

Donald Ball was murdered at a St. Louis, MO, Amoco gas station at about 9:45pm on June 4, 1984. Witnesses said that Ball was pumping gas into his car when a lone gunman approached him and fired a shot hitting Ball in the arm. Ball immediately ran and the shooter chased him, firing another shot into Ball's leg, which brought him to the ground. The assailant stood over the bleeding body of Donald Ball, fired the fatal shot into his back at point blank range, and then ran off into the night.

Customers of the gas station who witnessed the crime could only give a vague description of a light skinned black male with a short afro wearing khaki pants and a yellow shirt. The crime scene yielded no physical evidence outside of the bullet casing. Two of Donald Ball's relatives told police that Ball had been shot just a year earlier by Jesse Watson, a drug dealer with whom Ball was having a drug turf war. Watson, they said, tried to kill Ball and skipped town after the failed attempt.

Police stated that two days after the crime they received a tip. Eddie Walker who was accompanied by a man only known as "Tampa Red" approached the police saying he'd witnessed the crime and that Darryl Burton was the shooter. Soon, another man, Claudix Simmons, identified Burton as the shooter as

well. Less than a month after the crime, Darryl Burton was arrested. The state's two key witnesses, Eddie Walker and Claudix Simmons, were the key to Burton's conviction. While Burton knew the victim, there was no bad blood between them and no motive was ever presented by police.

Centurion Ministries (CM) found that Eddie Walker's story of what happened varied greatly every time he gave a statement. Walker died in 1996, but was characterized by friends as a drunkard, a liar and devoid of any scruples. Danny Pennington, a friend of Walker's, stated that he was with Mr. Walker one block away from the shooting when it occurred. In response to Walker's testimony, Pennington blurted out, "That's a lie! I was with Eddie when he heard the shots! We didn't see nobody!"

CM found "Tampa Red" who stated in an affidavit that he didn't remember anyone named Eddie Walker from his neighborhood and did not even recognize Walker when shown a photo of him.

Claudix Simmons admitted to CM that he had lied at trial as a part of a deal to avoid many years of state prison time for the crimes he was charged with at the time.

The gas station cashier, an African American woman named Joan Williams, she said that she had told the police that they'd gotten the wrong man because the shooter, whom she had plainly seen, was an African American much lighter in skin color than the dark skinned Darryl Burton.

By August of 2008, Darryl Burton's conviction was reversed and charges were dropped. In his decision, the judge in the case ruled that "the evidence of guilt presented at trial was extremely weak" and the testimony of the cashier to be "clear, credible, and powerful."

*Case description courtesy of Centurion Ministries*

Convicted: 1985

Sentence: Life in prison

Served: 24 Years



**Vindication:** 2008

—Perjury or False Accusation

—Official Misconduct

# DARRYL BURTON

## ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI