

Paynter's Truck Was Key In Convicts' Dramatic Trip

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Staff Writer

Thurman Paynter's 1979 Ford Ranger pickup truck could spin quite a yarn if it could talk. Between May 31, when Paynter parked it in the usual place behind his Afton home, and June 8 when driven by escaped prisoner Lem D. Tuggle it was stopped in Vermont, that truck traveled some extraordinary miles.

During the early morning hours of June 1, four of six death row prisoners who had escaped during the night from a Mecklenburg County, Va. prison reportedly made their second getaway in Paynter's truck. They had earlier overpowered guards, staged a bomb hoax, and driven to freedom in a prison van, which they later abandoned at Mariam Boyd School in Warrenton.

Evidence suggests that they then made their way down Highway 401, searching for a vehicle to continue their run. Paynter said, "They couldn't have stopped at a better place. The keys were in the ignition. The truck was in tip-top shape, full of gas, new tires, new belts, ready for a long trip. I had just serviced it because we were going to use it for hauling hay."

And a long trip it took. Paynter has no way of knowing the number of miles it traveled during that week, but when his son and daughter-in-law, Macey and Vivian Paynter, went to Vermont to bring it home, the trip back registered 745 miles.

Before driving away on the two-tone blue truck, the notorious visitors had apparently tried to start an orange one-ton truck belonging to the younger Paynter, who, with his family, lives next door. He had hooked a set of bleachers to it the night before and had planned to deliver them to Nashville in the morning.

About 5:50 a. m., he discovered the truck's door and vent open, the ignition torn out, and the bleachers unhooked.

Needing to make the delivery, he went to get his father's truck, and it was then that the theft was discovered. Upon calling the Warrenton Police Department to report it, he learned that there had been a prison break; but it was not until law enforcement officers rushed to the scene that he realized the seriousness of the matter.

Thinking back, both Vivian and her father-in-law remembered hearing dogs bark about 2:30 that morning, but neither gave it enough thought to investigate.

During the days that followed, the Paynters' home was given careful surveillance by the officers in the area. All-points bulletins were issued, some with the mistaken descriptions of a blue and white truck. The Paynters received several phone calls, many from Franklin County, that the truck had been spotted.

In reality, however, the truck was heading north, carrying prison escapees James and Linwood Briley as far as Philadelphia, Pa. and Willie Jones and Lem Tuggle to Vermont.

Tuggle was captured in the truck during an 85-mile-per-hour chase following his robbery of the Red Mill Gift Shop in Woodford, Va., a town of 311 residents. He had spent several days camping and partying on Green Mountain National Forest land, across a pond from and within clear view of the shop he robbed.

After the capture, the Paynters' first news that the truck had been located came from a neighbor, 12-year-old Jeff Howard, who had heard the news on television. About the same time, Macey heard the report on his truck radio and drove to the manhunt headquarters in Warrenton for confirmation. Later that day, a Warren County sheriff's deputy called the Paynters to verify the information.

The days which followed were a frustration as the family tried to learn the whereabouts of their truck and to determine how and when it would be returned to them. After numerous fruitless telephone calls and contacts, they received information that they could go to Shaftsbury, Vt. to reclaim their truck. It seemed to them that the truck which had earlier been everybody's business had suddenly become nobody's business.

On Sunday, June 24, Macey and Vivian went by plane from Raleigh-Durham to Washington, D. C. to Albany, N. Y., and then by bus to the Shaftsbury, Vt. highway patrol station.

From there they were driven to a nearby service station where the familiar truck, with license PEI-1 and two Levi Garrett bumper stickers, was waiting. Actually, it was not quite the same truck which had left Afton some three weeks earlier. According to Macey and Vivian, it was newly scratched, and filthy, inside and outside. Part of the seat covers had been removed, there was a small hole in the seat, and a two-way radio, later found behind the seat, was disconnected.

Before the Vermont State Patrol released the truck, Macey and Vivian were surprised to learn that the police computers still listed the vehicle as stolen. They were advised to stay overnight in historical Bennington, Vt. and were given a letter to verify their ownership of the vehicle should they be stopped by authorities.

Before leaving the area, Macey and Vivian visited the gift shop and met the lady whom Tuggle had robbed of about \$100 at knife point. They also

went to the campsite which had been Tuggle's hideaway. There Macey recovered a pair of trousers which later were identified as part of a prison guard uniform.

Trying to make the best of the trip to Vermont, the Paynters took photographs of the scenic landscape and various points of interest. They were impressed by the beauty of the mountains and plantlife and the friendliness of the people in southwestern Vermont. They arrived back in Afton, driving the much publicized truck, on June 26.

"Daddy's glad to have his old truck back," said (Continued on page 6B)



High winds toppled this old oak in the yard of Travis and Sylvia Ormsby on Pluto Place in north Warrenton early last Wednesday morning. The tree, which fell during a storm about 1 a. m., narrowly missed hitting the home of Johnnie



Thurman Paynter and his son, Macey, are pleased to have again in their possession the 1979 Ford pickup truck recently taken as a getaway

vehicle by prison escapees from Mecklenburg County, Va. (Staff Photo)

Harrington Retains Seat

Veteran Sen. J. J. (Monk) Harrington of Bertie County, dean of the State Senate, fought off challenges from two candidates Tuesday to easily win re-election from a newly constituted 2nd Senate District.

In Warren County, just as in the other counties of the sprawling 2nd District, Harrington, a white businessman, handily outpolled his two black opponents. In Warren the vote was 1,084 for Harrington, with Dr. John B. Moore of Weldon getting 347 votes and Ahsokie lawyer Rob Lewis getting 155.

Harrington, who has spent 22 years in the State Senate, carried 11 of 12 Warren precincts. Only in Roanoke was he defeated.

Throughout the 2nd District, Harrington got 7,755 votes or 57 percent in the unofficial returns. Lewis received 3,509 votes or 26 percent and Moore got 2,287 votes or 17 percent.

Voters Tuesday cast ballots in five Senate districts and two House districts in unusual primary elections made necessary by a court challenge of North Carolina's redistricting plan.

In two Warren precincts—Judkins and

Fishing Creek—State Sen. Dallas Alford and former legislator James E. Ezzell, Jr., both of Rocky Mount, sought voter support. Alford won in Warren County's two District 10 precincts, 97 to 38, but Ezzell won in the district.

Here's how the vote went in each of Warren's 14 precincts:

RIVER — Harrington 55, Lewis 14, Moore 21.

SHOCCO — Harrington 63, Lewis 7, Moore 21.

SIXPOUND — Harrington 72, Lewis 1, Moore 11.

HAWTREE — Harrington 121, Lewis 15, Moore 26.

SANDY CREEK — Harrington 59, Lewis 7, Moore 39.

SMITH CREEK — Harrington 48, Lewis 10, Moore 4.

WEST WARRENTON — Harrington 181, Lewis 31, Moore 89.

FORK — Harrington 52, Lewis 1, Moore 15.

ROANOKE — Harrington 6, Lewis 12, Moore 8.

NORLINA — Harrington 177, Lewis 18, Moore 22.

EAST WARRENTON — Harrington 177, Lewis 28, Moore 79.

JUDKINS — Alford 30, Ezzell 14.

FISHING CREEK — Alford 67, Ezzell 24.

Court Term Abbreviated By Sickness

A jury last week in Warren County Superior Court found Curtiss Lee Carrington not guilty on a charge of possession of stolen goods in connection with a 1982 break-in at State Line Gulf in Norlina, but before it could render verdicts on two other charges against Carrington the illness of the judge forced a mistrial.

Judge Robert H. Hobbgood of Louisburg presided over Superior Court on Monday and Tuesday of last week, but on doctor's orders did not appear for court on Wednesday.

Carrington is also charged with breaking and entering and larceny in the theft of 50 tires, miscellaneous garage equipment and 30 cases of beer from the service station. However, the jury, which began deliberat-

Littleton Man Is Charged In Connection With Thefts

A warrant was drawn on a Littleton man Tuesday charging him with his second count of breaking, entering and larceny in four days.

According to the Warren County Sheriff's Department, James Fields, Jr., 17, of Rt. 2, Littleton faces the most recent charge in connection with the theft of a clock radio, cassette recorder, and AM/FM radio from the lake home of John Abner Godfrey on Laura Circle at Wildwood Point. Godfrey lives in Louisburg.

Two juveniles have also been charged with breaking, entering and larceny in the incident. Sheriff's Deputy Thomas McCaffity was the investigating officer.

On Friday, Fields was charged with the July 6 breaking, entering and larceny at the residence

Buckner, a neighbor of the Ormsbys. No one knows the exact age of the tree, but Mrs. Onnie Harp, who now lives on Main Street and at one time resided where the Ormsbys live, said the oak was fully grown when she moved there in 1910. (Staff Photo)

of William C. Nettles of Hemlock Lane in Wildwood Point subdivision in which miscellaneous fishing equipment was taken, according to Chief Deputy B. D. Bolton, who was assisted in that investigation by Deputy Lloyd Newsome. Fields has also been charged with misdemeanor larceny in the theft of a canoe from the

Hemlock Lane property of Perry Spence of Richmond, Va. on June 19.

The canoe has been recovered, as has one of the radios taken from the Godfrey home, according to a department spokesman.

Fields had not been served the most recent warrant as of Tuesday afternoon. He is free on \$500 bond in connection (Continued on page 3B)

'Storytime' Being Held

"Storytime" is being held in the Warren County Memorial Library each Friday morning through August 17.

Children who will be attending kindergarten this fall meet from 10:30 to 11 a. m. and those who will be in first grade and up meet from 11:15 a. m. until noon.

Children in the third

grade and up who are participating in the library's Summer Reading Program are asked to be in the library by 10:30 a. m. Monday, July 23, to hear Dr. Ray Selby, rector of Emmanuel Episcopal Church and a native of England, speak on the settling of the Roanoke Island as seen from the British perspective.

Increased Demand Said Behind Outages

Recent electrical outages in areas of Warren County were caused in part by increased demands on lines as a result of growth in the county, according to Mike Finney, Halifax Electric Membership Corporation (HEMC) general manager.

The majority of the outages, which have lasted anywhere from a few minutes to several hours, have been in the Embro, Arcola, Inez, and Parktown communities.

Finney estimated that between 150 and 200 new HEMC customers have been added in those areas in the past year, outstripping all of the HEMC's projections.

Changes are being made to eliminate a large part of the problem, Finney said this week, but the long-term solution involves the

replacement of equipment which will take several months to complete.

"We know that these outages are a terrible inconvenience to our members, and we apologize for these occurrences," Finney said. "However, the situation will improve rapidly, and we hope that our members will understand and will bear with us until we can eliminate these problems."

A total of five outages have been reported in the past month, Finney said. In two areas the outages have been caused by incompletely trimmed rights-of-way by HEMC's contractors causing limbs to interfere with the lines. That trimming is currently being completed by HEMC crews, Finney added.

Student Transfer Requests Denied

The Warren County Board of Education Monday night denied three requests for pupil transfer during a routine session held with all members present.

In an hour-long executive session, the board denied requests from Mrs. Angela Hyson that her two children be released to attend school in Vance County, from Eddie Clayton that his grandson be allowed to attend Mariam Boyd rather than South Warren, and from Mrs. Paul Kearney that four of her children be allowed to attend Mariam Boyd and Hawkins rather than South Warren.

The board also accepted the resignations of four persons, all retiring after devoting a total of

80 years to public education. They are Nancy P. Blankenship, teacher at North Warren School; Eleanor G. Ellis, teacher at South Warren School; Rufus W. Alston, custodian at Hawkins Elementary School; and Willie Bobbitt, part-time food service worker at Mariam Boyd School.

Three transfers gained board approval. They included James Hargrove, custodian, from Vaughan Elementary School to Hawkins Elementary School; Audrey Davis, from home-school coordinator to dropout prevention counselor at Warren County High School; and Nancy Townes, food service worker, from John (Continued on page 3B)