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Glenn Elliott

## He was Taller than That

By Glenn Elliott

*In a business as gruesome as a police officer's can be, it is little wonder that, without an occasional bit of humor, life on the job might be unbearable. Statistically, police officers have one of the highest suicide rates of any occupation. This story by Glenn Elliott is a part of the same case than he talked about in the last issue of*

*the [Dispatch](#) [click here].*

**I** was in my office in Longview early that Saturday morning in 1976 when I received a phone call from Panola County Sheriff Johnnie Spradley. He got straight to the point. "Glenn, we've got a body in the Sabine River on Highway 43 between Tatum and Marshall. It's in the water, right at the bridge. Can you come down?"

"I'm on my way, Johnnie."

"Glenn?"

"Yeah."

"We've got a body, but we don't have a head."

"I'll be right there."

I arrived at the crime scene about thirty minutes later. In my thirty-eight-year career with the Texas Department of Public Safety—twelve as a highway patrolman and twenty-six as a Texas Ranger—I'd seen my share of gruesome scenes. This one was no different: there was blood everywhere along the riverbank. There was a little twist, however. In the shallow water a few feet away lay the body of a headless torso. You could tell at a glance that the corpse had been a real winner. There were nasty tattoos all over his body.

After five hours of searching the river, we still didn't have a head. My job at the crime scene was finished.

We needed the information that could be gained from the autopsy of quickly as possible. In 1976, all the autopsies in my area of responsibility were performed at the Dallas Crime Lab, 125 miles west of my area. Hawthorne Funeral Home in Carthage picked up the body, and I asked the driver to head for Dallas and with an officer from Panola County, I would follow behind him and his associate in my vehicle.

We had gone about 30 miles when we got word on my radio that the head had finally been recovered. I radioed the ambulance and asked the driver to continue to Dallas while I returned to the crime scene. I would meet them at the crime lab later.

The Henderson Rescue Unit had recovered the head. There were three bullet holes in the face. One of the wounds near the left nostril had been fired at extremely close range. I placed some plastic in my back floorboard, laid the head on it, and prepared to depart for the Dallas Crime Lab. I was just stepping into my car when one of the officers stopped me.

"Glenn, before you leave, there's a boy over there who thinks this might be his brother. He wants to see the head."

I told him that was fine. Before bringing the young man to my car, the officer explained that he was a little "slow."

"Bring him over. Slow or not, he should be able to identify his own brother."

I reached toward the floorboard and grabbed the head by the hair. When I got it outside the car, I held it out at shoulder length. The boy was standing to my left, and I told him to come around so he could see the face.

"I don't need to."

"You don't?"

"That's not him."

"How can you tell without seeing his face?"

"Well, he was taller than that!"

*You can read about the whole case and many others in Glenn's book, **Glenn Elliott: A Ranger's Ranger**, sold through the Museum's gift shop. Order toll free at 1-877-750-8631.*

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