

CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION

Notice to Close File

File No. 144-41-3564

Date May 2, 2010

To: Chief, Criminal Section

Re: Unknown Subject(s)
Hattiesburg, Mississippi;
Selma K. Trigg (Deceased) - Victim
CIVIL RIGHTS

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

Case Synopsis

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) initiated an investigation into this matter based on a referral from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in the form of a press release that listed the January 23, 1965, death by burning of "Saleam K. Triggs." The press release referenced the NAACP's 1965 annual report that stated that "Mrs. Saleam K. Triggs," a resident of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, had "mysteriously burned to death" on January 23 of that year.

In April 2009, an FBI case agent determined that the person who died in January 1965 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, was 76-year-old Selma Kelly Trigg and that her actual date of death was January 21, 1965.

Cristina Gamondi, Attorney

To: Records Section
Office of Legal Administration

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

5/2/10

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

The FBI then obtained Ms. Trigg's death certificate that listed her cause of death as "burns and suffocation" when she was "trapped in bedroom of home which burned." The manner of death was listed as accidental. The FBI subsequently obtained January 22 and 23, 1965 *Hattiesburg American* newspaper articles. According to one article, Ms. Trigg "sustained fatal burns when a fire of undetermined origin trapped her in her bedroom." Although Ms. Trigg was carried out through a window and transported to a hospital, she was pronounced dead on arrival there. The second article was an obituary and listed several of Ms. Trigg's relatives, including XXXXXXX then residing in Lybia. The FBI contacted XXXXX one of Ms. Trigg's XXXXXX who had returned to Hattiesburg and who stated that XXX was not aware of any foul play involved in Ms. Trigg's death.

Additional federal investigation revealed no evidence that Ms. Trigg's death was other than accidental.

2008 Federal Review:

In the fall of 2008, the 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." The FBI contacted numerous Mississippi agency officials; sent letters to the SPLC and the NAACP; and conducted searches of the internet, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), and the records of the SPLC and the University of Southern Mississippi library.

As mentioned above, the FBI obtained Ms. Trigg's death certificate from the Mississippi Bureau of Vital Statistics that indicated that she died as a result of "burns and suffocation" when she was "trapped in bedroom of home which burned" on January 21, 1965 in Hattiesburg.

Having found Ms. Trigg's grave in the Riverside Cemetery in Hattiesburg, the FBI contacted Linda Owens, the widow of Johnny Owens, who owned the cemetery prior to the city but Ms. Owens had no records or information concerning Ms. Trigg's death.

Through various searches, the FBI found a February 2009, *Hattiesburg American* article titled "Civil rights deaths are not forgotten," that stated that "One involved Saleam Triggs, whose body was found burned to death in January 1965. Over the years the Triggs slaying has gotten little attention." Similarly an 2005 online article by XXXXXX titled "Murders Around Mississippi," merely reproduced the SPLC's Civil Rights Memorial that listed "Saleam K. Triggs, Forrest, January 25, 1965."

The FBI contacted the Hattiesburg Police Department, the Forrest County Sheriff's Office, the Forrest/Perry County District Attorney's Office, the Mississippi Attorney General's Office

(MAGO), and the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation (part of the Mississippi Department of Public Safety), but none of those agencies had any records relevant to the death of Ms. Trigg.

Legal Analysis

This matter does not constitute a prosecutable violation of the federal criminal civil rights statutes. Despite undertaking numerous investigative steps, the FBI did not locate any information or evidence indicating that Ms. Trigg's death was other than accidental. Accordingly, this matter lacks prosecutive merit and should be closed. For the same reason, the matter will not be forwarded to the state for prosecutive review. AUSA Glenda Haynes, Southern District of Mississippi, concurs in this recommendation.