



Classification: **Child serial killer**
Characteristics: **Kidnapping - Child molester**
Number of victims: **5 - 9 +**
Date of murders: **1984 - 1988**
Date of birth: **February 9, 1958**
Victims profile: **His 2-month-old son / Christi Lynn Meeks, 5 / Christie Diane Proctor, 9 / Nydra Ross, 9 / Roxann Hope Reyes, 3**
Method of murder: **Strangulation**
Location: **Ohio/Texas, USA**
Status: **Sentenced to life in prison in Ohio, 1992 / Sentenced to life in prison in Texas, 2005**

Interview With Killer David Penton

Sunday, March 04, 2007

EDITOR'S NOTE: Since being confined in 1988, David Elliot Penton has denied scores of interviews sought by local and national media outlets, but he granted the interview with the Tyler Courier-Times--Telegraph. Kenneth Dean traveled to Ohio to meet the man, who authorities say has claimed to fellow cellmates of abducting and killing at least 50 children.

By Kenneth Dean - TylerPaper.com

Toledo, Ohio — The serial killer rose from the chair, stared intently with his icy blue eyes, stuck out his hand and said, “Nice to meet you, I am David Penton.”

The 5-11, 49-year-old balding man, wearing a gray prison uniform with inmate number A245242, greeted his visitor Wednesday morning deep within the walls of the Toledo Correctional Institution.

There were no bars, no glass barrier. He was not chained nor handcuffed. No guards were present for the interview in the medium-sized room bearing the Ohio State Seal on one wall.

Since being confined in 1988, David Elliot Penton has denied scores of interviews sought by local and national media outlets, but he granted an interview with the Tyler Courier-Times—Telegraph. I traveled to Ohio to meet the man, who authorities say has claimed to fellow cellmates of abducting and killing at least 50 children.

“This is the first interview I have ever given, so yes this is an exclusive,” he said while signing documents agreeing to be interviewed, recorded and photographed. “I got to thinking about your request and thought maybe it’s time I told my side of the story.”

Penton has been convicted of five child murders, including his 2-month-old son, three Dallas-area girls abducted in the 1980s and an Ohio 9-year-old. Serving life in prison for the crimes, he has become the focus of authorities in multiple states in the disappearances of other young children. This focus includes the Big Sandy disappearance of

Ara Denise Johnson, apparently abducted from her bed on April 2, 1986.

Upshur County Sheriff officials now have information pointing to Penton as a person of interest in her disappearance and are building a case.

THE INTERVIEW

For an hour and a half we sat in the conference room as the pale-skinned Penton talked about the crimes he has been convicted of, new investigations, his life, problems with drugs and the solicitation of young prostitutes in Korea while in the U.S. Army.

He seemed intelligent, elusive and somewhat proud of his "notoriety." He also contradicted himself numerous times.

Penton's moods changed so quickly, the changes were sometimes unnerving to watch.

As he answered some questions that clearly bothered him, he would become red-faced with anger as he moved his hands rapidly, then his eyes would tear up and finally he would sneer or laugh in my direction. The changes often occurred within a one-minute period.

Penton began by saying he was in prison for aggravated murder and kidnapping in the Ohio case and admitting he had signed plea agreements in the murders of Dallas area girls, Christie Proctor, Christi Meeks and Roxann Reyes. He also admitted to pleading guilty to the violent shaking death of his two-month-old son Michael James Penton in November 1984.

However, the inmate said he did not kill the Dallas girls, but he would not discuss the case in Ohio saying, "Due to the pending investigations against me I don't want to talk about that case." "But I did not kill Roxann Reyes, Christie Proctor or Christie Meeks. I only signed the plea agreements because I would be sitting on death row right now in Texas, and here I might have a chance that someone will listen to me."

He said another reason for pleading guilty was that he did not want to drag his family through another murder trial. He blamed the crimes on a Jordanian national he says fled the country before authorities could interview him.

But, he said, "If I had been on the jury if the Texas cases went to trial I would have convicted myself. It was in Collin County, which is a conservative county, and those people would have sent me to death row."

I asked him if he would have found himself guilty in the Ohio case and he again said yes.

DENIES INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the interview Penton, a former mechanic who moved between states in the 1980s, denied traveling across the country abducting, raping and killing children. He claims all of the police agencies and the FBI are conspiring against him to clear old abduction cases across the country.

"I'm not a monster, though I have been called a monster. But I didn't go around the country killing little kids. You can either accept that or not," he said loudly while using his hands to emphasize his claims. "They (the authorities) are working with each other just to clear up cases and I'm in prison and I can't get out there to clear up my name. Who is going to believe a man convicted of a child murder?"

Penton said when he was in Korea he solicited prostitutes, and some may have been underage. He said he used illegal narcotics, such as LSD and cocaine. He also said he obtained prescription medications and took them while serving in the military.

"I'm not going to lie. I was with a lot of prostitutes and some of them could have been underage," he said. "But I didn't fancy little kids like the cops say. It wasn't so much that I fancied the age as it was about the cleanliness. I mean there were a lot of diseases out there."

TROUBLES BEGIN

He would not talk about the death of his son, other than to say it was the first time he had been in trouble with

police, but he did say he appealed his guilt.

But Penton fled from Texas while on bond and was on the lam until apprehended in Ohio in 1988. He said he did not flee and his bondsman knew where he was every day.

“I was not even a fugitive from justice when they caught me,” he said.

He denied allegations that he attempted to kidnap other girls in Dallas who escaped and later identified him through hypnosis.

Penton said he knew that he might be deemed the most prolific child killer in history, but said he was not concerned with the stigma placed upon him, because he could not change what people believed.

“People are going to believe what they want to believe about me, and there’s nothing I can do. I mean, like I said, I am sitting in prison and I can’t clear my name,” he said.

When asked if he would fight new charges or simply sign another plea, his first reply was, “Do you know the date (of the crime)?” Then he added “I’m going to trial in the Indiana case regardless, and if they put me on death row then so be it, because I’m better off on death row because someone will listen to me. It’s so frustrating that I want to bang my head, because no one listens to me.”

ACCUSATIONS REFUTED

In regard to possible DNA evidence, Penton said there is no evidence against him in any case and he blamed cellmates — including former cellmate Jeffrey Sunnykalb — as using him in attempts to shorten their time in prison.

Penton said Sunnykalb, a convicted Ohio child molester, knew who Penton was when the two became cellmates in 1997.

“He knew who I was because in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and so on I had more publicity than most people in America. I was known by everyone in the system and he (Sunnykalb) used me to try and get a deal,” he said.

Penton said the fact Sunnykalb still talks to authorities in relation to cases despite not getting any type of deal just shows the man has something against him.

Penton said the inmates use the Freedom of Information Act to obtain information regarding abduction cases then they claim they have new information.

However, police officials such as Garland Police Detective Gary Sweet, who has interviewed Penton, said the information is specific and not information shared through public information.

NO JUSTICE

Penton said, “This is my philosophy; there is no justice in America, no more for me at least. I am a poor defendant who cannot afford a top-notch defense team.

“Society isn’t worried about me, they have labeled me a predator and I have accepted that,” he said. He said a deathbed confession would detail, “No more than you already know.”

Closing the interview, Penton expressed sorrow for his family and the trials they have endured with him and said he knew he would never be a free man.

“If I don’t die by lethal injection I’m going to die of old age. I know that and my health is failing anyway. ... I’m just tired of fighting and I’m tired of being put through the ringer and you know you get to the point where you will yourself to die because you get sick of it. ... If I fell over dead tomorrow it would be doing everybody a favor. Then, everyone could conjecture, ‘Well we didn’t get him to trial but we still think he did it.’”

Following are excerpts from an interview Wednesday of convicted child serial killer David Elliot Penton with *Tyler*

Courier-Times--Telegraph reporter Kenneth Dean. Penton said he has never spoken about his crimes to any media outlet. The interview in the Toledo Correctional Institution lasted an hour and a half.

KD: Did you ever rape, try to kidnap, or fantasize about kidnapping little girls?

DP: I've already told you no. Here's the thing: If I did it, then I'd tell you I did it.

KD: Did you rape and murder Nydra Ross? (Penton was convicted of the murder in Ohio.)

DP: I'm not going to comment on that.

KD: Why not? You just said you would tell me.

DP: Look, I have 400 agencies investigating me right now, so they're going to come up and say, "Well, he confessed to this and confessed to that, and let's just go ahead and bank him."

KD: So you are saying all these agencies involved and all these people including the Federal Bureau of Investigation have got a conspiracy to keep David Penton behind bars and pin all these cases on him?

DP: Yes. Let me tell you what the FBI told me. They said they were going to remain neutral in the Texas cases. How can they remain neutral? If I did it, then I did it; if I didn't, then I didn't.

KD: Have you ever bragged about killing kids? (Former cellmates have told authorities Penton has bragged about killing at least 50 children.)

DP: Why would I go around here bragging about killing kids? I don't have to brag about killing so other inmates will leave me alone. I'd just pick up a mop handle and bop them in the head.

KD: Did you kill Christie Proctor, Christi Meeks or Roxann Reyes? (In 2005, Penton pleaded guilty to capital murder in these three cases.)

DP: No, I did not.

KD: Did you kill any other kids?

DP: No, I have told you, I didn't go around killing kids.

KD: So you are telling me that you have never killed any children, including Nydra Ross?

DP: I didn't say that. What I'm saying is if I did it, then I did it, and I said I'm not talking about the Ross case.

KD: But by your admission, through pleading guilty to the Reyes, Meeks and Proctor cases and your two previous convictions, you have killed five kids, right?

DP: Correct.

KD: Have you ever been to East Texas?

DP: Yes, I have been through there several times. I lived in Texas for five years, but I didn't know anyone there.

KD: Where were you on April 2, 1986?

DP: Was that a weekday or a weekend? Because if it was a weekday, I was working in Ohio, and a lot of times I worked on weekends. But yes, I was in Texas in the 1980s. I was stationed there.

KD: If you are getting that needle in your arm, are you finally going to say...

DP: I'm going to tell them what I've done in life before they put that needle in my arm. I'm going to call somebody and tell them everything so I will have a clear conscience.

KD: Will it be a lot more than what you are saying you have done?

DP: No. No more than what you know already. Accept it or reject it — that is up to you.

KD: When someone sits down and writes the next book about serial killers, will your name be at the top of the page?

DP: Oh, absolutely.

KD: Does that give you cause for concern?

DP: No.

KD: Why not?

DP: Because there is nothing I can do about it. I'm just a monster, a hideous idiot, a demon from hell that goes around the country killing little kids, and I've been labeled that and no one listens to me.

Convicted Killer Mentions Another Possible Victim

March 05, 2007

Authorities are investigating whether an Ohio prison inmate who pleaded guilty to killing three young Dallas-area girls in the 1980s could also be responsible for the disappearance of an East Texas girl.

David Elliott Penton, who is serving a life sentence for killing a 9-year-old Columbus girl in 1988, allegedly mentioned 5-year-old Ara "Niece" Johnson to fellow inmates, said Detective Freddie Fitzgerald of the Upshur County sheriff's office.

Ara was abducted from her bedroom in Big Sandy, about 95 miles east of Dallas, in April 1986.

"We have to talk to him - there is no getting around it," Fitzgerald said. "We have to err on the side of caution, but this information brings hope to a case where hope was all but abandoned."

In a prison interview, Penton told the Tyler Morning Telegraph authorities are using him as a scapegoat to settle old cases that he had nothing to do with.

"I'm not a monster, though I have been called a monster. But I didn't go around the country killing little kids," Penton told the newspaper.

Penton pleaded guilty to manslaughter in 1985 for the death of his 2-month-old son in Bell County in central Texas. Police said he shook the child. He fled during an appeal of that case.

In 2001, he was convicted in Ohio of the sexual assault and murder of a friend's 9-year-old girl. Penton was brought back to Texas two years later to face charges in the 1985 and 1987 deaths of three Dallas-area girls - ages 3, 5 and 10 - and pleaded guilty in all three deaths.

Penton also is a suspect in the cases of two other Texas girls who vanished in the mid-1980s, said Garland police Detective Gary Sweet, who investigated Penton for seven years.

Child killer David Elliot Penton

By KENNETH DEAN - TylerPaper.com

April 19, 2007

BIG SANDY — A child serial killer convicted in three Dallas- area abductions and murders in the 1980s is now a “person of interest” in the 1986 abduction of a Big Sandy girl.

For more than two decades there were no leads in the disappearance of 5-year-old Ara “Niece” Johnson, apparently snatched from her bed in the middle of the night. Now, Upshur County Sheriff detectives say fresh information points to 49-year-old David Elliot Penton.

Penton, a mechanic who drifted from Ohio to Texas, is being held in Ohio for the abduction and murder of a 9-year-old Ohio girl. In addition, he has confessed to the Dallas-area cases.

Officials in Texas and several other states are investigating the possibility Penton may be in-volved with other unsolved child disappearances after cellmates claimed he bragged about killing more than 50 children.

Niece’s disappearance on April 2, 1986, has stumped authorities and remained unsolved with no clues or suspects.

After learning that Penton allegedly spoke of Ara Johnson to cellmates, Upshur County sheriff detective Freddie Fitzgerald told the Tyler Courier-Times—Telegraph they now consider the Ohio inmate a “strong person of interest” in her abduction.

“From the information we are getting we definitely need to talk to him (Penton),” he said. “We have to talk to him — there is no getting around it.”

The seasoned lawman added, “We have to err on the side of caution, but this information brings hope to a case where hope was all but abandoned.”

ABDUCTED

Niece was last seen by her father about 2:30 a.m. the day she disappeared. A search by law enforcement using tracking dogs and on horseback turned up no clues to the girl’s whereabouts, according to sheriff officials at the time.

Authorities noted there was no forced entry into the mobile home in the 300 block of Boulder Street and the rear door was left open. The bedspread she was sleeping under was also missing from the home, but there were no signs of a struggle and her parents said they didn’t hear anything unusual.

James and Ophelia Johnson made passionate pleas through the media for the safe return of their only daughter, but the case soon grew cold.

Since the disappearance, James has died and attempts to reach Mrs. Johnson over a two-week period have been unsuccessful.

Niece was added to the Texas Clearinghouse of Missing Persons and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, but no information surfaced in the investigation until late last month when detectives learned about Penton.

“He tossed out the name of a little girl abducted here in Big Sandy, Texas, and he is in an Ohio prison serving life sentences for this same type of crime,” Lt. David Dickerson, also with the Upshur County Sheriff’s Department, said. “That really interests me because who has ever heard of Big Sandy? And he was in Texas about the same time as her disappearance.”

Within 18 months of Niece’s disappearance, three abductions occurred in the Dallas area with authorities finding the bodies of Christi Lynn Meeks, 5, Christie Diane Proctor, 9, and 4-year-old Roxann Reyes.

SERIAL CHILD KILLER?

Garland Police detective Gary Sweet has spent seven years working cases against Penton, a man he describes as intelligent, elusive and cunning.

Sweet, who worked the kidnapping and murder cases of the three Dallas-area girls, has interviewed Penton and some of cellmates and other young girls who Penton allegedly attempted to kidnap.

The abductions in Dallas began with Meeks, who was kidnapped from her mother's front yard as she played on Jan. 19, 1985. Her decomposing body was found several months later about 40 miles away in Lake Texoma after it surfaced. She had been strangled and drowned, a report showed.

As detectives worked the Meeks case, Proctor was kidnapped while walking home in north Dallas in February 1986. Her body was discovered in a field in the Plano area, two years later. According to a medical examiner and forensic evidence, she had been raped and strangled. Reyes was kidnapped while picking wildflowers for her mother near her Garland apartment Nov. 3, 1987. She was found in Murphy one year later. Evidence also suggested she had been raped and strangled.

Sweet said Texas authorities are looking at Penton as a suspect in the disappearances of Angelica Gandara, 11, of Temple, missing since July 14, 1985, Amber Nicole Crum, 2, of Dallas, missing since Dec. 26, 1983 and Johnson.

"He won't come right out and admit the crimes, but the inmates all had specific information about each missing girl," he said.

The Collin County District Attorney's office was prepared to move forward with the capital murder trial against Penton and seek the death penalty four years ago.

In their arsenal prosecutors had information that Penton had attempted several other kidnappings in Dallas in the 1980s and those victims had identified him after he was indicted on the capital murder charges in 2003.

Records in Collin County contained allegations, which have never been made public, that he possessed child pornography and verbally expressed fantasies of kidnapping, sexually assaulting and murdering young school girls in Franklin County Ohio.

The records also quoted one of Penton's ex-wives who told prosecutors that her ex-husband had sexually assaulted her daughter and had tortured and killed small animals while stationed at Fort Hood in the 1980s.

Letters to his family while he was jailed in Texas pending the trial were also part of the file in Collin County. Using immaculate penmanship, Penton expressed his innocence in letters to his family.

A statement by Collin County District Attorney John Roach said his office was seeking the death penalty.

"The acceptance and prosecution of these cases will serve as a notice to anyone who would abduct and murder our children that we will not forget," he said in 2003. "We will not forget the killer, we will not forget the crime and we will not forget the victims."

Before the cases could go to trial, Penton avoided the death penalty, pleaded guilty to the capital murder charges levied against him. He was convicted and received three concurrent life sentences in January 2005.

WHO IS PENTON?

Investigators and court records paint a picture of a troubled man who crisscrossed the country venting rage against children.

David Elliot Penton was born Feb. 9, 1958, and was raised in Columbus, Ohio, by his mother. His father abandoned both the mother and child.

After graduating high school he joined the U.S. Army in 1977 where he specialized as a track vehicle mechanic until 1984.

He quickly made a name for himself as an expert marksman and a soldier, who superiors called "highly motivated," with an excellent record.

In 1980 he was charged with storing alcohol in his foot locker and a few months later he was charged with lying about his marital status to obtain military benefits for which he was not entitled.

He was demoted from sergeant to specialist.

In 1984 while stationed at Ford Hood, Penton would face his first charges of killing a child.

A Bell County medical examiner told authorities Penton violently shook his 2-month-old son to death in a "fit of rage," because the child would not stop crying. Penton pleaded guilty to a manslaughter charge and was discharged from the Army. While out on bond appealing his case, Penton fled from Texas authorities and began crossing the nation.

He remained on the lam until he was arrested for the murder of a friend's niece in Ohio three years later.

The abduction, rape and murder of 9-year-old Nydra Ross, whose body was found in a creek bed, led authorities to Penton, who admitted to smoking crack and doing other illegal narcotics with the girl's family members. He was placed into custody and convicted by a jury in 2001 where he received a life sentence in prison.

After his arrest in Ohio, Texas authorities learned of Penton and began their own investigation into the man who made numerous trips between the two states. They were especially interested in the striking similarities between the Ohio and Texas cases, but they could not tie Penton to the Dallas area crimes.

Eight years later, cellmates of the convicted child killer would go to authorities with new information about several cases.

Armed with the new evidence and the cellmates' information, Penton was extradited to Collin County, Texas for the murders and was to face the death penalty.

However before the case went to a jury, Penton pleaded guilty.

Sweet said Penton is evasive, but intelligent and seems to take pleasure in bragging about his "killing spree," which may span multiple states.

"He (Penton) has made claims to killing more than 50 children across the states," he said. "I personally believe the actual number is between 25 and 30."

NEW CHARGES

Mark Harper, a private investigator close to the case, said officials in Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Alabama, Michigan, Georgia and several other states are also looking at Penton as a possible person of interest.

Penton is also a suspect in the abduction of 6-year-old Shannon Marie Sherrill, who was last seen in Thorntown, Ind., playing hide and seek with friends on Oct. 5, 1986.

Harper was hired by the Sherrill family to investigate the abduction of their child after the case by law enforcement stalled.

Penton is scheduled to be extradited to Indiana later this month to face charges in the case.

"I believe this guy may be responsible for an enormous number of missing girls and although I was hired by the Sherrill family to find their daughter's killer, I want every case this monster might have been involved in solved before he dies," he said. "I want these families to have some closure as to what happened to their children."

Harper has worked with detectives across the country including Gary Sweet and the two men have shared a wealth of information regarding Penton.

Sweet said after interviewing Penton and his cellmates he knew about the Johnson case and he is now working with

Dickerson and Fitzgerald and the three lawmen are sharing information.

"It's my belief that Penton is their guy," Sweet said.

"I feel pretty certain he is responsible for Ara's abduction.

Fitzgerald told the newspaper Thursday he and Dickerson are planning to look at Sweet's files to better prepare themselves for a meeting with the man labeled a "monster" by Collin County officials.

"Before we go up there to talk to him, we want to make sure we have all the information available to know how to question this individual," he said.

Fitzgerald said a capital murder charge is not out of the question.

"It is definitely a possibility because she was abducted out of her house, against her will and if she was killed then it would be a capital murder case," he said.

Sweet summed up his involvement with the Penton cases.

"What case can you work that is more important than a child abduction and murder?" he said.

"I am a parent and this is a parent's worst nightmare."

David Elliot Penton

Dallas Morning News

Jan. 7, 2005

Inmate avoids death for area girls' killings----Plea deal closes book on 3 children's abduction-slayings

Days before the start of his capital murder trial, an Ohio prison inmate pleaded guilty Thursday to the abductions and slayings of 3 Dallas-area girls more than 17 years ago.

David Elliott Penton was accused in the strangulation deaths of Roxann Hope Reyes, 3, Christie Diane Proctor, 9, and Christi Lynn Meeks, 5. Jury selection was to begin Monday in the Reyes case.

Mike Meeks, father of one of the victims, was incensed by David Penton's plea deal. In a plea agreement with Collin County prosecutors, Mr. Penton, 47, avoided the death penalty by accepting a sentence that should keep him behind bars for life. He is now convicted of killing five children, including his own infant son.

"The man is a devil. He has no soul. He has no heart," said Tamela Lopez, Roxann's mother, sobbing that she had hoped her daughter's killer would die for his crime.

The agreement, approved by state District Judge Nathan White, comes almost 20 years after Christi Meeks disappeared during a game of hide-and-seek outside her mother's Mesquite apartment complex. Her body was found almost 3 months later in Lake Texoma, and the slaying brought national attention to the plight of missing and abducted children.

Christie Proctor's body was found in a south Plano field in April 1988, more than 2 years after the fourth-grader was last seen walking from her North Dallas apartment to a friend's house. Roxann Reyes was snatched from an alley while playing outside her Garland apartment in November 1987. Her body was found 6 months later in Murphy, east of Plano.

The girls' families said Thursday that they are consoled that their daughters' killer is in custody, but they wanted Mr.

Penton put to death for his crimes.

"For 18 months, I've been told this man was going to die. I was told from day one that this was a death penalty case," said Mike Meeks, Christi's father. "They [prosecutors] are taking the easy way out, in my opinion."

Prosecutors said they agreed to the lesser punishment because they feared that evidence showing that Mr. Penton may have been out of Texas when Roxann was killed could hurt their case.

Before announcing the agreement Thursday, Greg Davis, Collin County first assistant district attorney, met with the victims' families and the police officers from Plano, Mesquite and Garland who had worked on the three cases over the years.

"These people have just flat lied to me," Mr. Meeks said. "They walked in there this morning and said they cannot try this case because they don't think they can win."

Edwin King, lead defense attorney, said the plea agreement was a "fair resolution" and called the state's evidence against Mr. Penton "very thin." Mr. King said recent evidence found by the defense shows that Mr. Penton received pay from another state during the time of one of the murders.

He said that the guilty pleas were Mr. Penton's decision and that going to trial would have been a gamble.

Gregg Gibbs, another defense attorney, said the new information was "not rock solid, not bulletproof" but would have improved Mr. Penton's chances at trial.

Ms. Lopez, who now lives in Ohio, said that the last time she saw Roxann, her daughter gave her a handful of flowers she'd picked outside and kissed her cheek. She still celebrates Roxann's birthday with a cake each January and collects Beanie Babies for her. She would have been 21 this month.

Roxann had another handful of flowers when a playmate saw her get into a car with a man after he promised her ice cream and candy. Roxann apparently thought Mr. Penton was her father's friend because she had seen him around their apartment complex, Ms. Lopez said.

"I won't ever forgive him," she said, "but I know she has. I'm just glad he won't be able to hurt another."

Laura Proctor, Christie's mother, agreed. "He can harm no other child. Essentially, he'll die in jail," she said.

The girl's father, Howard Sherrill, said "there is some sense of closure. I personally would have preferred the death penalty." He added that he was consoled by the idea that Mr. Penton will likely never be free.

When asked whether Mr. Penton was admitting to the crimes or only trying to save his life, his attorney, Mr. King, replied, "That's between God, Mr. Penton and three little girls."

Mr. Meeks said he had believed that police had his daughter's killer but now isn't so sure.

"From what I got today, a guy can plead to anything," he said. "He wants to save himself from being killed. I'm not even sure at this point that he did it."

Mr. Davis, the assistant district attorney, said he believed that Mr. Penton's confession was honest and "that he killed all three of these murdered girls."

The prosecutor said he, too, wanted Mr. Penton to be sentenced to die.

"I think David Penton was very deserving of the death penalty," he said. "His crimes were heinous."

Bill Hobson, assistant Mesquite police chief, investigated Christi's disappearance. He said no case has moved him more in 33 years with the department.

"It's kind of a quiet satisfaction in knowing that we've pursued this thing for so many years and here's a successful

conclusion," he said.

"There's still a lot of emotion in this case. But part of me feels that, 'OK, Christi, you can rest easy now.'"

Mr. Penton is serving a life sentence in Ohio for the abduction and killing of 9-year-old Nydra Ross, who disappeared from her aunt's Columbus home in 1988.

Under the agreement approved Thursday, he will complete his sentence in Ohio, where he is eligible for parole in 2027. After completing his punishment there, Mr. Penton will serve three consecutive life sentences in Texas.

"In my opinion, he'll never see the ground in Ohio, much less Texas," said Mr. Gibbs, his attorney.

For years, authorities suspected Mr. Penton in the three Dallas-area slayings, in part because the Texas victims died in a fashion similar to the Ohio girl. At least 2 of the Texas victims were sexually assaulted. But investigators lacked enough evidence to charge the former Fort Hood soldier, who was arrested by Ohio authorities in 1988.

Mr. Penton was honorably discharged from the Army in late 1985 in Killeen, Texas. He pleaded guilty that year to manslaughter in the Bell County death of his 1-month-old son. He fled during an appeal of his sentence, and his whereabouts were unknown until his 1988 arrest in Ohio.

In 2003, Plano police forwarded charges against Mr. Penton to Collin County prosecutors, declining to publicly reveal what new evidence connected the inmate with the local killings.

He was extradited to Texas in 2003 after a Collin County grand jury indicted him on 3 counts of capital murder.

Prosecutors said Thursday that a collection of evidence, including the words of jailhouse snitches in Ohio, led them to seek the indictment against Mr. Penton.

Prosecutors said Mr. Penton told fellow inmates in Ohio about the Texas cases. Those inmates came forward with information about the deaths and were not given any deals in return, Mr. Davis said.

A TIMELINE OF DAVID PENTON'S CRIMES

Jan. 19, 1985: Five-year-old Christi Lynn Meeks is abducted while playing outside her mother's apartment in Mesquite.

April 3, 1985: Christi's body is found floating in Lake Texoma.

Feb. 15, 1986: Christie Diane Proctor, 9, of North Dallas is reported missing by her family. She was last seen walking to a friend's house.

Nov. 3, 1987: 3-year-old Roxann Hope Reyes is abducted from behind her mother's Garland home at the Meadow Terrace Apartments while playing with a friend in the late afternoon.

April 1988: Christie Proctor's body is found in a south Plano field more than 2 years after her disappearance. About the same time, David Elliott Penton is arrested in the slaying of Nydra Ross, 9, of Dayton, Ohio.

May 19, 1988: The body of Roxann Reyes is found in Murphy, just east of Plano.

Aug. 15, 1988: Area detectives acknowledge that Mr. Penton is being questioned in the deaths of the 3 Dallas-area girls, but they can't find evidence that he was in Texas at the time of the abduction-slayings.

May 10, 1990: Mr. Penton is indicted on charges of kidnapping and killing Nydra Ross.

1992: Mr. Penton is convicted and sentenced to life in prison for killing Nydra. He will be eligible for parole in 2027.

May 21, 2003: Plano police charge Mr. Penton in the abduction-slayings of Christi Meeks, Christie Proctor and Roxann Reyes. Collin County authorities say that if Mr. Penton is indicted on the charges, they will seek the death

penalty.

June 17, 2003: A Collin County grand jury indicts Mr. Penton in the abduction-slayings of the 3 girls.

Aug. 2003: Mr. Penton is extradited to Texas.

January 2004: A jury trial is scheduled in the Reyes case.

Jan. 6, 2005: Mr. Penton pleads guilty to the murders of the 3 Dallas-area girls. He will remain in prison for life, first finishing his sentence in Ohio before facing his sentence in Texas.



Convicted murderer David Elliot Penton is shown in prison in Toledo, Ohio, in this undated photo.



Christi Lynn Meeks, 5, victim.