

CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION

Notice to Close File

File No. 175-45-211

Date October 01, 2013

To: Chief, Criminal Section

Re: Prentiss Mathis (Deceased)  
Carl Cavin (Deceased)  
Red Metcalf (Deceased) - Subjects,  
Wilkinson County, Mississippi;  
Clifford "Clifton" Walker (Deceased) - Victim  
CIVIL RIGHTS

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

1. Date of the Incident: February 29, 1964
2. Synopsis of the Facts and Reasons for Closing:

On February 29, 1964, in Woodville, Mississippi, Clifford "Clifton" Walker, a 37 year-old African American man, was killed by a close range shotgun blast to the head in his vehicle near his residence. Walker was killed on his way home from a local drinking establishment after his shift at the International Paper Company in Natchez, Mississippi.

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Paige Fitzgerald  
Deputy Chief

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To: Records Section  
Office of Legal Administration

The above numbered files has been closed as of this date

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Date

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Chief, Criminal Section

FORMERLY CVR-3 FORM CL-3

The last person to see Walker alive was XXXXXXXX, an African American man who worked with Walker and carpooled with him back to Woodville, where Walker dropped him off at approximately 11:40 p.m. on February 28, 1964. Walker's body was found the following afternoon in his vehicle, which had been heavily damaged by shotgun blasts.<sup>1</sup>

The murder of Clifton Walker was first reported by a local man, Prentiss Mathis, a caucasian man who reportedly "found" Walker's body in his vehicle and flagged down a local patrolman, R. W. Palmertree. Palmertree immediately notified Sheriff Charles T. Netterville of Wilkenson County, Mississippi, and an inquiry into the murder began.

After initially processing the crime scene the Sheriff contacted the Mississippi Highway Patrol (MHP) for assistance. MHP investigators traveled to Woodville in February and March of 1964 to talk with witnesses and to review evidence.<sup>2</sup> The last known MHP report from March of 1964 identifies three prime suspects – Carl Cavin, Prentiss Mathis and Red Metcalf – in the murder.<sup>3</sup> As discussed below, there is little available evidence linking Cavin and Metcalf to the murder. Aside from the fact that Mathis found Walker's body, the only other evidence linking Mathis to the murder comes from investigators noting that Mathis was "uncooperative and belligerent" throughout his interview with MHP, and that he had "an extreme dislike for Negros."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) became involved in the matter when, on February 29, 1964, they received a report that Walker had been shot and killed in Mississippi. The FBI monitored the Walker investigation and ultimately closed its case in the winter of 1964.

No arrest was made in the case, and there is no available evidence that could support the prosecution of any suspect.

### **The 1964 MHP Investigation:**

MHP began its investigation into Walker's murder by interviewing Patrolman Palmertree, who was the first law enforcement officer to respond to the crime scene.<sup>4</sup> Palmertree advised that Prentiss Mathis flagged him down at approximately 1 p.m. on February 29, 1964, and told him that there was a "dead man" in a car on Poor House Road, north of Woodville.

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<sup>1</sup> It is unclear whether Walker was killed before midnight on February 28, 1964, or sometime in the early morning of February 29, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> MHP immediately dispatched investigators to Woodville on February 29, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> These three suspects are listed in the final report from MHP dated March 30, 1964. According to Federal Bureau of Investigation documents, MHP lead investigator Rex Armistead verbally informed the FBI that he considered Alton Metcalf, Alvin Metcalf, "Bud" Jeter, and G.B. Sproles as other possible suspects in the case. Armistead's reason for including Alton Metcalf, Alvin Metcalf, and Jeter as potential suspects is not explained in the FBI's file. Each of these individuals is deceased.

<sup>4</sup> At the time of Walker's murder, MHP was also looking into whether Palmertree and other policemen were involved with the Klu Klux Klan. The evidence suggests that Palmertree may have had ties with the Klan, although MHP did not appear to pursue this.

When Palmertree arrived at Walker's vehicle he noticed that Walker's body was slumped to the right of the driver's seat with his feet under the floor board. Palmertree stated that all of the windows of the vehicle were shot out, and that several shots had been "fired into the body," but could not advise how many.<sup>5</sup>

Palmertree further noted that shotgun shells and wadding were found in Walker's vehicle, which remained in "high gear" despite the fact that the engine was off, and that the keys were stuck in the dash board compartment lock with the compartment swinging open. Inside the compartment was a .38 caliber Smith and Wesson four-inch barrel, chrome-plated firearm.<sup>6</sup>

MHP next spoke with Sheriff Netterville who advised that he believed Walker had been dead approximately twelve to fourteen hours when Palmertree arrived on scene.<sup>7</sup> Netterville also advised that Walker's wallet with \$148.00 in cash was recovered from the scene.

At approximately 7:30 p.m. on February 29, 1964, MHP investigators were able to view Walker's body noting that it appeared that a full load of buck shot entered "just under the left ear appearing to be fired at a very close range." Another load appeared to have entered Walker's chin and mouth on the right side tearing away parts of the mouth, chin and neck.

MHP focused its investigation on trying to find a motive for the killings. To that end, MHP interviewed a number of people who worked with or knew Walker in an effort to develop leads. Many of Walker's co-workers advised that although the International Paper Company had recently integrated its facilities, there was no known conflict between Walker and any white workers. Many of Walker's co-workers generally had a favorable opinion of his character and could not provide a motive for the killing.

MHP was particularly interested in interviewing XXXXXXXX, who was the last known person to see Walker alive. XXXXXXXX advised that he was very close to Walker, and that if Walker had trouble with anyone, he would have known about it. XXXXXXXX indicated that on the night of the murder he rode home with Walker to the "car pool," which was approximately one mile north of Poor House Road.<sup>8</sup> From there, XXXXXXXX followed Walker down

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<sup>5</sup> It is not clear from the reports whether Palmertree is referring to Walker's body or the body of the vehicle.

<sup>6</sup> MHP would later "re-check" the vehicle finding several buck shots and a portion of a shotgun slug. MHP investigators also found a love letter written to Walker dated October 1963, from XXXXXXXX (race unknown), who lived in California. She was not interviewed during the course of the investigation.

<sup>7</sup> Per the request of MHP, Sheriff Netterville convened a Coroner's jury to determine the cause of death. The MHP report states that a coroner's report would be furnished by the coroner's jury, but no such report is contained within the MHP materials. Walker's death certificate lists the cause of death as "gun shot wounds."

<sup>8</sup> The "car pool" appears to refer to a place where people would drop off their vehicles before carpooling with one another to work.

Highway 61 until Walker's vehicle turned onto Poor House Road. XXXXXXXX did not know who killed Walker.<sup>9</sup>

As the MHP investigation continued, investigators learned of allegations and rumors that Walker had been talking to white women, and that some white men took offense to this.<sup>10</sup> It appears that MHP attempted to substantiate these rumors, but the remnants of their case file show a disjointed investigation that failed to produce enough evidence to charge anyone in the murder.

MHP seemed particularly interested in learning more about Walker's interactions with white men and women at Nettles Truck Stop on Highway 61, six miles north of Woodville. One former employee, a white 40-year old woman named Geraldine Vines, reported that in September or October of 1963, Walker commented to her "I sho does likes you," (sic) a comment she reported to Mrs. Mildred Nettles, whose husband, Jennings B. Nettles, owned the truck stop. On the advice of Mrs. Nettles, Vines told Walker to "get up and leave and to never darken the door of that place of business [again]."

Vines further reported that she had heard from Mrs. Nettles "a few years back" that Walker had tried to run Mrs. Nettles into a ditch on Poor House Road. MHP contacted Mrs. Nettles who advised that in 1956 or 1957, she was taking one of her employees home when Walker's vehicle almost ran her into a ditch on Poor House Road.<sup>11</sup> After the incident Nettles drove to the truck stop and told her husband about her encounter with Walker. Mr. Nettles and his wife drove back to Poor House Road to look for Walker, but by the time they arrived he was gone. When MHP interviewed Mr. Nettles, he said that Walker was a "good negro" with whom he had no complaints.

While this incident could have provided Mr. Nettles with a "motive" to harm Walker, MHP did not uncover or record any evidence linking him to the murder. It appears that no efforts were made by MHP to account for Mr. Nettles whereabouts on the night of the murder.

MHP further inquired about other alleged "inappropriate" interactions Walker may have had with white women. Sheriff Netterville notified MHP that he had information that XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, was overheard on the telephone trying to get Doris Dover to accompany her on a "negro date."

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<sup>9</sup> MHP investigators noted that they believed that XXXXXXXX knew more about Walker's murder than he was telling them.

<sup>10</sup> The investigation further revealed that Walker had a relationship with at least one other woman to whom he was not married, an African-American woman named XXXXXXXX. Walker and XXXXXXXX together, although XXXXXXXX never told her husband about her relationship with Walker. XXXXXXXX husband was ruled out as a suspect because she told investigators that he was at home with her the night of the murder.

<sup>11</sup> Nettles advised MHP that she knew it was Walker's vehicle because her employee remarked "there goes that damn smart alec negro Walker."

The only apparent follow-up on this lead consisted of brief interviews of a man named David Vines and a woman named XXXXXXXX.<sup>12</sup> D. Vines advised that the day before Walker's murder, Walker showed up at Rita Lee Dover's home where he was invited to come inside. MHP recorded no further information from D. Vines, and his relationship to Rita Dover is not specified in the investigative reports. MHP also interviewed Rita Dover and her father noting that they "failed to find that they were connected in anyway," to the murder of Walker.<sup>13</sup> XXXXXXXX was next interviewed, but MHP found that she too was not connected in any way with the case. Again, the MHP report is void of any description of the relationship between XXXXXXXX and G.B. Sproles, who was flagged earlier in the investigation as someone who Walker may have had contact with.

The information received by MHP relating to Walker's interactions with white women in Wilkenson County was never fully developed and never produced a viable suspect in the murder. The only "suspects" identified in MHP's report were Carl Cavin, Prentiss Mathis and Red Metcalf. The only mention of Cavin and Metcalf in the 32 page report from MHP is a single paragraph that states that Cavin XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX on the night of Walker's murder at approximately 1 a.m. and "appeared to be extremely nervous and drinking fairly heavily." She further reported that Cavin had been in the company of Red Metcalf, at around 10:30 p.m. the evening before the murder and was seen "within one mile of the murder scene."

Despite listing them as suspects, MHP never interviewed Cavin or Metcalf, and there was no other information contained in their report linking Cavin and Metcalf to the murder. MHP closed its investigation without making any arrests.

### **The 1964 FBI Investigation:**

After learning of Walker's death, the FBI opened a case to provide limited assistance to the Sheriff's Office and MHP. The Bureau monitored and tracked the information they received from MHP before ultimately closing the case when no prosecutable suspect was identified.<sup>14</sup>

### **The 2009 FBI Investigation**

In 2009, the FBI initiated a review of the circumstances surrounding Walker'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." The FBI retrieved the original 1964 FBI case file and reviewed the

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<sup>12</sup> A records search for the whereabouts of XXXXXXXX had negative results.

<sup>13</sup> MHP's report does not contain a summary of the information provided by Rita Dover or her father, and no additional investigative work appears to have been done on this lead.

<sup>14</sup> During their limited investigation the FBI learned that Walker was not a member of the Congress of Racial Equality or National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and was not registered, nor had he attempted to vote.

contents. The FBI also conducted research to determine whether any of the “subjects” identified by MHP or other relevant individuals were still alive.

The FBI confirmed the following individuals are deceased:

- Gordon Geter died on March 26, 1982.
- Alton Metcalf died on October 16, 1989.
- Adele G. Vines died on November 10, 1991.
- Prentiss Mathis died on June 15, 1993.
- Green Bannister (G.B.) Sproles died on October 14, 1996.
- Carl Cavin died on November 7, 1998.
- Doris Dover died on March 6, 2002.
- Mildred Nettles died on May 5, 2005.
- Ida B. Sproles died on April 22, 2008.
- Jennings B. Nettles died on February 20, 2009.
- Rita Dover died on June 2, 2009.
- David L. Vines died on September 15, 2012.

Alvin Metcalf and Red Metcalf were confirmed deceased by Jimmy Ray Reese, Chief of Police, Centerville, Mississippi.

On September 27, 2010, the FBI contacted XXXXXXXX, XXXXXXXX Bude, Mississippi, who indicated that he had information regarding the death of Walker. XXXX, who was around XXX years old when Walker was murdered, recalled a day when XXXXX, G.B. Sproles, pulled up to XXXXXXXX with a shotgun. XXXXXXXX advised that he observed Sproles saw off the barrel of the shotgun. XXXXXXXX asked asking him why he was doing that. Sproles responded that he had something to do, and then shooed XXXXXXXX away. A couple of days later XXXXXXXX heard about the murder of Walker and thought that Sproles was probably involved.

XXXXXX later heard talk between the adults that Walker had been killed because he was going with a white woman. He also heard that the gun used to kill Walker was thrown off the Mississippi river bridge in Natchez. XXXX further advised that Sproles was “as sorry as the day was long,” but did not elaborate further on this remark. XXXX stated that he would not be surprised if Sproles was involved in the murder. As noted above, G.B. Sproles died in 1996.

On February 14, 2013, the FBI located XXXXXXXXXXXX and interviewed her about Walker's death. XXXX was referenced in MHP's 1964 report as an individual who had information regarding Walker.<sup>15</sup>

XXXX, an African American woman, worked at XXXXXX in 1964 and knew Walker. XXXX told agents that on the night of Walker's death she was in Louisiana with her boyfriend and did not learn of the shooting until she arrived back in Centerville, Mississippi the following day. Upon returning, she learned that law enforcement was looking for her because they believed she had information about Walker's death. XXXX advised that she left Centerville because she did not want to get involved with the investigation even though she had no knowledge of who killed Walker.

XXXX further noted that she was interviewed in Louisiana shortly after Walker's death by local investigators. She explained to the investigators that she did not know who killed Walker.

### **Contact with Ben Greenberg**

Beginning in the fall of 2010, the FBI was in contact with Ben Greenberg, a freelance journalist who was working on gathering information regarding the death of Walker and other civil rights era victims. From the fall of 2010 through the summer of 2011, Greenberg repeatedly sought to exchange "information" he had regarding Walker's murder for access to un-redacted FBI information. Greenberg claimed to have information that would be valuable to the FBI's investigation. Greenburg was advised that he would not be able to "trade" information for access to un-redacted FBI files.

In July of 2011, Mark J. Kappelhoff, Section Chief, Criminal Section, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice, sent a letter to Greenberg requesting any information that he had related to Walker's death. Greenberg never responded to the request, and in July of 2012, he published an article in the Clarion Ledger detailing his investigative efforts. No additional leads were identified in Greenberg's article.

### **Legal Analysis**

This matter does not constitute a prosecutable violation of the federal criminal civil rights statutes. There are no known surviving eyewitnesses and there is no available physical evidence to review. As such, there is no reasonable possibility that further investigation will lead to a prosecutable case.

As noted above, MHP appeared to have focused its investigative on identifying suspects with a motive to kill Walker. Without any eyewitnesses to the murder, MHP was left with few leads, and never fully developed any evidence on suspects who may have had a motive to harm

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<sup>15</sup> MHP specifically noted that they had information that XXXX stated to XXXXXXXXXXXX, "I know too much about this mess and I aint gonna get involved."

Walker. In 1964, the FBI had minimal involvement in the investigation. No suspects were developed by the FBI.

The FBI in 2010 was successful in tracking down the remaining state and federal files on the Walker murder. After their review, and after determining that many of the individuals mentioned in the 1964 reports, including all the individuals alleged to have had any motive to harm Walker, are now deceased, it became apparent that continued investigation would not lead to a viable prosecution of a living suspect.

Accordingly, this matter lacks prosecutive merit and should be closed. AUSA Glenda Haynes of the Southern District of Mississippi concurs in this recommendation.