

Nine Arrested In Raid On Drug, Gambling Ring

BY ERIC CARLSON

A man police say was the kingpin for a major five-county illicit lottery operation was among the nine people arrested for the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department drug squad raided two Leland mobile homes allegedly used for cocaine trafficking, gambling and illegal liquor sales.

Among the items seized at what one officer called a "mini-country club" was a pound of white powder believed to be cocaine, more than \$37,000 cash, numerous firearms, \$16,000 worth of gold jewelry, 42 cases of beer, numerous bottles of liquor, a Dodge van and about 25,000 lottery tickets.

The two mobile homes are located at the end of a dirt road in Ballard's Mobile Home Park in the Phoenix area near Leland, Detective Lt. David Crocker said Monday.

"It's an isolated area where 90 percent of the residents are family members," Crocker said. "They maintain a surveillance with spotters who watch for outsiders."

One of the trailers was used for drug trafficking, Crocker said. Another trailer and a garage apartment were used as headquarters for the lottery gambling operation. One room was set up with a bar, where customers could have a drink while they waited for drugs or lottery results, he said.

After making an undercover purchase of cocaine at the mobile home park Thursday afternoon, detectives arrested four men and a woman on multiple drug trafficking charges. Three other women were charged with lottery violations.

A fourth suspect, Hardy Ballard Jr. (also known as "Rev" or "Shorty"), 39, turned himself in to sheriff's detectives Tuesday. He is believed to be the head of the gambling operation and was charged with three misdemeanors involving the possession and sale of lottery tickets.

"Mr. Ballard is THE lottery connection for Brunswick, New Hanover, Pender, Columbus and Bladen counties," said Crocker.

Ballard allegedly supervised the operation of at least a dozen "houses" in the five-county area where customers could place bets ranging from \$1 to \$100 on the winning three-digit number in the New York or Illinois lotteries, Crocker said. The numbers are published daily in some newspapers.

The houses were operated by "writers" who would bring Ballard the money collected and copies of their daily sales receipts. Ledgers and account books documenting each writer's activities were among the items seized from Ballard's trailer, Crocker said.

Police believe that more than \$50,000 in confiscated cash and jewelry were proceeds from Ballard's gambling business.

"We can't seem to find any legitimate source of revenue for Mr. Ballard," Crocker said.

Thursday's raid at Ballard's Mobile Home Park culminated an extensive two-year undercover investigation involving the Brunswick, New Hanover and Onslow County sheriff's departments with assistance from the State Bureau of Investigation Crocker said.

Informants had given detectives evidence of numerous drug transactions at Ballard's mobile home park, according to an application for a search warrant on file at the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office. One informant allegedly told police that Ballard had been selling cocaine for more than five years.

After making several purchases of cocaine at the mobile home park from Debra Elaine (a.k.a. "Bootsie") Robbins, 34, an undercover agent arranged to purchase a pound of cocaine, Crocker said. The agent showed her \$35,000 cash and she agreed to the deal, telling him to come back the next day.

Armed with search warrants for both trailers,

Brunswick detectives made the deal and arrested Robbins and others involved in the operation. The white powder and cash used to make the purchase were recovered, Crocker said.

As police searched the mobile home, a detective saw one of the co-conspirators make a phone call from a nearby store. A short time later, two women were seen running out of Ballard's home carrying a heavily-loaded duffel bag and a plastic garbage bag.

The two were stopped and the duffel bag was found to be stuffed with more than 25,000 lottery tickets, Crocker said. The garbage bag contained a set of triple-beam scales of the type commonly used to weigh drugs.

In a search of the two trailers and Ballard's garage apartment, detectives seized loaded handguns, two shotguns, a safe, a fax machine, two cash registers, several calculators, two Rolex watches and other jewelry, a 35mm camera, two video cameras, courier radios, a scanner and stacks of papers believed to be business records of illegal activities, Crocker said.

The confiscated white powder, thought to be cocaine, was sent to the SBI laboratory in Raleigh for qualitative and quantitative analysis, Crocker said.

Those arrested in the case, with their charges include:

■Hardy Ballard Jr., one count each of possessing lottery tickets, acting as an agent in this state for a lottery, selling lottery tickets and possession of drug paraphernalia;

■Debra Elaine Robbins, three counts each of selling and delivering cocaine and possession with the intent to sell and deliver cocaine and one count each of conspiring to traffic in cocaine by selling, delivering, transporting and possessing more than 400 grams of the drug; and one count each of trafficking by selling, delivering and possessing between 28 and 200 grams of cocaine;

(Each step of a cocaine transaction—possession, transport, delivery and sales—can constitute a separate

trafficking offense punishable by a minimum mandatory sentence of 35 years in prison.)

■Julius Drake Lewis (a.k.a. "Buddy"), 37, of Hevener Road Leland, conspiracy to sell and deliver cocaine and one count each of trafficking by possession, transport, delivery and sales of 400 grams of cocaine;

■Jack Lowers Bessent, 29, of Wilmington, conspiracy to sell and deliver cocaine and one count each of trafficking by possession, transport, delivery and sales of 400 grams of cocaine;

■Harvey Lee Grady (a.k.a. "Bird"), 29, of Old Cedar Hill Road, Leland, conspiracy to sell and deliver cocaine and one count each of trafficking by possession, transport, delivery and sales of 400 grams of cocaine;

■James Franklin Simmons, 34, of Holly Ridge, conspiracy to sell and deliver cocaine and one charge each of trafficking by possession, transport, delivery and sales of 400 grams of cocaine;

■Mary Jane Ballard, 37, of Lane Trail, Leland, one count each of possessing lottery tickets, acting as an agent for a lottery, selling lottery tickets, dealing in lottery tickets, possession of drug paraphernalia and possession of an alcoholic beverage for sale;

■Latoya Benita McKinney, 16, of Lang Road, Leland, one count each of possession of lottery tickets, acting as an agent for a lottery, selling lottery tickets, dealing in lottery tickets and possession of drug paraphernalia;

■Tommie Catherine McKinney, 41, of Atlanta, Ga., one count each of possession of lottery tickets, acting as an agent for a lottery, selling lottery tickets, dealing in lottery tickets and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Still in jail Tuesday (with their bond) were Robbins, \$250,000; Lewis, \$125,000; Bessent, \$125,000; Grady, \$125,000; and Simmons, \$50,000. Mary Ballard, Latoya McKinney and Tommie McKinney were released on \$2,000 bond. Hardy Ballard was freed on \$5,000 bond.

Active Prison Terms Given In Burglaries, Sex Offenses

One of four men charged in a series of home break-ins last summer in the Supply and Bolivia areas was sentenced to 14 years in prison after pleading guilty in Brunswick County Superior Court to 38 felony charges.

Timothy L. Barnes, 26, of Route 3, Supply, pleaded guilty to 12 counts each of second-degree burglary, felonious larceny, possession of stolen goods and one charge each of obtaining property under false pretenses and conspiracy to obtain property by false pretense.

Barnes, his brother and two other men were indicted in late August on charges stemming from the theft of more than \$10,000 worth of property from homes mostly in the Tanglewood, Seashore Road, Kirby Road and Sandy Bluff areas of Supply and on Swain Street, Bolivia. The burglaries occurred between June 1 and July 18.

Among the items stolen in the night-time break-ins were guns, computer equipment, video cassette recorders, televisions, fishing tackle, appliances, tools, liquor, stereo equipment and furniture.

Barnes was also charged with cheating a State Bureau of Investigation agent out of \$51.50 for the alleged purpose of purchasing a quarter-ounce of marijuana, according to

the indictments.

As part of a plea agreement, the cases were combined for sentencing. Barnes was ordered to pay \$1,080 in court appointed attorney fees.

Superior Court Judge Dexter Brooks presided over three days of court last week. No jury trials were held. Assistant District Attorney Lee Bollinger was the prosecuting attorney.

In other cases heard last week:

■Charles Edward Flynt, 58, of Pine Forest Mobile Home Park on N.C. 133 outside Southport was sentenced to 17 years in prison after entering a negotiated plea of guilty to a charge of committing a second degree sexual offense against a child under the age of 13. He had been charged with a first-degree sexual offense. Flynt was also ordered to pay court costs and attorney fees of \$720.

■Almond Junior Graham, 40, of Fairhaven Mobile Home Park, Leland, was sentenced to 12 years in prison after agreeing to plead guilty to a charge of second degree rape. He had been charged with first degree rape of a child under the age of 13 and a statutory sex offense. The judge gave Graham credit for the 293 days he spent in jail awaiting trial and ordered him to pay court costs and to undergo an alcohol and substance abuse evaluation.

■Jerry Carlton Foster Jr., 26, of Fawn Brook Mobile Home Park, Bolivia, was sentenced to three years in prison after pleading guilty to a charge of taking indecent liberties. He was ordered to pay court costs and \$270 in attorney fees.

■Kenneth Lee Nobles, 22, of Route 1, Leland, entered a negotiated guilty plea to a charge of misdemeanor child abuse and was given five years supervised probation. He was indicted last April on a charge of felonious child abuse for allegedly inflicting serious injuries, including multiple fractures of the arms and legs, on his 13-month-old stepson. Nobles was given a two-year suspended sentence, fined \$100 and court costs and ordered to pay \$600 attorney fees.

■Robert E. Rose, 26, of Route 1, Ash, pleaded guilty to three charges of felonious larceny and was fined \$100 and put on five years supervised probation. He was charged with stealing more than \$14,000 worth of cable from Black Industries Inc. in three separate thefts. He was put on five years probation, ordered to perform 100 hours of community service and fined \$100 and court costs.

■Jessie Lee Tipton, 44, of Shell Point Road, Shallotte, entered a negotiated guilty plea to two misdemeanor charges of possessing stolen

goods. He had been charged with nine counts of felonious possession of stolen goods. Tipton pleaded guilty in two break-ins last July in which he stole a color television, a lawn mower, a grass trimmer two remote control toys, fishing tackle, assorted baseball cards and other items valued at \$1,140. He was given a two-year suspended sentence, three years probation and ordered to pay a \$100 fine, court costs, \$900 attorney fees and \$830 restitution to two Myrtle Beach, S.C., pawn shops.

■Tracey Lee Simmons, 24, of Caison Loop Road, Winnabow, pleaded guilty to four charges of breaking and entering and larceny and one charge of possession with intent to manufacture marijuana. Simmons was charged in break-ins at the Winnabow Florist, American Legion Post 650, a home on Caison Loop Road and another in Leland. Simmons was given a 10-year suspended sentence and five years probation and ordered to pay a \$100 fine, court costs, \$480 attorney fees and \$3,280 restitution.

■Terry Wayne Wooten, 30, of Route 1, Supply, pleaded guilty to driving while impaired and driving while his license was revoked. He was given a seven-day active jail term, a two-year suspended sentence, five years probation, and was

ordered to pay a fine of \$250 and court costs. He will be required to perform 75 hours of community service and will be put on electronic house arrest for 30 days when he gets out of jail.

■Cooper McLean Cannon, 22, of Fayetteville pleaded guilty to one charge each of consuming beer in the passenger area of a motor vehicle, possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia. He was given a one-year suspended sentence, three years probation and was fined \$250 and court costs.

■Wanda Ballard, 29, of Route 5, Leland, admitted violating the terms of probation imposed after her April, 1990, guilty plea to a charge of possession with intent to sell and deliver cocaine. Her three-year prison sentence was activated and she was

ordered to pay \$720 in attorney fees.

■Kimberly Dawn Pittman, 19, of Wilmington pleaded guilty to a charge of purchasing alcoholic beverages while underage. Judgment was postponed on the condition that she pay court costs.

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