

# Man pleads guilty to murder

## Confession brings close to 10-year-old cold case

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A Midland City man pleaded guilty Monday to murder in what had been a cold case homicide of a 72-year-old man.

Dale County District Attorney Kirke Adams said 59-year-old Frederick B. Hightower received what's referred to as a 20-year split sentence, with three years to serve in the Department of Corrections, after he pleaded guilty to felony murder.



Hightower

Dale County Sheriff's investigators arrested Hightower in May 2014 and charged him with capital murder during a robbery.

Hightower pleaded guilty to the stabbing death of his former neighbor, 72-year-old Billy Ray Jackson, at his Friar Road home in Midland City on Sept. 3, 2005.

Adams said Hightower will serve the entire three-year sentence day-for-day in prison. He will serve the remainder of the 20-year sentence on probation. If he's charged with any crime while on probation, he likely will have to serve the remainder of the 20-year sentence.

Adams said Hightower will receive credit for time served in jail awaiting trial, so he has about 19 months left of his sentence with a likely release date in May 2017. Attorney Susan James represented Hightower in court.

Adams said law enforcement had developed Hightower as a suspect in the murder shortly after the crime but did not have enough evidence at the time to file charges or even convict him.

"All we knew at the time he was a neighbor of 72-year-old Billy Ray Jackson, and he was known to borrow money from him," Adams said. "There were numerous weapons that were sent to the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences for testing, but none led to any DNA evidence connecting Mr. Hightower to this crime."

## Stabbing

From Page 1A

Adams said authorities received word Hightower had confessed to the killing to a cellmate while serving time in the Florida Department of Corrections. Be-

cause of that confession, the victim's family was able to receive some closure to the homicide.

"I'm satisfied the case is solved and closed with a conviction. While I'm not thrilled with the amount of time the defendant will serve in prison, I do recognize the flaws and weak-

nesses of a cold case. My office met with the Jackson family and they were satisfied with the agreement," Adams said. "There were enough questions for the state to negotiate a guilty plea in the case, and there were enough answers for him to plead guilty to felony murder."