



## Mutilated Horse Baffles Police in Des Moines, Iowa

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*As bizarre as it is, something came along and removed half the face from the horse."*

- Sgt. Max Halverson, Des Moines, Iowa Police Department



The warm body of a male horse was found dead in a Des Moines, Iowa, pasture on January 4, 2003, with the right side of its head stripped of flesh to dry bone, without blood.

Earthfiles, news category.

**January 21, 2003 Des Moines, Iowa** - On the morning of January 4, 2003, owners of a horse stable in Des Moines, Iowa were putting out feed when they noticed that one of the male horses owned by Roy and Margie Whitten was missing. All the horses were fine the day before. But during the search, the horse's body, still warm to touch, was found dead and mutilated in a pasture about a half mile from the stable. Like so many of the hundreds of horses and thousands of cattle also found dead and mutilated around the world since the 1960s, the right side of the horse's head was stripped of flesh to dry bone, without blood.



The Des Moines Police Department is withholding photographs of the January 4, 2003, horse mutilation, but this photograph shows another similar mutilation of a fourteen-year-old gelding found June 22, 1993, in Raymer, Colorado, by owner and horse raiser Doris Williams.

Photograph by Mike Peters, *The Greeley Tribune*.

The lead investigator on the case is Sgt. Max Halverson in the Animal Control Unit of the Des Moines, Iowa Police Department. Sgt. Halverson told me this week he worked in the Robbery/Homicide division for seven years and in Traffic investigating fatalities for five years. He's never seen anything like the bloodless removal of half a horse's face before now.

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## Interview:

**Sgt. Max Halverson, Des Moines, Iowa Police Department, Animal Control Unit:** "I contacted our intelligence section and had them ask not only the FBI, but the DCI for any similar cases in this area and they turned up nothing. This was so unusual that we threw all of our work force at it, trying to resolve it right off. And we're still in that process.

WAS THE EXCISION VERY CLEAN LEAVING NO FLESH OF ANY KIND ON THE BONE?

Yes, it was. The entire side of the face was removed completely behind the line of the skull, the jaw bone and up the center line of the nose. This was a knife cut excision, but it was not a clean excision, not just one line. It was like they were peeling flesh back and hacking at the same time. Like someone with a pair of scissors cutting through paper, there are several stops and starts in it. So, we think that's clear indication that a knife was used in this case and that the side of the face was cleaned back down to the bone, the whole side of the face.

WHICH IS DIFFICULT, EVEN FOR BIRDS TO DO?

Yes, it is. I'm keeping an open mind. I don't think birds were involved in it because we had no bird droppings around it which would have been a normal occurrence if they were there feeding on the flesh.

GENTALS WERE INTACT?

Yes. There are no marks on the animal anywhere to indicate anything, and that's what is real mystifying. We are either looking at someone injected something into this horse to bring it down, or it died of natural causes, some sort of disease.

AND THEN SOMETHING CAME...

As bizarre as it is, something came along and removed half the face from the horse.

DID THE PERSON DOING THE NECROPSY EXAMINE TO SEE IF THE TONGUE, TRACHEA OR ESOPHAGUS WERE REMOVED?

We did a complete necropsy right out there in the field. We split this animal stem to stern. Everything else was in place. The trachea had some indications that the horse had suffocated some during its death throws, but nothing was cut or removed as far as tongue, trachea or any other organs or any other marks on the horse whatsoever.

If you are knowledgeable, what we are looking at right now is a tetanus type disease that is in the soil and can pass through a wound into the animal and they die of poisoning from the bacteria.

FROM THE VETERINARIAN PATHOLOGIST'S POINT OF VIEW, THE ANIMAL MIGHT HAVE DIED FROM TETANUS AND THEN THIS EXCISION FROM THE FACE WAS DONE?

Yes. And the lack of blood, just a small amount of blood, indicates that the animal was already dead when this occurred. The time element here is that maybe we have a 24-hour period we're looking at. It was about 20 degrees F. during the evening and the *carcass was still warm enough* that it was probably within 12 hours that the death had occurred. (Linda Howe's emphasis.)

IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO REMOVE ALL TISSUE FROM BONE WITHOUT BOILING IT.

I'm aware of (the difficulty to remove). In fact, the jaw part of the horse was almost dry in appearance. All this is very curious to me and I'm trying to keep an open mind, but to believe other than human intervention at this time, I would be very skeptical of that. Not that I don't believe if we are leading down the path of UFOs or something like that not that I don't believe in that, but I would find it quite difficult.

THIS WAS THE ONLY HORSE AFFECTED AT THE STABLES?

Yes.

DID YOU OR THE OWNERS OF THE STABLE NOTICE ANY UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR ON THE PART OF THE OTHER HORSES?

Nobody said anything about it and we've interviewed quite a few people that were down there. Detectives are involved in this and they went out and interviewed everybody at that time. Nobody said anything about unusual occurrences. The only thing they mentioned was that when they went to feed the horses that morning, he did not come up to be fed like the rest of them.

AT THE SCENE, WAS THERE ENOUGH GRASS IN THE PASTURE UNDERNEATH THE HORSE TO NOTICE IF THERE WAS ANY DEPRESSION OR ANYTHING CHANGED ABOUT THE GRASS LAID DOWN ON THE SOIL?

Like I said, the horses go through this area. So, the grass - which is probably about knee-high in certain areas - was trampled. There was a lot of fecal material around the area where the horses go back there quite often. We didn't find any blood we searched the area for blood, footprints, tire tracks, anything, and couldn't find anything unusual around there. The horse had laid on its side for awhile and through flailing with its feet and all had cleared some grass, which would be normal death throws for this type of disease. That was the only indication that the horse had been down for some period. It didn't just drop dead. It was on its side suffering for some time.

IN THE NECROPSY, ALL THE INTERNAL ORGANS WERE THERE?

Yes. We took liver samples, spleen samples, urine samples. We took the esophagus, lungs, heart. We decapitated the animal and even took the head and sent it in up to Iowa State University for testing. But the horse, like I said, there were no injuries anywhere no cuts, no lacerations, no missing parts other than the side of the face which was the side that was up where the animal was laying.

DID YOU DO AN EXAMINATION OF THE EXCISION TO LOOK FOR THE PRESENCE OF HEAT?

We sent the whole head up to Iowa State University and there is no indication that heat was used on the incision. I even got down and looked at the incision. We even have hairs that were cut by what we assume to be the knife. And hairs, if there is heat, will melt and have a little bump on the side. There is no indication of that. On the jaw line of the horse, there is quite a bit of hair there where it was cut by a knife and it was cleanly cut. There was no melting the hairs.

IN YOUR DES MOINES OFFENSE REPORT FILES, DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER SIMILAR MUTILATION CASES OF CATTLE OR HORSES OR CATS?

I contacted our intelligence section and had them ask not only the FBI, but the DCI for any similar cases in this area and they turned up nothing.

This was so unusual that we threw all of our work force at it, trying to resolve it right off. And we're still in that process."

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## **More Information:**

If anyone has any information, please call:

Sgt. Max Halverson

Des Moines Police Department, Animal Control Unit   **515-242-2720**

## **Credits**

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