

How a 'Goon Squad' of Deputies Got Away With Years of Brutality

They barged into homes in the middle of the night, then held people down while they beat and choked them, witnesses said. For years, signs of the violence went ignored.

By Brian Howey and Nate Rosenfield Photographs by Rory Doyle for The New York Times

Brian Howey and Nate Rosenfield investigated dozens of arrests made by Rankin County deputies to report this article, which is part of a series by The Times's Local Investigations Fellowship examining the power of sheriffs' offices in Mississippi.

Nov. 30, 2023

For nearly two decades, a loose band of sheriff's deputies roamed impoverished neighborhoods across a central Mississippi county, meting out their own version of justice.

Narcotics detectives and patrol officers, some who called themselves the Goon Squad, barged into homes in the middle of the night, accusing people inside of dealing drugs. Then they handcuffed or held them at gunpoint and tortured them into confessing or providing information, according to dozens of people who say they endured or witnessed the assaults.

They described violence that sometimes went on for hours and seemed intended to strike terror into the deputies' targets.

In the pursuit of drug arrests, deputies of the Rankin County Sheriff's Department shocked Robert Jones with a Taser in 2018 while he lay submerged in a flooded ditch, then rammed a stick down his throat until he vomited blood, he said.

During a raid the same year, deputies choked Mitchell Hobson with a lamp cord and waterboarded him to simulate drowning, he said, then beat him until the walls were splattered with his blood. That raid took place at the home of Rick Loveday, a sheriff's deputy in a neighboring county, who said he was dragged half-naked from his bed at gunpoint, before deputies jabbed a flashlight threateningly at his buttocks and then pummeled him relentlessly.

The string of violence might have continued unchecked if not for one near-fatal raid in January.

According to a Justice Department investigation, deputies broke into the home of two Black men, Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker, shocked them with Tasers and threatened to rape them. Deputy Hunter Elward shoved the barrel of a gun into Mr. Jenkins's mouth, not realizing a bullet was in the chamber, and pulled the trigger. Mr. Jenkins was grievously injured, the incident was thrust into the national spotlight, and in August five deputies and a police officer pleaded guilty to criminal charges.



Top row: former Rankin County sheriff's deputies Hunter Elward, Christian Dedmon and Brett McAlpin; bottom row: former deputies Jeffrey Middleton and Daniel Opdyke, and former Richland police officer Joshua Hartfield. All pleaded guilty this year to federal and state charges. Rogelio V. Solis/Associated Press

Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey said in a press conference this summer that he was stunned to learn of the “horrendous crimes” committed by his deputies. “Never in my life did I think it would happen in this department.”

But an investigation by The New York Times and the Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting at Mississippi Today reveals a history of blatant and brutal incidents stretching back to at least 2004.

Reporters examined hundreds of pages of court records and sheriff’s office reports and interviewed more than 50 people who say they witnessed or experienced torture at the hands of the Rankin County Sheriff’s Department. What emerged was a pattern of violence that was neither confined to a small group of deputies nor hidden from department leaders.

Many of those who said they experienced violence filed lawsuits or formal complaints, detailing their encounters with the department. A few said they had contacted Sheriff Bailey directly, only to be ignored.

The Times and Mississippi Today identified 20 deputies who were present at one or more of the incidents — many assigned to narcotics or the night patrol — but also several high-ranking officials: a former undersheriff, former detectives and a former deputy who is now a local police chief.



A federal investigation found that deputies broke into the home of Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker, shocked them with Tasers, threatened to rape them and shot Mr. Jenkins, severely wounding him. Rogelio V. Solis/Associated Press

Brett McAlpin, former chief investigator for the department, was involved in at least 13 of the arrests and was repeatedly described by witnesses as leading the raids. He was named in at least four lawsuits and six complaints going back to 2004. Even so, Sheriff Bailey named him investigator of the year in 2013. This year, he pleaded guilty to criminal charges for his role in the January raid.

Taken together, the reporting shows how Rankin deputies were allowed to operate with impunity, while racking up arrests for relatively minor drug infractions and leaving entire neighborhoods in fear of violent raids.

Among the dozens of allegations reviewed, The Times and Mississippi Today were able to corroborate 17 incidents involving 22 victims based on witness interviews, medical records, photographs of injuries and other documents.

In nearly half the cases, Taser logs obtained from the department through a public records request helped corroborate the allegations. Electronically recorded dates and times of Taser triggers lined up with witness accounts and suggested that deputies repeatedly shocked people for longer than is considered safe.

The Taser logs also suggest that the scope of the violence may extend much farther.



Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey won re-election this fall, running unopposed, despite scrutiny on his office as the Justice Department investigated his deputies. Rogelio V. Solis/Associated Press

At least 32 times over the past decade, Rankin deputies fired their Tasers more than five times in under an hour, activating them for at least 30 seconds in total — double the recommended limit. Experts in Taser use who reviewed the logs called these incidents highly suspicious.

"This is not typical Taser use," said Seth Stoughton, faculty director of the Excellence in Policing & Public Safety program at the University of South Carolina. "There's just no justification for that."

It is impossible to tell from the logs alone whether a series of shocks were aimed at one target, and whether they all made contact. Incident reports by the deputies offer little clarity, because in nearly every case they failed to mention that a Taser was used at all.

Over the past year, The Times and Mississippi Today have investigated how powerful sheriffs in rural Mississippi have dodged accountability in the face of misconduct allegations. The reporting exposed numerous sexual abuse accusations against two sheriffs in counties near Rankin, along with evidence that Sheriff Bailey obtained subpoenas to surveil his girlfriend's phone calls.

Sheriff Bailey has faced increased scrutiny since the Justice Department began to investigate his deputies' conduct this year, and the NAACP and local activist groups have called for his resignation. After 12 years as sheriff, he was re-elected in November when he ran unopposed.

The deputies accused of being involved in violent arrests declined to comment or did not respond to repeated requests for interviews.

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It is not always clear what actions individual deputies took during the incidents. Witnesses often did not know their names and many of the deputies did not wear uniforms or name tags during the raids.

Jason Dare, a lawyer for the department, declined to comment on The Times and Mississippi Today's findings.

During a brief phone interview on Sunday, Sheriff Bailey repeatedly declined to comment. Told that several high-ranking deputies were involved in arrests that had sparked accusations of brutal treatment, he said, "I have 240 employees, there's no way I can be with them each and every day."

On Tuesday, the department announced that it had updated its internal policies and that deputies would receive training on federal civil rights laws.

A statement from the department that referred to the January assault without acknowledging a broader pattern said, "Even though the prior actions were abnormal and extreme, we will make every effort to ensure that they do not occur in the future." •



In the Robinhood neighborhood of Brandon, the county seat, residents said home raids became common.

New Problems, Old Tactics

For most of its history, Rankin County was a rural area dominated by farmland and forests.

That began to change when white flight reached the capital city of Jackson in the 1960s and Rankin's fields gave way to subdivisions and strip malls.

But tucked among the stately homes and manicured lawns, some of the county's most impoverished residents live in run-down trailers and makeshift shacks, a few without running water or electricity.

These neighborhoods were hit hard in the early 2000s as meth — cheap, highly addictive and easy to manufacture in isolated places — spread across rural America like wildfire.

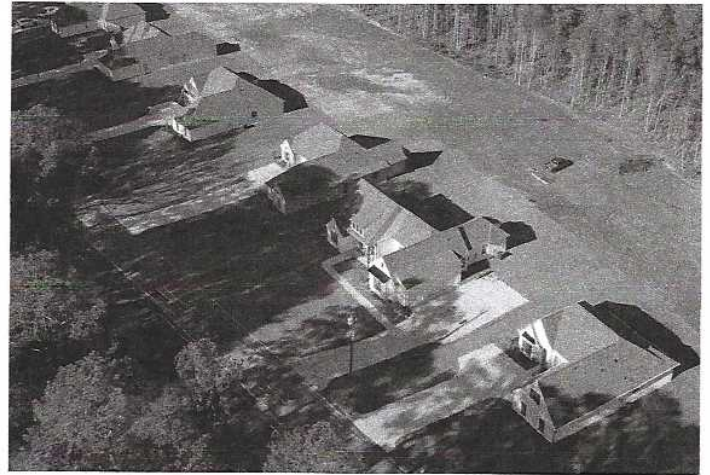
Local sheriffs, even in small departments, set up special narcotics units and joined state and federal task forces in the War on Drugs. The Rankin County Sheriff's Department responded by targeting low-income communities and policing them relentlessly.

In an area called Robinhood, residents said home raids became routine and it felt as if they couldn't go to the corner store without being stopped and searched.

"Once they start picking on you," said a former resident, Matasha Harris, "they will not leave you alone."



A home in the Robinhood area of Rankin County.



New homes border low-income housing in Robinhood.

Though Rankin deputies appear to have targeted people based on suspected drug use, not race — most of their accusers were white — their tactics could have been pulled from the Jim Crow era, when sheriffs and their deputies harassed and beat Black Southerners and civil rights activists.

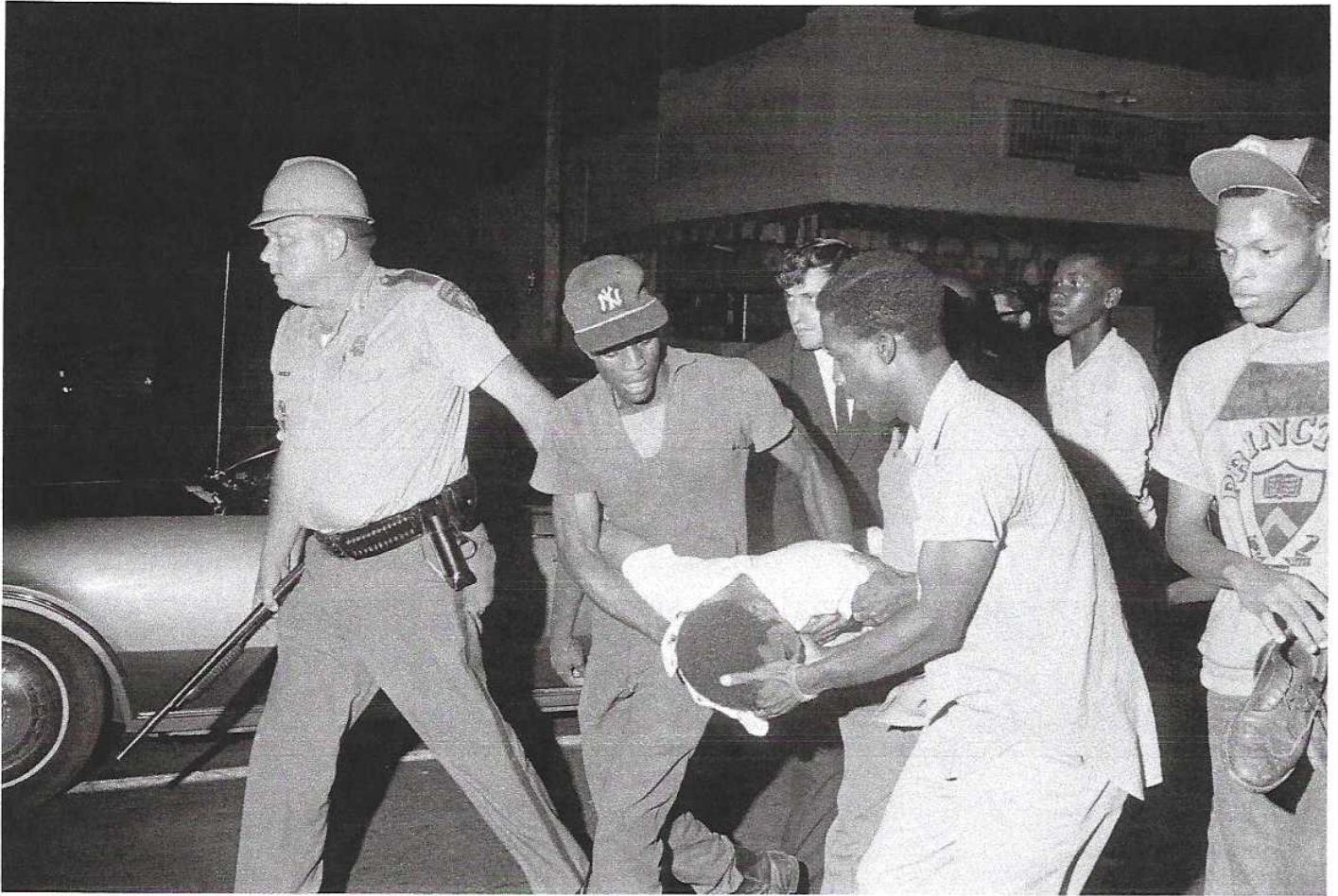
During that period, deputies coerced false confessions, sometimes using cattle prods or “the water cure”: pouring water into suspects’ nostrils until they complied.

Priscilla Perkins, co-president of the John & Vera Mae Perkins Foundation, a nonprofit based in Jackson, Miss., that promotes racial reconciliation, said the Goon Squad’s acts reminded her of the reign of terror against civil rights activists that often involved law enforcement officers.

“It’s the hidden shame of Mississippi and America,” she said. “People are still trying to cover it up.”

Among the officers of that era accused of beating Black residents was Lloyd Jones, a state trooper who would become sheriff in nearby Simpson County.

A Justice Department investigation long after his death found that he had bragged to a colleague about fatally shooting a Black man, Benjamin Brown, in the back during a 1967 standoff between police officers and civil rights protesters.



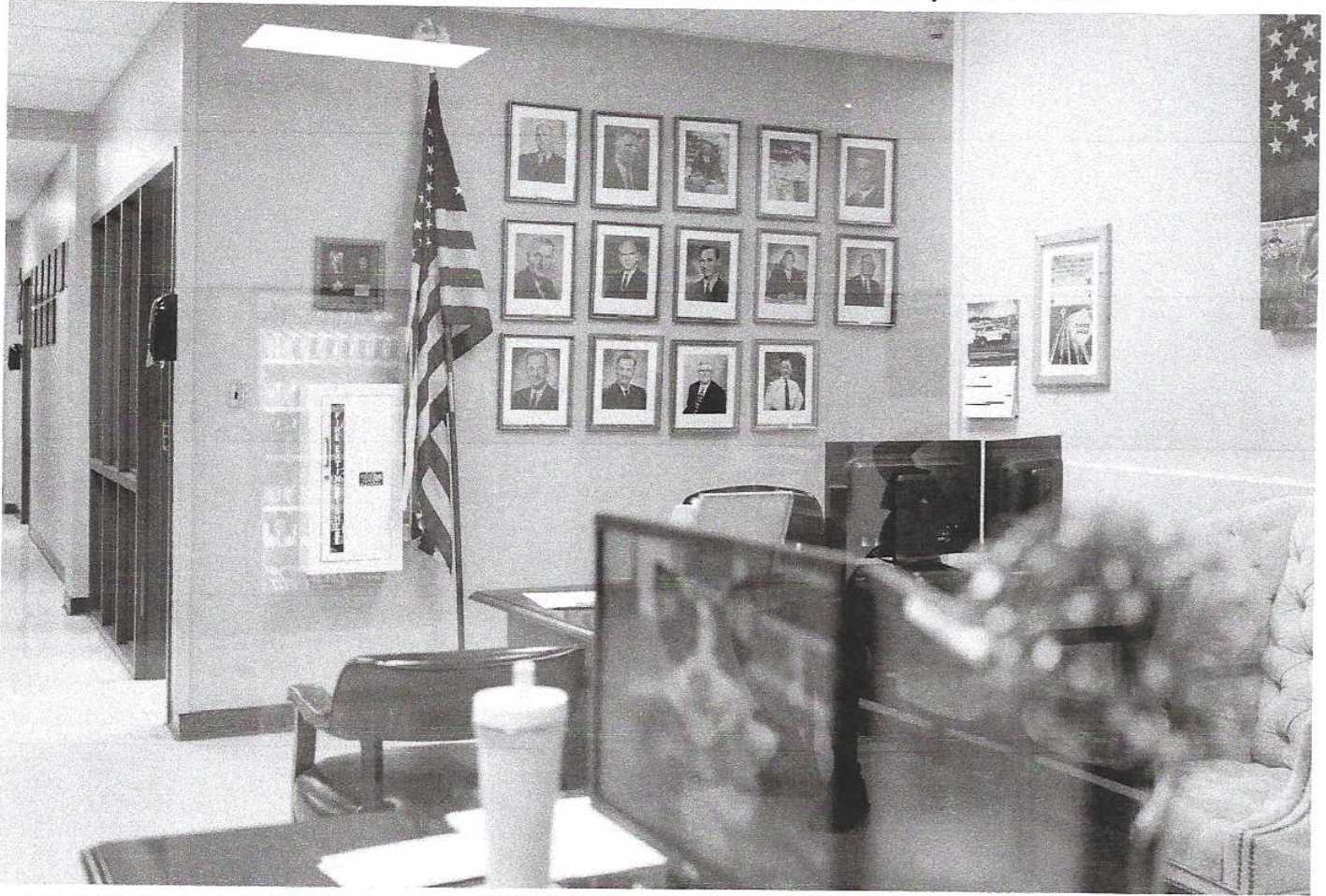
Benjamin Brown being carried away after he was shot by the police in Jackson, Miss. in May 1967. At left, Lloyd Jones, a state trooper who would later be implicated in the shooting, led the group down a street. Bettmann, via Getty Images

In 1970, Mr. Jones participated in the beating of the Rev. John Perkins in the Rankin County jail, which culminated with a deputy jabbing a fork up his nose, according to the pastor and witnesses who testified against the officers.

As sheriff, he gave Bryan Bailey his first job in law enforcement.

“He is on my life’s wall of gratitude and had a huge impact on who I am,” Sheriff Bailey wrote on Facebook in 2015. “Not a day goes by that I don’t think about him or recall something that he taught me.”

Sheriff Bailey called him a mentor. But years before, Simpson County residents had begun calling him something else: “Goon” Jones.



Portraits of Rankin County sheriffs over time are displayed inside the department. Under the current sheriff, deputies were allowed to operate with impunity for years.

Scope of Abuse

It's unclear when Rankin County deputies adopted their nickname, but last year, they ordered commemorative coins emblazoned with cartoonish gangsters and the words "Lt. Middleton's Goon Squad." Lt. Jeffrey Middleton was the squad's supervisor. He is among the five deputies who pleaded guilty to criminal charges stemming from the January raid on Mr. Parker and Mr. Jenkins.

A Justice Department investigation this year found that Rankin County deputies chose the name Goon Squad "because of their willingness to use excessive force and not report it."

The investigation found that Mr. McAlpin, along with a narcotics detective, Christian Dedmon, and Goon Squad members burst into Mr. Parker's home, tortured and humiliated the men while demanding to know where drugs were, and then disposed of the evidence.

Across the 17 cases for which reporters found corroborating witnesses and evidence, accusers described similar tactics by deputies, almost always over small drug busts.

Deputies held people down while punching and kicking them or shocked them repeatedly with Tasers. They shoved gun barrels into people's mouths. Three people said deputies had waterboarded them until they thought they would suffocate. Five said deputies had told them to move out of the county.

Many of the targets teetered on the edge of homelessness and were caught with a few grams of meth or with only drug paraphernalia — a glass pipe or used syringe. Several people sat in jail for days or weeks only to have their charges dropped.



A commemorative coin that Goon Squad members carried.



One side shows gangsters and name-checks a supervisor.

The largest bust among the incidents examined was for a \$420 heroin sale.

In 2018, a confidential informant arranged an \$80 meth deal at Jerry Manning's home. Mr. Manning, who denies being part of the sale, said he heard deputies burst into his trailer and scream his name.

When he went to investigate, deputies pinned him to the floor. They said they wanted to test their new Tasers on him to see which hurt more, he said.

"They got me in my private parts, they got me in my head," Mr. Manning said. "They kept tasing and tasing and tasing."

Taser logs indicate that two of the nine deputies involved that night, James Rayborn and Cody Grogan, together triggered their Tasers at least 15 times during the two-and-a-half-hour raid.

As the deputies ransacked his home looking for drugs, Mr. Manning said, they wrapped a pair of jeans around his head and punched him repeatedly in the face before using a blowtorch to melt a metal nutcracker handle onto his bare leg as he screamed. On Mr. McAlpin's orders, Mr. Manning said, a deputy then forced him to sit, pulled a belt around his neck and yanked it upward, choking him until he believed he would suffocate.



Mr. McAlpin, whom the sheriff named investigator of the year in 2013, was identified as a leader of Goon Squad raids. Vickie D. King/Mississippi Today

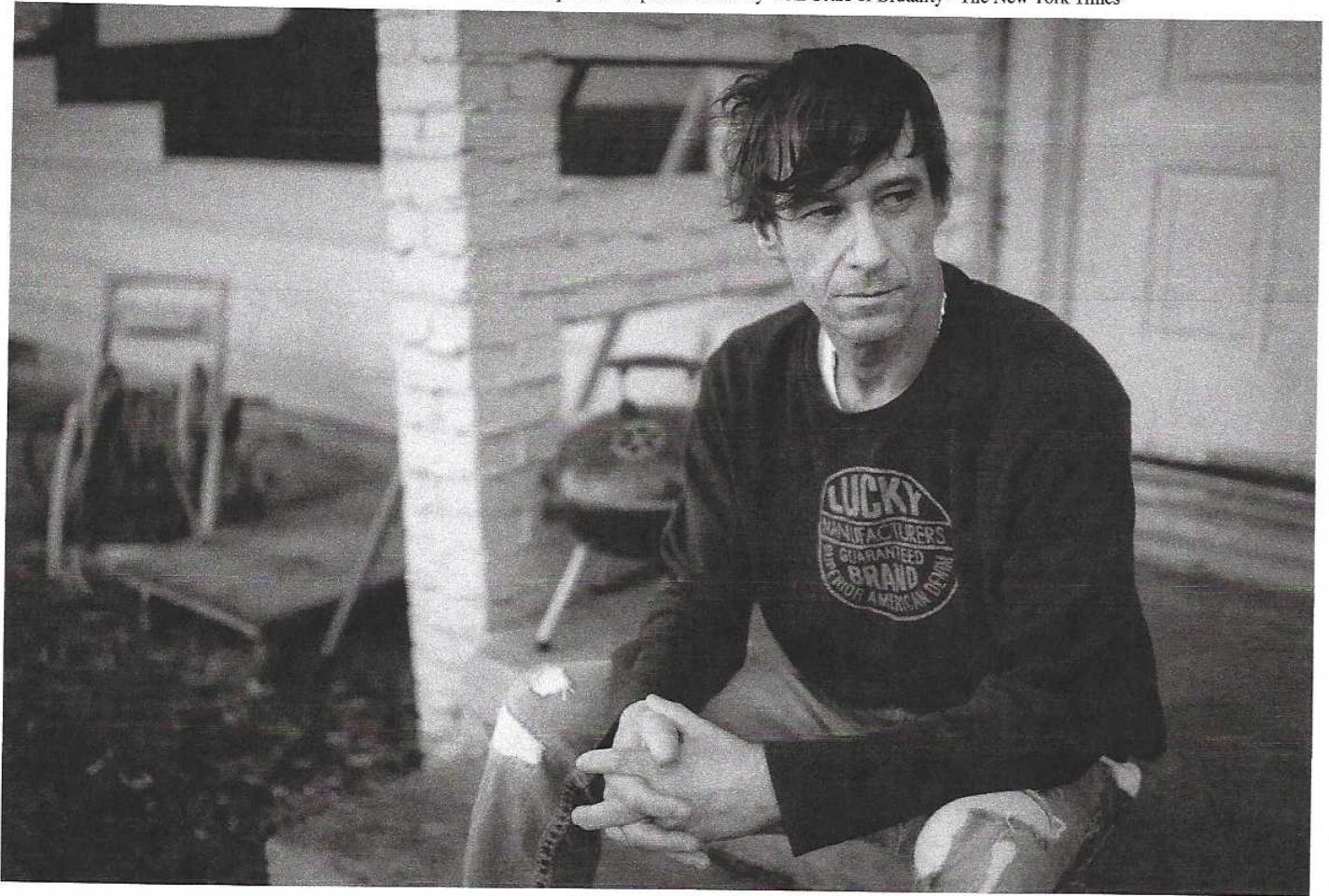
Three other men in the trailer that night described violent attacks. Garry Curro, a 64-year-old Air Force veteran, said deputies handcuffed, beat and shocked him. Adam Porter says Mr. McAlpin threw him into a glass mirror, then took Mr. Porter's pocketknife and sliced his pants to ribbons, demanding to know where the drugs were. Mr. Manning's roommate, James Lynch, said Mr. McAlpin dragged a blowtorch flame across his feet while interrogating him.

People's accounts of the raids shared striking similarities, beyond the patterns in the violence.

At least 12 of the 17 cases began as Mr. Manning's did, with a suspect being set up by a confidential informant, someone the deputies had persuaded to stage a drug buy while they waited nearby.

In six cases, people said deputies threatened to continue assaulting them until they disclosed either the name of a drug dealer or the location of drugs. Five people said the deputies ransacked their kitchens and destroyed their food or used it to humiliate them — smashing a cake into a man's face before arresting him, dumping flour and rice onto a kitchen floor, pouring milk into a freshly cooked dinner. Every Black accuser said deputies had hurled racial slurs at them.

Most of the targets were men in their 30s or 40s with a history of drug use. But in 2009, Mr. McAlpin knocked out 19-year-old Christopher Hillhouse's tooth with a Maglite, he and his mother say. The next year, deputies beat and shocked Dustin Hale, then 17, until he urinated on himself while his girlfriend watched, he said. When his mother and grandmother went to the county jail to pick him up, they said, they hardly recognized him through the bruises and swelling.



Jeremy Travis Paige alleged in a lawsuit that deputies forced him to arrange drug deals and beat him unconscious.

The story of Jeremy Travis Paige, who was targeted in 2018, fits a typical pattern described by the accusers.

Mr. Paige, a 41-year-old with several arrests, was pulling up to his home in a working-class neighborhood outside Jackson when he realized deputies were there waiting for him, he said.

He drove away, hoping they wouldn't notice. But Mr. McAlpin chased him and pulled him over, then deputies beat him unconscious in the intersection, Mr. Paige alleged in a lawsuit against the county.

The suit claimed that he regained consciousness as the deputies dragged him, handcuffed, into his home. Mr. McAlpin and another deputy then pummeled him in the living room for nearly an hour, according to Mr. Paige and a witness who spoke on the condition of anonymity, fearing retribution from the deputies.

In interviews, Mr. Paige said the deputies pulled him into his roommate's bedroom and sat him upright on the bed, where he felt someone press a knee into his back and stretch a washcloth across his mouth. Then, he said, deputies poured gallon after gallon of water over his face. As he struggled to breathe, he said, one of them pressed a lit cigarette into his thigh.

All the while, they shocked his groin intermittently with Tasers, Mr. Paige said. Taser logs show that one of the four deputies who reported being at the scene triggered his Taser during the arrest.



Mr. Paige's booking photo, taken at the Rankin County jail in 2018, shows his battered and bruised face after an encounter with deputies.
Rankin County Sheriff's Office

Three people, including Mr. Paige, said they had been shocked not only with gun-shaped Tasers — the type issued by the department — but also with small, rectangular ones, suggesting that some deputies used personal stun guns that were not being tracked.

"They had the devil in them," Mr. Paige said. "I thought they was going to kill me."

Deputies ordered him to send Facebook messages to friends asking to buy drugs. He struck out, and the deputies took him to jail.

Before leaving, they stuffed the blood- and water-soaked bedding in trash bags and removed them from the house, Mr. Paige said.

The next day, when Mr. Paige was in jail, his son Trace visited the house. He found evidence of the violence, he said, including a bent bed frame where his father had been held down by deputies and a puddle of blood on the floor.

Pictures taken by Mr. Paige's roommate show the bed stripped of linens and blood spattered on the wall.

Mr. McAlpin wrote in his report that deputies restrained Mr. Paige after he tried to kick them during the arrest, but the detective did not mention the use of Tasers or other force that might explain the blood.

During Mr. Paige's trial for drug sale charges, Mr. McAlpin testified that deputies might have injured Mr. Paige when they pulled him out of his car, because he was resisting. He denied hurting Mr. Paige in his home.

Mr. Paige was sentenced to five years in prison. When he sued the sheriff's department, no lawyer would take his case and he resorted to representing himself. He wrote a letter to the judge explaining that he had only a seventh-grade education.

"I don't know how to present big words or anything like that," he wrote. "But I do know the truth."

After he missed several court deadlines, the judge dismissed his case.



Evidence of the violence inflicted by deputies has been collecting in the sheriff's department's computer files for more than two decades.

Who Knew

Over the years, more than a dozen people have directly confronted Sheriff Bailey and his command staff about the deputies' brutal methods, according to court records and interviews with accusers and their families.

At least five people have sued the department alleging beatings, chokings and other abuses by deputies associated with the Goon Squad.

The department settled two of those cases. Two others, including Mr. Paige's, were dismissed over procedural errors by accusers representing themselves.

But the mounting allegations signaled that something was profoundly wrong in the narcotics unit of Sheriff Bailey's department.

Mr. McAlpin, the department's former chief investigator who led most of the raids reviewed by reporters, was involved in at least four arrests that prompted lawsuits, court records show.



The family of Brett Gerhart sued the department, saying he had been injured and terrorized during a mistaken raid at the wrong home. United States District Court in Jackson, Miss.

According to one suit that was settled, Mr. McAlpin kicked 19-year-old Brett Gerhart in the face and pressed a pistol to his temple in 2010 during a mistaken raid at the wrong address. In a 2012 case, tossed out because of missed court deadlines, Gary Michael Frith claimed that he had been beaten and choked in the back of a squad car during a drug bust; records show that Mr. McAlpin was one of the arresting officers.

Mr. McAlpin also figured prominently in complaints lodged with the department. Seven people told reporters they had mailed letters, filed formal complaints or called the sheriff personally to tell him about the abuse they experienced.

Joshua Rushing said he wrote several letters to the department in 2020, after Mr. McAlpin and Mr. Dedmon drove him to an isolated dead-end road and shocked and beat him. He said he never heard back.

Nicole Brock said that when she went to the sheriff's office to submit a formal complaint against Mr. McAlpin for ransacking her car during a search, he tore up the form, threw it in the garbage and arrested her for a syringe he had found during the car search.



Joshua Rushing said he wrote several letters to the department in 2020 about the abuse he experienced at the hands of deputies. He said he never heard back. Rankin County Sheriff's Department

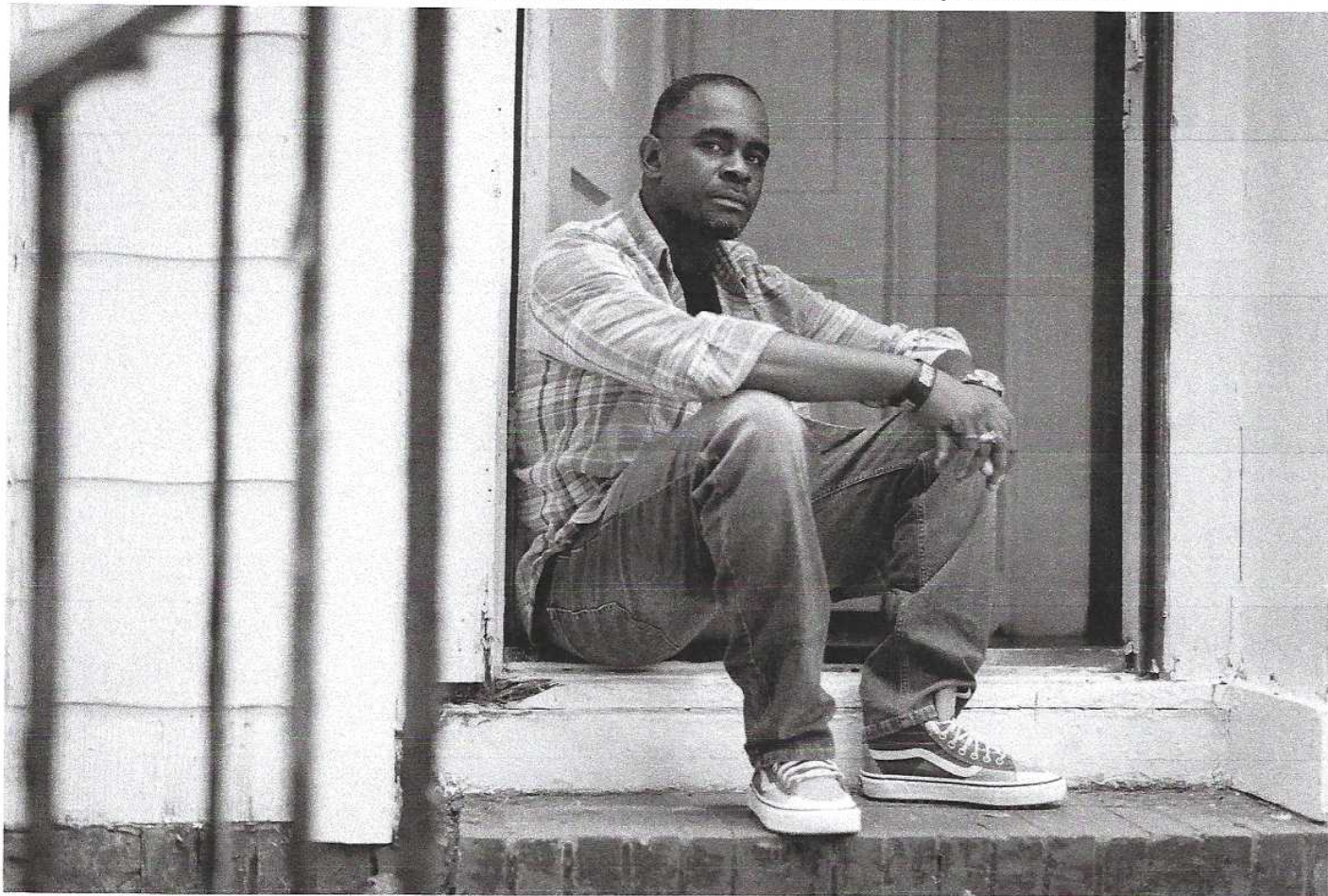
Ms. Brock said she left several messages on Sheriff Bailey's office phone to report the deputy's behavior, but he never returned her calls.

Mr. Dare, the department lawyer, declined to provide copies of complaints, saying they were considered personnel records protected by state law. When asked to confirm the existence of the seven complaints described by accusers, he said he could not immediately provide it.

Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, said this long list of complaints and lawsuits should have prompted investigations by the sheriff.

"If you're getting multiple complaints about the same officers, from different sources, that's a red flag," he said. "If you don't do anything about it, you're in denial."

Despite the allegations against him, Mr. McAlpin continued to rise through the ranks of the department, winning Investigator of the Year and eventually being promoted to the top investigator position.



Mitchell Hobson said that during a 2018 raid, deputies choked him with a lamp cord and waterboarded him to simulate drowning.

Until this year, the Rankin County Sheriff's Department did not have anyone assigned full time to handle complaints. Instead, supervisors were responsible for investigating the deputies they oversaw, according to four former employees who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared retribution from the department.

Among those supervisors were Mr. McAlpin and Lieutenant Middleton, who both pleaded guilty in August for their roles in the assault of Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Parker.

On Tuesday, Sheriff Bailey announced that the department would allow residents to file complaints against deputies on the department's website.

Beyond the lawsuits and complaints, there were other obvious signs of the violence, including injuries that would have been visible to jail workers and court officials who saw the injured shortly after their encounters.



Mitchell Hobson's booking photo.
Rankin County Sheriff's Office

Hospital records show that Mr. Hobson was treated for a gash over his eye after a 2018 raid in which he says deputies waterboarded him and punched him repeatedly. His face is bandaged in his jail booking photo.

Robert Jones, the man who said deputies rammed a stick down his throat, arrived at the jail with a swollen and mud-streaked face after deputies beat him and threw him into a ditch.

Many of the mug shots from the Rankin County jail feature bandaged faces, swollen cheeks and black eyes associated with drug-related arrests.

But the most glaring evidence of the violence inflicted by deputies has been collecting in the department's computer files for more than two decades.



The Rankin County Courthouse. Several of those who said they experienced violence filed lawsuits detailing their encounters with the department.

The Taser Logs

Every time a Taser is fired, the device keeps a record of it. In Rankin County, deputies upload this data to a computer, compiling detailed departmentwide logs that allow supervisors to monitor deputy Taser use.

The data, reviewed by The Times and Mississippi Today, contained tens of thousands of Taser triggers stretching back 24 years.

The logs supported the accounts of nine people who described being shocked by deputies while handcuffed or held down. In all but three of these cases, the deputies did not report their Taser use, violating department policy.

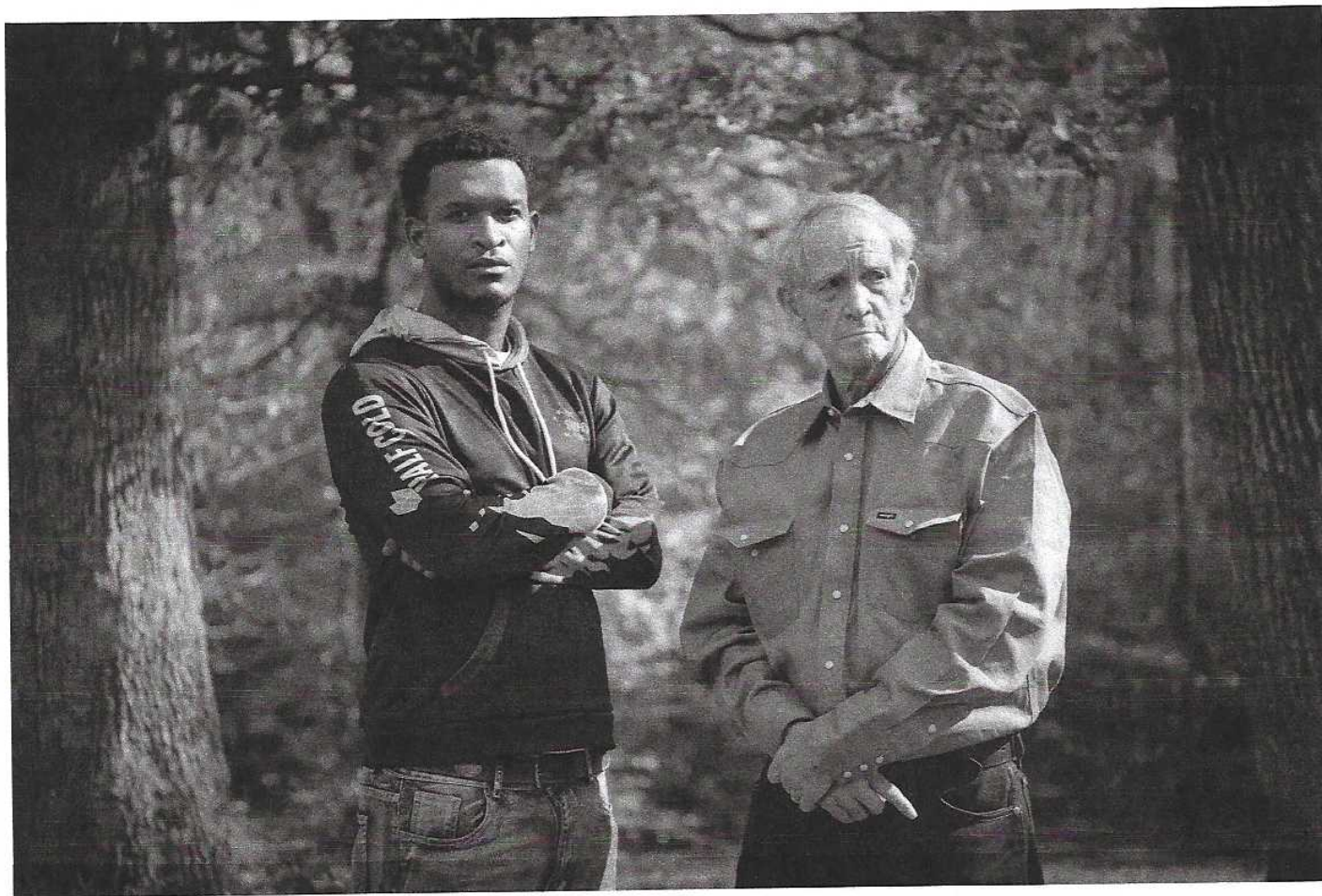
"I don't believe I've ever come across an agency in which it would be acceptable for an officer to deploy a Taser and not report it in some way," said Ashley Heiberger, a retired officer and an expert in police use of force.

After several studies linking prolonged Taser exposure to severe medical problems and even death, the Police Executive Research Forum developed national guidelines advising against shocking a person for more than 15 seconds during an encounter.

The logs contain dozens of instances of Tasers being fired for at least double the recommended time limit over the course of an hour. In April 2016, a device assigned to a deputy who participated in Goon Squad raids was triggered nine times in four minutes, delivering 31 seconds of current.

Several experts in police use of force said the logs showed abnormal Taser use that was hard to explain. Seth Stoughton, from the University of South Carolina, said the frequency of the deputies' Taser triggers suggested they were not using the weapons for their intended purpose: to quickly subdue a combative person.

"It just doesn't suggest that the Taser is actually being used to induce compliance," he said.



Christopher Holloway, left, and Sam Carter said they were repeatedly shocked with a Taser during a home raid. Both were charged with paraphernalia and drug possession. Mr. Carter said the raid was the beginning of a string of arrests.

By comparing the logs to department records, reporters identified four people who claim they were at the receiving end of Taser shocks recorded in the data.

In 2016, Deputy James Rayborn fired his Taser for 20 seconds over the course of 20 minutes during a raid of Samuel Carter's home.

Mr. Carter, a 64-year-old Army veteran, had had previous run-ins with Rankin sheriff's deputies over alleged drug use. On the night of the raid, he said, deputies dragged him to his bedroom, shocked him and demanded that he open a safe where they expected to find drugs and cash.

Instead, deputies found a tub of cake frosting he had stashed in the safe to hide from houseguests with a sweet tooth.

Mr. Carter said they became enraged and shocked him again until his leg began to bleed.

Down the hall, Christopher Holloway, a 26-year-old who had been helping Mr. Carter maintain his property, was beaten and shocked until he defecated on himself, he said. Then they dragged him outside and threatened to push him, handcuffed, into Mr. Carter's pool.

Mr. Holloway and Mr. Carter were charged with paraphernalia and drug possession — Mr. Holloway for marijuana, Mr. Carter for several grams of methamphetamine.

Like many people targeted by Rankin deputies, Mr. Carter said the first raid was just the beginning. Three months later, deputies arrested him again, this time for drinking in front of his home, Mr. Carter said. He was arrested four more times over the next year, department records show, mostly for drug or paraphernalia possession.

Ballooning legal fees left Mr. Carter unable to pay his bills.

"They had the power," he said. "And they used it."



Rick Loveday, a sheriff's deputy in a neighboring county, looks at a picture of his injuries sustained when Rankin County deputies raided his home.

'I Lost My Life'

The Goon Squad has left a long trail of shattered lives in its wake. Some people who said they were brutalized are jolted awake by nightmares after their encounters with deputies. Four said they fled the county for good. Several are serving lengthy prison terms.

In 2015, Ron Shinstock was struggling with a methamphetamine addiction, even as he raised a family with his wife and ran a mechanic shop with his brother.

Everything changed, he said, after Mr. McAlpin led a violent raid of his home, holding his children at gunpoint and forcing him to strip naked in his backyard. The arrest led to a 40-year prison sentence for a \$260 meth sale within 1,500 feet of a church.

Mr. Shinstock's wife left him. He is scheduled to be released in 2056, two months before his 82nd birthday.

"I lost my family, I lost my home," Mr. Shinstock said. "I lost my life."



Andrea Dettore moved out of Rankin County after witnessing two raids by its deputies.

Andrea Dettore, a former resident of Rankin County, witnessed deputies brutalize three people in two incidents. She said she was there in 2018 when the Goon Squad attacked Mr. Loveday, the former deputy, and Mr. Hobson.

During a raid on her own home in January, she said, she heard deputies beat her friend, Robert Grozier, behind a closed door, and saw a deputy, Christian Dedmon, shove a sex toy into his mouth, threatening to shock him with a Taser if he spat it out.

Ms. Dettore and Mr. Grozier were each fined several hundred dollars, and she has since left Rankin County. Mr. Hobson sat in jail for six months before his charges were dropped, and Mr. Loveday lost his job as a sheriff's deputy. Court records show he was never convicted of a crime.

After Mr. McAlpin arrested Mr. Loveday and accused him of consorting with drug dealers, he ordered him to leave town. Mr. Loveday fled the state, fearing he would be targeted again. He couldn't forget that night.

"If they did that to me, how many other people have they done it to?" he wondered.

Before he left Mississippi, Mr. Loveday said, he called Sheriff Bailey personally to warn him about his deputies' behavior.

But Mr. Bailey wouldn't listen, he said. He called Mr. Loveday a dirty cop and accused him of secretly recording the call.

Then, Mr. Loveday said, "He hung up on me."

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