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El Paso

Lucas led police to home of dead woman, ranger says

By Gary Scharrer
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Henry Lee Lucas's first link to the murder of 72-year-old Librada Apodaca came early in 1984 as police were driving him around El Paso in search of bodies Lucas might have dumped in the desert.

Lucas eventually pointed toward Mexico and told police that he "killed an old lady in Mexico," Texas Ranger Clayton Smith testified Thursday.

Prosecutors suspect that Lucas got confused when he crossed a canal on the way to Apodaca's Lower Valley home. Lucas probably mistook the canal for the Rio Grande, First Assistant District Attorney Bill Moody speculated.

In 1983, about six months after gesturing toward Mexico, Lucas confessed to killing the elderly woman. But he later retracted

that confession, along with hundreds of other murder confessions. Lucas' lawyers are trying to suppress the Apodaca confession in what is expected to be a lengthy hearing before the capital murder trial begins.

Smith was a co-leader of the Rangers' Henry Lucas Task Force, which coordinated police investigations of Lucas. At one time, law enforcement agencies around the country had cleared 266 murder cases based on Lucas' confessions, Smith testified.

Lucas' subsequent retractions have influenced the reopening for some of those cleared cases. But Smith said he doesn't know how many.

"The press says it's shrunk, but we have talked to officers who are still of the opinion that Henry is telling the truth" about his old confessions, Smith said.

At one time, appointments for police to interview Lucas about unsolved murders were backlogged four months, Smith said. And the task force interviewed Lucas about at least 300 other cases on behalf of smaller police departments that could not afford send anyone to Texas, he said.

One day after Lucas formally confessed to killing Apodaca, Smith accompanied him to El Paso, where Lucas showed officers the way to her Lower Valley home.

Smith said Lucas had not been shown any photographs of Apodaca's house or neighborhood. And he said Lucas "gave the directions" that led police to her house.

The Ranger's testimony will continue this morning before 120th District Judge Brunson Moore.