



Official State Historical Center of the Texas  
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the  
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

Managing Editors

**Robert Nieman** 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

**Byron A. Johnson** 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

**Byron A. Johnson** 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

**Pam S. Baird**



Funded in part by grants from  
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

Copyright 2017, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX. All rights reserved. Non-profit personal and educational use only; commercial reprinting, redistribution, reposting or charge-for-access is prohibited. For further information contact: Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco TX 76702-2570.



**Lt. Hank Whitman, Texas Ranger**

***The story behind the cover page***

*It is with great pride that the Dispatch presents one of the most moving moments in the long history of the Texas Rangers. Our selection for the cover for this issue attests to this.*

*The Dispatch wants to express our gratitude to Ranger sergeants Ronny Griffith, Jeff Robertson, and Hank Whitman for a remarkable job we in Texas all too often take for granted. Since this case was brought to a successful conclusion, Sergeants Robertson and Whitman have promoted to lieutenant. We especially want to thank Lieutenant Whitman for allowing us to publish his brief synopsis of this remarkable case solved by the cold case unit.*

On April 23, 1996, Leah Jane Sherwood was murdered in her home near Hallsville, Texas, and her boyfriend was wounded. The crime was initially investigated by the Harrison County Sheriff's Department and aggressively pursued by Investigator Lieutenant Clay Medrano. Ranger Ronny Griffith (Longview) joined in the investigation and assisted Medrano with numerous interviews regarding the suspicious case. Sadly, Lieutenant Medrano lost his life in the line of duty, and the case went cold for over a decade.

During the initial investigation, the sole witness and surviving victim had been Sherwood's boyfriend, George Allen Williams. Williams had advised investigators that he was spending the night with Ms. Sherwood when two unknown male subjects knocked on the front door at approximately 4:30 a.m. and requested to use the telephone. When he opened the door, the two men immediately attacked him, rendering him unconscious with a blow to the head and a stab wound to his abdomen. When Williams regained consciousness, he discovered Ms. Sherwood dead in the master bedroom.

From the onset, Lieutenant Medrano was suspicious of Williams's story, which could not be corroborated by the evidence at the scene. After Medrano's death, the case reached



**Jeff Robertson**



**Hank Whitman**



**Ronny Griffith**

**Texas Rangers in charge of the Leah Sherwood case.**

a stalemate until the victim's parents, Dale and Delana Sherwood, contacted Ranger Griffith for assistance. Griffith, in turn, consulted with the Harrison County Sheriff's Department and the Texas Ranger Unsolved Crimes Investigation Team in San Antonio. The case was forwarded to the team, and I was subsequently assigned to the case in October 2005. After reviewing the file, Rangers Griffith and fellow Unsolved Crimes Ranger Jeff Robertson joined me in an aggressive investigation.

We requested the exhumation of Ms. Sherwood for the purposes of conducting a second autopsy. In addition, we once again interviewed numerous witnesses and reconstructed the original crime scene. The second autopsy revealed additional evidence that was not uncovered during the previous examination: Ms. Sherwood had endured a brutal murder in which she was not only shot, but strangled as well.

As the investigation culminated, it became apparent that Williams's account of the alleged break-in was bogus. It was revealed that, two weeks prior to Sherwood's death, Williams had convinced her to place him as sole beneficiary to her life insurance policy. Williams stood to gain over \$200,000 plus other benefits. Moreover, Sherwood's employment records indicated that Williams had agreed to be considered her "common-law" husband in order to gain the benefits. The case was taken before Harrison County Criminal District Attorney Joe Black. He gave a three-hour presentation of the case to a grand jury, which then returned a true-bill indictment against George Allen Williams.

In October 2007, Williams was tried in Marshall for the offense of capital murder. Prior to the trial, District Attorney Black had made the decision that he would not seek the death penalty in anticipation of Williams agreeing to a plea bargain of twenty years in prison. However, Williams had quickly dismissed the offer, stating, "I won't even plea out to ten years probation if it was offered." After the two-week trial, Williams was found guilty of capital murder and was sentenced to life in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Institutional Division. He would not be eligible for parole for forty years.

Contents and design of the Texas Ranger *Dispatch*<sup>TM</sup> are copyrighted by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum and other named copyright holders. Permission is granted to print copies or excerpts for personal use and educational coursework. Commercial use or redistribution requires written permission from the Office of the Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco, TX 76702.



Within a week of his sentencing, Williams requested, through his attorney, to speak with District Attorney Investigator Hall Reavis and me. During the arraigned interview, Williams confessed that he had in fact participated in the death of his former common-law wife, Leah Jane Sherwood. Moreover, he admitted that the wounds he sustained were self-inflicted, something that investigators had always suspected.



Early on in the investigation, I had noticed that the only marking at Ms. Sherwood's gravesite was the traditional aluminum placard provided by the funeral home. When I asked why there was still no headstone on her daughter's grave after almost ten years, Ms. Sherwood's mother emotionally told me,

Until we find justice for Janie, we're not going to do it. If and when this case reaches trial, and no matter what the outcome (win, lose, or draw), then and only then will we place a headstone on her grave. We plan on ordering her a very special one.

After the Williams verdict and subsequent sentencing, I hugged Ms. Sherwood's mother and said, "I think it's time to buy that baby girl her beautiful headstone." She quickly agreed.



On April 28, 2008, at the request of the Sherwood family, I joined Rangers Griffith and Robertson in Hallsville for the unveiling of Leah Jane Sherwood's headstone. Unknown to the Texas Rangers, there was a second memorial stone that had been placed at the foot of the grave by her parents and extended family. On it was inscribed a tribute to all those involved in the successful prosecution of George Allen Williams.



△ Leah's footstone is a special tribute to all involved in the successful resolution of her murder.

△ Leah loved horses, and her tombstone depicts her riding into the sunset, finally able to rest in peace.