Chevrolet car, and at some point during the car ride, Todd shot the victim twice with a 22-caliber pistol. The men dumped the body in an area near a canal close to an overpass in the Winter Haven and Eloise area so it would be eaten by turtles. The two took his wallet and rings and sold a large amount of tools in the victim's car to Ingram's brother.

The informant also told detectives that Ingram took the victim's car with Georgia plates and sold the car in Keeler, Michigan for \$500.

Deputies said the information provided by Williams was "extremely accurate," and he could have only learned it from someone involved in the murder.

Detectives try to identify the victim

In 1974, Florida detectives inquired with Georgia law enforcement about missing persons cases from 1972. Georgia authorities gave them information about Lewis House who left the state for Florida and was never seen again.

The information was followed up but no leads were found, and the case went cold. In February 2017, the victim's body was exhumed for DNA collection. Family reference samples were also collected from Lewis House's family, but testing revealed the victim wasn't him.

The victim's DNA was entered into a national database, but there were no matching profiles.

Another attempt to identify "John Doe"

In November 2023, a section of the victim's femur bone was sent to Othram, Inc., which is a private lab that has [helped solve other cold cases in the Tampa Bay area](#). In April, the lab submitted a report saying the victim could possibly be Mack Lavell Proctor.

During interviews with Proctor's son and family members, deputies learned he was last seen between 1969 and 1972 in Georgia but was never reported missing.

The son's DNA ended up being a match with the victim's. The son also said he last saw him in Georgia and confirmed his father was a master mechanic, which explains the tools in the vehicle. The family also said he was a heavy drinker, which explains the three men meeting at a bar.

What about the suspects?

Ingram died in 1995, Todd died in 2015 and Ingram's brother died in 2003.

Deputies figured out that Clarence Ingram received a traffic citation in Michigan eight days after Proctor's body was found and 20 miles away from where the prisoner informant said Ingram sold the car

Ingram's criminal history also included a homicide conviction in Lake County where he shot a person three times in the back in 1973 with a 25-caliber handgun. Coincidentally, Proctor's family told detectives that Proctor commonly had that same handgun with him at all times. But officials couldn't find any history with the gun.

Deputies also said Ingram and Todd were close associates and resided in the Eloise and Winter Haven areas at the time of the homicide.

Timeline

- May 17, 1972: A body is found in Eloise
- May 25, 1972: Ingram stopped in Michigan for a traffic citation
- April 21, 1973: Ingram charged with homicide and later convicted
- November 1973: Williams and Ingram confirmed to be in Union Correctional Facility at the same time
- Jan. 14, 1974: Williams tells investigators Ingram and Todd murdered a man
- 1995: Ingram dies
- 2003: Ingram's brother, whom he sold the tools to, dies
- 2015: Todd dies
- Feb. 10, 2017: "John Doe" body is exhumed and DNA is extracted. Detectives confirm it's not Lewis House
- Nov. 15, 2023: Femur bone submitted to Othram, Inc. for testing
- April 1, 2024: Othram submits reports stating the victim could be Mack Levell Proctor
- April 17, 2024: Detectives talk to Proctor's son in Georgia
- May 3, 2024: Othram confirms that Proctor is John Doe