

CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION

Notice to Close File

File No. 144-19M-1755

Date April 12, 2010

To: Chief, Criminal Section

Re: Edward Williamson (Deceased),
Lynwood Harvey (Deceased)
Butler, Georgia - Subjects;
Maceo Snipes (Deceased) - Victim
CIVIL RIGHTS

It is recommended that the above case be closed for the following reasons:

Case Synopsis

On July 18, 1946, Maceo Snipes, the victim, an African-American World War II veteran, was shot and fatally wounded by a white man, Edward Williamson, in Butler, Georgia. Present at the time of the shooting was at least one other white man, Lynwood Harvey. A friend of the victim's family took him to Montgomery Hospital in Butler, where he died on July 20, 1946.

The day before the shooting, July 17, 1946, the victim was the only African-American in the Rupert, Georgia, Voting District to vote in the gubernatorial primary election. In August 1946, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigated the shooting at the request of the

Cristina Gamondi
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To: Records Section
Office of Legal Administration

The above numbered file has been closed as of this date.

Date

Chief, Criminal Section
FORMERLY CVR-3 FORM CL-3

Department of Justice's Criminal Division to determine whether the victim had been killed because he had exercised his right to vote. Williamson was interviewed by the FBI on August 22, 1946 and stated that he and subject Harvey had driven to the victim's house so Williamson could collect a \$10 debt the victim owed him. Williamson stated that he and Harvey remained in the car as the victim came out to speak to them. Williamson claimed that, by pre-arrangement with Harvey, Williamson suggested that Harvey pay the debt in exchange for the victim doing some work at Harvey's saw mill, but the victim refused the offer. According to Williamson, the victim had then pulled out a knife, ignored a warning by Williamson to step back, and then stepped toward Williamson. At that point, Williamson had pulled a .32 caliber pistol from the glove compartment and fired two shots at the victim. The victim dropped the knife and said he was going back into the house to get some "protection." Williamson and Harvey then drove away.

Subject Harvey was also interviewed by the FBI on August 22, 1946. He said that he was the only other person in the car with Williamson at the time of the shooting. Harvey generally confirmed Williamson's account to the FBI except that Harvey told the FBI that the victim took two steps *back* prior to pulling the knife out of his pocket. Harvey did not confirm that Williamson warned the victim to back away or that the victim stepped forward before Williamson fired the two shots.

XXXX, the victim XXXXX, was interviewed by the FBI and stated that XXXX and XXX XXXX, XXXX, were in the house with the victim when the subjects drove up and called the victim out of the house.¹ According to XXXX, there were three or four men in the car. XXXX stated that the victim talked to the men and then she heard two shots, a pause, and then a third shot. The victim came back into the house, holding his arm. The victim told XXXX that Williamson had shot him because he had tried to get the victim to work at the saw mill. XXXX then went to find someone to take the victim to the hospital.² XXXX said that when a XXXX brought the victim's clothes back from the hospital, XX found a white-handled knife in a pocket.

XXXX, the victim XXXXX, told the FBI that XX, too, saw four white men in the car that drove up to the house and that she knew two of the men, Williamson and Harvey. Like XXXX, XXXX heard three shots. XX further confirmed that the victim said that the men had wanted him to work at the saw mill for several days and he could not. According to XXXX, the victim told her said that he had started back toward the house after one of the men reached for a gun. The men told the victim not to run and then shot him.

¹ Although neither XXXXX nor her XXXX, XXXX, specifically stated that they were the only other people in the house that evening, neither mentioned the presence of anyone else.

² XXXXX did not mention whom XX found to help XX transport the victim. However, as is discussed shortly afterwards, XXXX told the FBI that it was he who carried the victim to the hospital.

XXXX told the FBI that XXXX came to his house at about 10:00 p.m. on the night of the shooting and told him that Williamson had shot XXXXX, after they quarreled over the victim working at the sawmill to pay off his \$10 debt. XXXX stated that he carried the victim to the hospital in Butler but the victim did not say anything to XXXX about the shooting.

In September 1946, the Department of Justice instructed the FBI to close their investigation, having concluded that all the available testimonial evidence indicated that “the shooting arose from a personal difference unrelated to the act of voting.”³

Williamson died on October 29, 1985. Harvey died on March 20, 2003.

Local investigation

The shooting was investigated locally by a Butler, Georgia, Coroner’s Jury. On July 22, 1946, he jury acquitted Williamson, ruling that he acted in self-defense. XXXX, XXXXXXXXX of the Coroner’s Jury, told the FBI all of the evidence indicated that the shooting had occurred following a quarrel over the debt and that Williamson shot the victim in self-defense after the victim pulled out a knife. According to Cook, the only other person in the car with Williamson was Harvey.

Federal Review

In the fall of 2008, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) initiated a review of the circumstances surrounding the victim’s death, pursuant to the Department of Justice’s “Cold Case” initiative and the “Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act of 2007,” which charges the Department of Justice to investigate “violations of criminal civil rights statutes . . . result[ing] in death” that “occurred not later than December 31, 1969.” Additionally, in February and May 2007, respectively, the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP and Lula Montfort, one of the victim’s nieces, requested that the Department conduct an investigation. The FBI retrieved from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) the 1946 FBI file relating to the incident; interviewed one of the victim’s relatives, XXXXXXXXX; contacted the Taylor County Sheriff’s Department and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation; and conducted searches of Georgia death records.

XXXXXXXXX., told the FBI that he was six years old at the time of the shooting. XXXXXXXXX, XXXXXXXXX, told him that the victim had been shot by three white men. XXXXX stated further that when the victim’s family had tried to bury him in a local cemetery, several white men shot at them and they were forced to bury him in secret.

³ Presumably, therefore, the FBI took no further steps to identify and locate the two other men that the victim’s family stated were in the car with Williamson and Harvey.

After searching the relevant databases, the FBI case agent obtained copies of the subjects' death certificates, indicating that Williamson died on October 29, 1985, and Harvey died on March 20, 2003.

Legal Analysis

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