

Detective in Walsh case eyed book deal

He helped gather weak confession

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Another reason to doubt Otis Elwood Toole's confession in the murder of Adam Walsh:

J.W. Terry, the Jacksonville detective who helped cull the error-filled confession in 1983, was trying to cut a book deal with Toole at the same time, Terry's former boss said Monday.

"Here's a police officer entering into an agreement that somehow requires collusion of a serial killer," said John Nelson, then-Jacksonville undersheriff.

"It was for the worst of reasons. It was for financial gain," said Nelson, now the police chief in Orange Park. "I just didn't want him around the case any more after I found out about that. You are supposed to be arm's length to people."

Still, Nelson recalled, Terry took a different view of a book venture with the man he hoped to finger for the crime. "He didn't see anything wrong with that."

Records show Terry was eager to seal Toole's confession, despite huge errors in the suspect's story and the lack of any bona fide physical evidence to link him to the crime. Terry was involved because Toole is from Jacksonville, and first started talking about Adam Walsh while in the Duval County Jail.

The errors in Toole's first confession, Oct. 24, 1983, included:

- He said his partner in crime, Henry Lee Lucas, was with him when he abducted Adam July 27, 1981, from a Sears store in Hollywood, and that it was Lucas who beheaded the child. Lucas was in a Maryland jail cell that day and couldn't have been there.

- Toole couldn't describe Adam, getting his hair color and clothing entirely wrong.

- Toole said he buried Adam's remains near Mile Marker 126 on Florida's Turnpike, but an exhaustive search revealed no grave.

Still, Det. Terry — who was present while two Hollywood detectives questioned Toole that day and others — pressed on, records show.

On Oct. 26, 1983, Toole recanted: "No, I didn't kill Adam

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Detective sought book deal, ex-boss says

WALSH, FROM 1B

Walsh." Toole was then left alone with Terry for 12 minutes, and his story changed again, with Toole now admitting he "did kill Adam Walsh."

A few days later, on Nov. 1, 1983, came this exchange:

Terry: "Ottis, were you lying today? Are you sure you didn't kill Adam Walsh? Now come on now, let's don't do this way. Look at me. Look at me. Ottis . . ."

Toole, crying: "My mind ain't gonna take much more of this . . ."

Terry: "Just tell me the truth, that's all I want to know."

Toole: "No, I didn't kill Adam

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JOHN NELSON, was J.W. Terry's boss at the time

Walsh."

Terry: "Are you sure or you're not sure?"

Toole: "I'm sure I didn't."

Terry: "How are you sure? What makes you sure you didn't kill Adam Walsh?"

Toole: "Because if I was really sure I could come up with his body."

Toole had boasted of being

involved in 65 murders at the time of his Adam Walsh confession. Today, he's serving five life sentences for five murders at Union Correctional Institution in Raiford.

Though he has never been charged as Adam's killer, Toole remains a suspect even today, according to Hollywood police.

Still, Hollywood cold-case Det.

Mark Smith made note of the questions swirling around Terry's involvement: "One of the beliefs by the original investigators was that Toole was confessing for publicity fueled by specific facts furnished by an overzealous Jacksonville detective."

Terry, retired from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and now working at the Duval County Courthouse, did not return phone calls over the past week.

Once, Terry went on record with his conclusion:

"In my own opinion, I firmly believe Toole is the murderer of Adam Walsh."