



U.S. Department of Justice

Civil Rights Division

RM:PF:CG
144-33-2276

Criminal Section - PHB
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

(b)(7)(C)

FEB 20 2013

Westwego, LA 70094

(b)(7)
(C)

Dear (b)(7)(C)

We are writing to inform you that the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recently conducted a review of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance and probable murder of your (b)(7)(C) Joseph "JoEd" Edwards, on July 12, 1964. We regret to inform you that we are unable to proceed further with a federal criminal investigation of this matter because the men likely responsible for the disappearance and death of your (b)(7)(C) are deceased. Please accept our sincere condolences on the loss of your (b)(7)(C).

Over the last 50 years, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice has been instrumental in bringing justice to some of the nation's most disturbing civil rights era crimes. Today, the Division continues to use its resources and expertise to identify, locate, and, where possible, prosecute those responsible for committing racially-motivated crimes committed more than 40 years ago.

In 2006, the FBI began its "Cold Case Initiative" — a comprehensive effort to identify and investigate racially-motivated murders committed decades ago. Toward that end, each of the 56 FBI field offices searched their "cold case files" to identify incidents which might be ripe for investigation. In February of 2007, the FBI announced the next phase of the initiative, which includes a partnership with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), and the National Urban League to assist the FBI in identifying additional cases for investigation and to solicit their help. In October 2008, the "Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act" ("Emmett Till Act") became law, giving the Department of Justice additional tools to investigate "violations of criminal civil rights statutes . . . result[ing] in death" that "occurred not later than December 31, 1969."

The federal review concerning your (b)(7)(C) disappearance was begun pursuant to the Cold Case Initiative and the Emmett Till Act. This review was conducted by FBI Special Agents and experienced "cold case" civil rights prosecutors. We have now concluded that review and wish to inform you in writing of our findings.

cc: Records Chrono Gamondi

As part of its review of the circumstances of your (b)(7)(C) disappearance, the FBI retrieved from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) the 1964-1967 FBI file relating to the case; conducted public records searches; and obtained numerous media articles.

According to our review, in the early morning hours of July 12, 1964, your (b)(7) was seen leaving work at the end of his shift as a porter at the Shamrock Motel in Vidalia, Louisiana (the Shamrock). Although unclear, Mr. Edwards may have been seen by a friend on the evening of July 12, and by (b)(7)(C) with whom he was living the next evening, July 13. On July 19, 1964, Mr. Edwards' (b)(7)(C) reported (b)(7) missing to the Vidalia Police Department (VPD). On July 21, 1964, (b)(7)(C) made a similar report to the Natchez Police Department (NPD):

Sometime between July 12 and 23, 1964, an unknown person reported your (b)(7)(C) 1958 white-over-green Buick, which he had purchased on July 6, 1964, abandoned near the Dixie Lanes bowling alley on the Vidalia-Ferriday highway. Several witnesses stated that they looked into the Buick in the days that followed. Some said that a belt was looped around the steering wheel, others that a necktie was hanging from the inside mirror. The majority, including (b)(7) (b)(7)(C) said that they saw no bloodstains. One witness stated that he saw a silver-dollar-sized blood spot under the steering wheel. Two witnesses, including (b)(7)(C) (b)(7)(C) stated that they saw mud in the car.

Mr. Edwards's body was never found and he is presumed dead, likely murdered.

The FBI initiated a preliminary investigation on July 23, 1964, at the request of the Department of Justice, after (b)(7)(C) reported hearsay learned via one of (b)(7)(C) that Mr. Edwards was in jail in Ferriday, Louisiana. The FBI contacted all the local law enforcement agencies and determined that Mr. Edwards was not in jail; they also determined that the local agencies were not actively investigating the matter, as Mr. Edwards was considered "merely" a missing person.

In August 1967, the FBI initiated a full investigation after receiving information from a (b)(7)(C) in connection with another ongoing FBI investigation. The (b)(7) information indicated that your (b)(7) may have been the victim of Klan violence, specifically by members of the "Silver Dollar Group" (SDG), a Klan offshoot group operating in the area. At about the same time, the FBI received reports that sometime in September or October 1964, a commercial fisherman found "flesh-like matter" in a container submerged in the Mississippi River near Deer Park, Louisiana, about 15 to 20 miles from Vidalia.

The FBI continued its investigation until May 1968. The FBI interviewed more than 250 witnesses, many multiple times, and conducted several scuba searches and forensic tests.

Cold Case prosecutors and FBI agents reviewed the voluminous investigative file and findings. Several hypotheses were developed, the strongest of which centered on an incident involving a white woman, who worked as a telephone operator and registration clerk at the Shamrock at the time of Mr. Edwards's disappearance. According to the woman, who was interviewed multiple times by the FBI, one afternoon in July 1964, she was on her way to the restroom when Mr. Edwards grabbed her and attempted to kiss her. At the time, the woman was dating James Buford Goss, a married Louisiana Probation and Parole officer, and she reported the attempted kiss to him. Goss admitted to the FBI that he reported the incident to VPD Chief (and Vidalia Town Marshal) Johnnie Lee "Bud" Spinks. Spinks and an NPD officer visited and interviewed the woman, who reportedly declined to press charges.

According to the (b)(7) Spinks then enlisted the aid of the SDG, led by Raleigh Jackson "Red" Glover, and counting among its members Kenneth Norman Head, Homer Thomas "Buck" Horton, and Concordia Parish Sheriff's Office (CPSO) Deputies William Howard "Bill" Ogden and Frank DeLaughter.

A witness, (b)(7)(C) in 1964, told the FBI that on a night in July of that year, he saw a car matching the description of your (b)(7)(C) 1958 Buick being stopped by a white 1964 Oldsmobile. The Olds had no law enforcement emblems, but it did have two rear whip antennae and a red dashboard light. The traffic stop was on the Vidalia-Ferriday Highway, east of the bowling alley, i.e., at or near the spot where the Buick was later found abandoned. The Olds was driven by an overweight white man, and two other white men were standing by the open driver's door of the Buick. The witness stated the Buick appeared to be occupied solely by the driver, a man wearing a green, possibly plaid, sport shirt, whom the witness could not see sufficiently to state whether he was African-American. The witness passed the two cars and, shortly thereafter, the white Olds now occupied by several men, sped by the witness's car. Although the witness did not recognize any of the occupants of the Olds, he could attest that Frank DeLaughter, whom the witness knew, was not among them.

An extensive investigation determined that the only local law enforcement agency that used a 1964 Olds with two rear antennae was the VPD. The VPD car had a red light mounted on top of the roof, not on the dashboard as described by the witness. But several witnesses stated that the VPD officers, particularly Chief Spinks, had one or more portable flashing red lights that could be mounted on the dashboard. When the witness was shown pictures of the VPD car, he stated that he did not "believe it identical" to the one he had seen, however the interview occurred more than three years after the event he had witnessed.

It was also determined that SDG leader Glover purchased a white 1964 Olds in late May 1964, but it does not appear that it was determined whether the car matched the witness's description of the car he had seen.

In 2010, the FBI conducted an investigation and determined that all the most likely suspects in your (b)(7)(C) disappearance, i.e., James Goss, Bud Spinks, Raleigh Glover, Bill Ogden, Frank DeLaughter, Homer Horton, and Norman Head, are deceased. The FBI also determined that the (b) who provided the most useful leads against those men, is deceased.

Cold Case prosecutors and FBI agents also examined the evidence to determine whether there was any support for other hypotheses, including, but not limited to: 1) that your (b)(7)(C) murder was connected to the drowning of a child in the Shamrock pool or to your (b)(7)(C) alleged relationship with the child's mother; 2) that your (b)(7) was murdered because of his alleged involvement in providing prostitutes to motel guests; 3) that Mr. Edwards's death was connected to his alleged relationships with one or more white women and the related theory that he was caught entering the room of a female motel guest; 4) the theory that Mr. Edwards had been "hung up and skinned alive"; and 5) that your (b)(7) was taken to somewhere in Mississippi, shot more than 30 times, and then his body was put in concrete and thrown into the river. There was insufficient evidence to support any of these hypotheses.

Ultimately, the exhaustive investigation and review did not definitively determine what happened to your (b)(7)(C). But the overwhelming weight of the evidence strongly points to the incident involving the Shamrock phone operator as the precipitating event, and to the men listed above as perpetrators, particularly the members of the SDG. The investigation has produced no credible evidence implicating any other suspects.

As you are aware, the recent FBI investigation has been the subject of scrutiny and criticism, particularly in the local media. But, as the lengthy and thorough review by Department attorneys clearly established, all of the "leads" that the FBI allegedly failed to pursue had either been extensively pursued during the original investigation in the 1960s, lacked in useful specificity, or implicated the very same suspects discussed in this letter. All but one of those suspects was dead by 2004, and the last, Goss, died in 2009. Accordingly, we have no choice but to close our investigation.

We regret that we cannot be of further assistance to you. Again, please accept our sincere condolences on the loss of your (b)(7)(C).

Sincerely,

Paige M. Fitzgerald
Deputy Chief in Charge of the Cold Case Initiative