

A black and white photograph of a man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a dark jacket over a collared shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is holding a human skull in his left hand. The background is dark and appears to be an industrial or institutional setting with wooden paneling and a door.

Three Decades
of Intense
Investigations
and Edgy
Enthusiasms

THE SECRET PARTS OF FORTUNE

"A masterly concoction, a blend of boy reporter,
Ancient Mariner, and lounge lizard."

—*New York Times Book Review*

RON ROSENBAUM

Bestselling author of EXPLAINING HITLER

Dixon, who'd had doubts of his own about the Lucas confessions he'd looked into. "He took us to Henry's half-sister, to his relatives," Lemons recalls. "And we began talking to these people and began comparing what we had with what they had on his whereabouts, and we commenced to all of a sudden realize that when Henry was supposed to be killing somebody in Texas or California he was actually in jail in Maryland or at work in Pennsylvania or living at home with someone.

"It became obvious that this whole thing was a farce," Bob Lemons says.

Before they were through, their private investigation had produced enough documents and eyewitness accounts concerning Lucas's whereabouts to discredit scores of his murder confessions. But, once again, when they sought to bring the results of their investigation to the attention of the Lucas task force, their proffer was rejected out of hand.

By this time the Lemonses weren't alone in bringing doubts about Lucas to the attention of the task force.

There was a veteran journalist in Dallas named Hugh Aynesworth. He'd cowritten a book about serial killer Ted Bundy (*The Only Living Witness*), and originally he'd believed Lucas was a serial killer of even greater magnitude. He planned to do a biography of Lucas. But, Aynesworth says, Lucas confided to him early on that he'd only "done three" (his mother, Becky Powell, and Kate Rich). Aynesworth then began his own investigation of the Lucas-Toole travels, which ended up discrediting dozens more confessions in a *Dallas Times Herald* exposé.

Even Sister Clemmie, the truest of true believers in Lucas and his mission from God, began to have her doubts when Lucas started complaining to her that the task force was asking him to "take cases" that even he found objectionable. (Clemmie has remained loyal to Lucas after the shock of his recantation, and believes he's telling the truth now.)

One case Henry resisted—at first—involved the son of a lawman in a southern state. He'd been convicted of killing a convenience-store clerk and was already serving a murder sentence when Henry's confession sprang him from jail, got him a new trial and eventually an acquittal. The prosecutor who convicted the lawman's son would later testify in the El Paso hearing to his outrage and bewilderment; the prosecutor believes a false Lucas confession helped a real killer walk free.

Then there was a young crusading DA in Waco, Texas, named Vic Feazell, who was troubled by the way Lucas's confession to the murder of a prostitute had blown his chance to get a genuine suspect to confess. In trying to check out that one prostitute-murder confession, Feazell turned up serious problems with about a dozen other Lucas confessions. He, too, put himself on a collision course with the Lucas task force, and touched off what was to become a bitter civil war between branches of Texas law enforcement—a war which

began with a showdown over possession of Henry Lee Lucas's body. The showdown resulted from Feazell's efforts to bring Lucas before his grand jury in April 1985 to testify about his confessions. The Lucas task force was extremely unhappy about this.

Feazell sent his men down to the Lucas-task-force lair at the Georgetown jail. "They went down there and pretty much intimidated the Georgetown boys into releasing him and letting us bring him back to Waco," he recalls.

When the task force learned that its chief asset was in the hands of the enemy, it convened an emergency late-night strategy session and decided to call in the feds to get Lucas back.

"The next morning," Feazell recalls, "two FBI agents showed up in my office around seven, seven-thirty, demanding to see Lucas, right before he was to testify before the grand jury."

Feazell ordered his men to hold off the agents, and called for reinforcements. He called in Attorney General Jim Mattox. "He just hit the roof. He told them [the feds] it was obviously a conspiracy because nothing but the murder of a president gets the FBI out at seven A.M."

It was a tense standoff between armed men. "They were pretty upset," Feazell recalls. But he won the tug-of-war, held on to his controversial prisoner—although he paid dearly for that victory later on.

There followed a dramatic recantation scene. What finally brought Lucas to that moment in Waco when he disavowed the whole serial-killer charade? If you listen to Lucas now, it was the mind-numbing horror of the actual confession process.

"I got so sick of looking at those pictures—it was pathetic," he tells me in Huntsville.

"What kind of pictures do you mean?"

"Naked women, murder victims, people cut up in pieces. It was just sickening. You know, it was just sickening."

It would go on twelve hours a day, five, six, seven days a week, looking at hundreds, thousands, of mutilated corpses. "And the more I would try to get away from it, the more they wanted to show me. I told Clemmie, 'I can't take looking at these pictures.'"

At first, he says, he rebelled in a kind of covert, subversive way, deliberately "going wild" with the ever-inflating magnitude of his confessions to everyone and everything. After he raised his claimed-kills total to six hundred in the United States, he casually added that he'd "done about a thousand in Canada." Began claiming he'd kidnapped more than five hundred U.S. "milk carton" children on behalf of the Hands of Death and "sold them into slavery in Mexico." Threw in Jimmy Hoffa and Jonestown.

But none of these claims seemed to prompt the task force to examine any of his more mundane murder confessions, and Lucas realized, he says now, that

he'd have to expose his whole act to end it. In addition, he concedes he'd begun to get the feeling the jig was up—he knew Feazell, Aynesworth, and the Lemonses had been investigating him, poking holes in his story. And so, when he walked into Vic Feazell's office prior to testifying to the grand jury, "I asked them, 'What would it be if I told you that I didn't do the crimes?' And they said, 'Well, we know you didn't,' and I said, 'If I tell you that I didn't do the crimes, now they [the task force] would kill me before I got back to Georgetown.' And they said, 'What if we can give you protection?' And I said, 'I don't think you can do it.' They said, 'We'll get the attorney general up here.' So they called me in to talk to [Attorney General Jim Mattox] and he said, 'I guarantee they won't get anyone near you.' And I said, 'Well, I'll tell the truth, then.' And I said to them, 'There's some other people that deserve to know the truth.'"

"What did you mean by that?" I ask him.

"The Lemonses," I said. "I want them told the truth." They said, "The Lemonses already know the truth."

Lucas then went before the grand jury in Waco, recanted his confessions, and exposed the techniques of his hoax.

But what Lucas and the Lemonses and DA Feazell and the Texas attorney general didn't realize was that merely exposing the hoax confessions wasn't enough.

"Henry thought that by just telling the truth he could undo everything he'd done," Joyce Lemons says. "It was too late for that."

By the time Lucas had recanted, the machinery of the criminal-justice system had already locked in his lies and given a number of powerful law-enforcement institutions a stake in keeping them locked in. As Joyce Lemons says, "Henry had been everybody's ticket to glory, there were all these book contracts."

As soon as Lucas recanted, the task force had to fold up its tent, and he found himself quickly packed off to death row to await execution in the Orange Socks case.

One year later, in April 1986, Texas attorney general Jim Mattox issued his "Lucas Report." In addition to casting serious doubts on all but two of the Lucas confessions (Becky Powell and Kate Rich), the Lucas Report directly took on the task force and the Texas Rangers: "Those with custody of Lucas did nothing to bring an end to his hoax. Even as evidence of the hoax mounted, they continued to insist that Lucas had murdered hundreds of persons."

But partisans of the Lucas task force weren't taking this assault on their efforts lying down. According to a sworn affidavit from Sister Clemmie, shortly after the 1985 Waco showdown, Sheriff Boutwell told her, "By the time we finish with Vic Feazell, he will wish he'd never heard the name Henry Lee Lucas." (Sheriff Boutwell denies ever making that statement.)

And, in fact, before long a U.S. attorney was spearheading a full-court-press corruption investigation targeted against DA Vic Feazell, an investigation that resulted in Feazell's indictment and arrest on bribery charges on the eve of his reelection campaign. Feazell filed court motions portraying the indictments as "retaliatory prosecution" for his role in exposing the Lucas hoax and putting the prestige of "the law enforcement brotherhood" in question. Feazell fought back, won reelection, and won acquittal from a jury which deliberated for only six hours before rejecting the accusations on the first vote. The *Dallas Times Herald* later called Feazell's ordeal "a vendetta directed at a prosecutor whose major transgression appeared to be that he held the Texas Rangers and lawmen across the country up to public ridicule by helping expose the hoax of Henry Lee Lucas, a confessed serial murderer who turned out to be nothing but a serial con man." Vindicated, Feazell nonetheless had faced eighty years in prison for his attempt to get to the truth about that prostitute murder, and his promising political career was derailed.

El Paso judge Brunson Moore—the man who presided over the final Texas courtroom battle over a Lucas confession and threw it out of court in December 1986—contends that there's "not one guy who's stood up to the task force" who hasn't suffered retaliation from the law-enforcement brotherhood. What disturbs Judge Moore at least as much is the failure of the criminal-justice system to follow up on the hoax revelations and reopen all those murder cases closed by Lucas's confessions.

A particularly dramatic example of this came to light just two days after my second visit with Lucas on death row in June.

An A.P. dispatch in a Dallas paper datelined Salt Lake City reported that "police say the books will stay closed on three Utah murders attributed to Henry Lee Lucas even though . . . a 1986 Texas attorney general's report—which Utah lawmen say they didn't know existed—contains evidence which conflicts with information Lucas gave Utah lawmen. [Italics are mine.]

"In one of the [1978] murders," the story continues, "Lucas claimed he was assisted by Ottis Toole although the attorney general's investigation shows that Mr. Lucas didn't meet Mr. Toole until February 1979."

Investigator Mike Feary of the Texas attorney general's office, who worked on the A.G.'s 1986 investigation, was quoted saying, "Nobody should clear a case solely on a Lucas confession. They should ignore it, and see what else they have."

I called Investigator Feary and asked him if somebody in Texas law enforcement didn't have a responsibility to make sure the 150 or so police departments all over the U.S. who have Lucas's confessions still on the books had at least read the attorney general's report. "There may have been some obligation on our part to contact every agency," Feary conceded. Although his office sent out copies of the Lucas Report to lawmen nationwide, he said, it