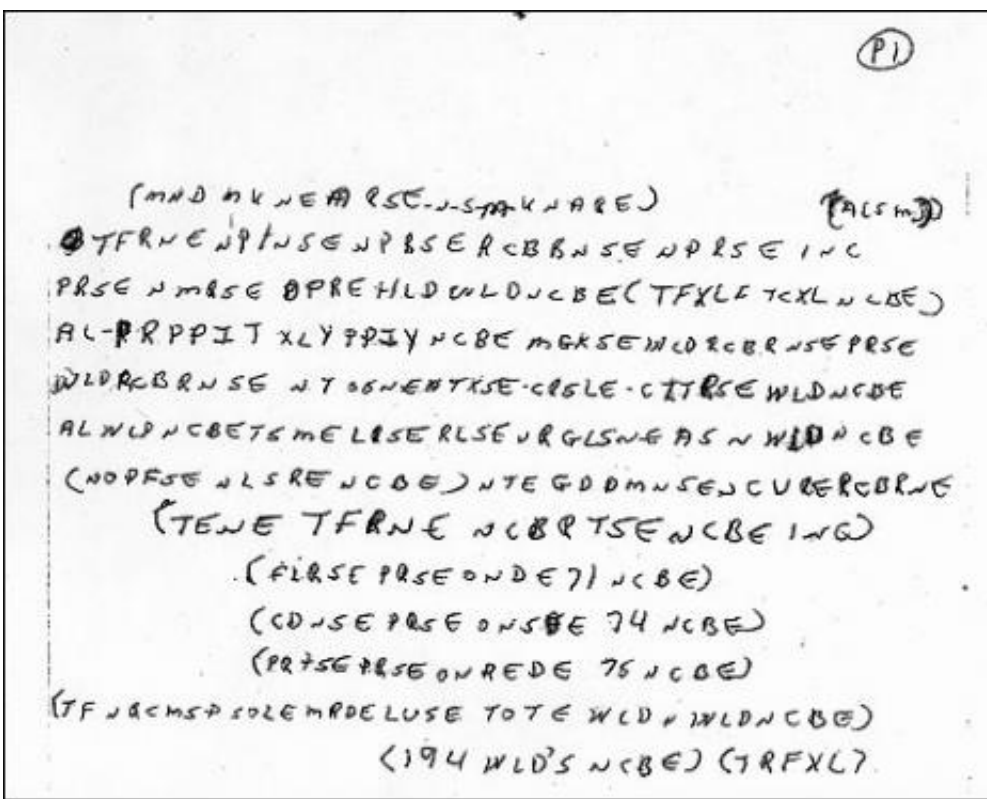


# FBI wants public to help break murdered man's code

April 6 2011



The meanings of the coded notes remain a mystery to this day

A lifelong fan of codes, Ricky McCormick wrote out two pages of letters, numbers and symbols and stuck them in his pocket. His body was found in a Missouri cornfield in the summer of 1999, those two sheets of paper still in his pants.

ALPONTE GLSE - SE ERTE, one line read. Is that a coded plea for help? A reminder to pick up the laundry from the cleaners? The beginnings of a commentary on the weather in St. Louis?

If you know, the FBI's top code-breaking unit wants your help in breaking McCormick's [code](#) — one that has baffled government cryptologists for more than a decade — and perhaps solving his murder.

Dan Olson, chief of the [FBI](#) Laboratory's Cryptanalysis & Racketeering Records Unit, said the papers found on the body of 41-year-old McCormick could be the key in figuring out why he was murdered.

But none of their cryptologists has been able to break the code created by McCormick, a high school dropout, even after years of work, Olson said. So the FBI is turning to the public for help, hoping that someone out there recognizes the code used by McCormick on the two papers posted by the agency at [1.usa.gov/evCb2i](http://1.usa.gov/evCb2i) .

Police said McCormick had experimented with codes and ciphers for much of his life.

"We asked the family, and they said he did it quite often," said Lt. Craig McGuire of the St. Charles County Sheriff's Department. "Nobody really knows what it means. It's kind of like private diary writing."

Officials said that what would help the most would be someone who has a sample of McCormick's coded system or even something similar to it so they can run a comparison.

The FBI has been trying to break the code on and off since 2001, Olson said. They have tried just about all of the standard routes of cryptanalysis that the top experts use, he said, so the FBI didn't bother asking for help from the government's chief code-breaking agency, the

National Security Agency, and its high-powered computers in the Maryland suburbs just outside the capital.

"The answer is going to come from a non-cryptological source," Olson said.

McCormick's decomposing body was found on June 30, 1999, in a cornfield near West Alton, Mo., by county sheriff's officers. He had last been seen five days before his body was found and he had never been reported missing.

Since the FBI first made its plea for help last week, more than 1,000 tips have come in — so many by mail and phone that the FBI established a Web page at [forms.fbi.gov/code](http://forms.fbi.gov/code) to help handle the flood. But nothing so far has given agents the breakthrough they need to figure out what McCormick was writing.

There is the possibility that no one will ever be able to break McCormick's code. The FBI is still working on breaking the code created by the Zodiac killer, a serial killer who operated in California in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"We are really good at what we do, but we could use some help with this one," Olson said.

**More information:** [www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2011/...cryptanalysis\\_032911](http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2011/...cryptanalysis_032911)

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