

83-Year-Old 'Man of God' Charged in Rape, Murder of Texas Beauty Queen

A former Catholic priest has been charged in a 55-year-old murder case in which he is suspected of beating and raping a beauty queen in south Texas shortly after taking her last confession, authorities said on Wednesday.

John Feit, 83, was arrested on Tuesday evening in Arizona in connection with the 1960 slaying of Irene Garza, 25, in McAllen, Texas, according to the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office in Arizona.

He is being held on \$750,000 bond pending extradition to Texas. During an initial court appearance Wednesday, Feit told a Maricopa County judge he will fight the return to Texas.

"This whole thing makes no sense to me because the crime in question took place in 1960," Feit said, in a court video posted on the county website. "I'm totally puzzled why something is coming up now, after the fact." Garza, a former Miss South Texas and second-grade school teacher, was last seen giving confession during Holy Week at Sacred Heart Catholic Church on April 16, 1960, according to the Texas Rangers cold case website.

Her body was found five days later in a nearby canal. An autopsy showed that Garza had been raped while comatose and died of suffocation.

Feit was long considered by authorities to be a suspect in the case but was not indicted. During a 2013 interview with CNN, he denied any involvement in Garza's death.

Shortly after Garza's body was found, Feit was ordered by his

church superiors to leave McAllen, the *Dallas Morning News* reported.

He also had been implicated in the assault of another woman in the area a few weeks before Garza's disappearance. He pleaded no contest to aggravated assault and served no jail time.

Feit later left the priesthood and moved to Arizona, where he started a family.

Hidalgo County District Attorney Ricardo Rodriguez could not be reached for comment on Wednesday. After Feit was arrested, the McAllen Monitor newspaper asked Rodriguez what new information led to the charge but he declined to comment.

Garza's family, who set up a "Justice for Irene" Facebook page, posted on Tuesday: "Today Irene Garza gets to finally . Justice has been served." {eoa}

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