

Willie Edwards Jr.

“Klansmen Abduct and Murder Black Man in Montgomery, Alabama”

“In the pre-dawn hours of January 23, 1957, a black man named Willie Edwards, Jr. was declared missing when the truck he was employed to drive was found abandoned along the road near Montgomery, Alabama. It was later discovered that four Klansmen had forced Mr. Edwards, a resident of Montgomery, to jump to his death from the nearby Tyler Goodwin Bridge. Mr. Edwards was driving back from his first assignment as a deliveryman for a Winn-Dixie grocery store when he stopped for a soft drink. As he read his log book under the console light in his truck, the four armed white men approached the vehicle, forced Mr. Edwards to exit the truck at gunpoint, and ordered him to get into their car.

Accusing Mr. Edwards of “offending a white woman,” the men proceeded to shove and slap him as they drove. One man pointed his gun at Mr. Edwards and threatened to castrate him. Sobbing and begging the men not to harm him, Mr. Edwards repeatedly denied having said anything to any white woman. Eventually the men reached the bridge and ordered Mr. Edwards out of the car. Ordered to “hit the water” or be shot, Mr. Edwards climbed the railing of the bridge and fell 125 feet to his death.

Mr. Edwards’s truck was soon found in the store parking lot, with the console light still on, but authorities had no answers about what had happened to him. Mr. Edwards’s wife Sarah, just 23 years old and pregnant, was left to raise their two young daughters. She initially

hoped her husband had taken an unannounced trip to California, but those hopes were dashed in April 1957 when two fishermen discovered his decomposed body.

Nearly twenty years later, in 1976, Attorney General Bill Baxley prosecuted three known Klansmen for Mr. Edwards's murder, after a fourth man confessed in exchange for immunity. Those indictments were later quashed and the FBI ultimately informed the AG that one of the men charged, Henry Alexander, was a federal informant. Mr. Alexander had been indicted for other acts of racial violence, including bombings of four churches and two homes, and the assault of a black woman riding on a bus. Mr. Alexander was never prosecuted for any of those offenses, and the charges for Mr. Edwards's murder were dropped.

In 1993, Mr. Alexander reportedly confessed to his wife on his deathbed that he and three other Klansmen had indeed murdered Mr. Edwards. Alexander's wife later reported he told her, "That man never hurt anybody. I was just running my mouth. I caused it."

In 1997, the Alabama Department of Vital Statistics changed Mr. Edwards's cause of death from "unknown" to "homicide," but a 1999 Montgomery County grand jury declined to indict any of the surviving suspects for the murder of Willie Edwards Jr."

Source: Equal Justice Initiative

Link:

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