

HAMILTON COUNTY COLD CASE UNIT
DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE
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CHATTANOOGA, TN 37402



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Chattanooga Man Given Three Life Sentences in Cold Case Murders

This morning, Christopher Jeffre Johnson (dob 8/30/1964) entered guilty pleas for killing Sean and Donny Goetcheus in 1997 and Missy Ward in 2004. Hamilton County Criminal Court Judge Don Poole accepted Johnson's pleas to three counts of First Degree Murder and sentenced him to three separate life sentences, each without the possibility of parole.

Background:

Melissa Michelle "Missy" Ward was last seen the night of October 29, 2004, getting into a pickup truck outside a Bi-Lo grocery store on East 23rd Street. Two months later, the 33-year old's decomposing body was found on Cash Canyon Road in Lookout Valley.

In 2011, Christopher Jeffre Johnson was charged with the kidnapping and rapes of two teenage girls. During interviews with Hamilton County detectives, Johnson repeatedly admitted to killing Ward the night she disappeared. Johnson said he and Ward engaged in drug use and sexual intercourse, which ended with Johnson strangling Ward. Detectives took Johnson to the area where Ward's body was recovered. Johnson pointed out locations where he left Ward and her belongings, which perfectly matched where Ward and her belongings had been found seven years earlier.

In 2014, Johnson began serving a 50-year prison sentence for the kidnapping and rapes committed in 2011.

The following year, in 2015, the DA's Cold Case Unit began a review of the Ward case and in January 2016 a Hamilton County Grand Jury indicted Johnson on one count of First Degree Murder.

As CCU investigators interviewed Johnson regarding the Ward case, they also mentioned the unsolved double murder of Sean and Donny Goetcheus. Johnson is a career offender who spent years bragging to other inmates about killing 25-year old Sean and 19-year old Donny Goetcheus. The brothers were found dead inside their Brainerd home the evening of January 9, 1997. Both had been shot multiple times at close range.

The CCU investigators, one assigned from the Chattanooga Police Department and one from the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, became convinced Johnson killed the

Goetcheus brothers. During a series of conversations with CCU Supervisor Mike Mathis in 2016, Johnson repeatedly confessed to the murders and forensics experts confirm Johnson's account of events is consistent with the crime scene. He has provided details only the killer would know.

Johnson claims he went to the Goetcheus brothers' house to buy a videotape of illegal activity involving Rick Davis of Rick Davis' Gold and Diamonds. Once there, Johnson said he became angry and shot Sean. Johnson then discovered Donny was also in the house and killed him to avoid leaving a witness.

In October 2016, a Hamilton County Grand Jury indicted Johnson on two counts of First Degree Murder for the deaths of Sean and Donny Goetcheus.

In meetings with CCU members and District Attorney General Neal Pinkston, Johnson repeatedly expressed his desire to plead guilty as charged to the murders of Missy Ward and Sean and Donny Goetcheus in order to spare his family and his victims' families the pain of enduring lengthy trials.

***Note:** David and Julenne Goetcheus did want us to extend their thanks to the media for continuing to tell their sons' story for the last twenty years. They are grateful for the support they've received from the media – and the public – which played a large role in solving the murders.

However, the families of both the Goetcheus brothers and Missy Ward have expressed to us that at this time they **do not** want to talk to the media and have asked that they not be contacted for comment or interviews. Once they've had time to process their emotions, they may be interested in talking publicly. When/If that time comes, details will be arranged by our office.

DA's Cold Case Unit

District Attorney General Neal Pinkston created the Cold Case Unit upon taking office in September 2014 to review the 200 unsolved homicides and missing persons cases in Hamilton County. The Unit is led by retired CPD Captain Mike Mathis. Chattanooga Police Chief Fred Fletcher and Hamilton County Sheriff Jim Hammond each provide an investigator to the unit. **If you have information about any cold case, please contact us using the Cold Case Hotline at 423-209-7470 or by email at coldcases@hctnda.org.**