

Recluse won't tell what he knows of '63 assassination

By RAY LA FONTAINE
AND MARY LA FONTAINE
SPECIAL TO THE HOUSTON POST

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Living today as a virtual recluse on an island in the Mississippi River is a man who could answer a lot of questions about one of the darkest days in American history.

If he would.

What John Franklin Elrod has kept bottled up inside for nearly three decades concerns the Nov. 22, 1963, death of President John F. Kennedy and the possible relationship between the man accused of killing him, Lee Harvey Oswald, and the televised fatal shooting two days later of Oswald by Jack Ruby in the garage of the Dallas Police Department.

The little that Elrod, now 60, will say hints that:

■ Oswald and Ruby did know each other before the shootings.

■ Elrod shared a jail cell with Oswald and another man after Kennedy's assassination, and the wounding of Texas Gov. John Connally.

■ Oswald told Elrod of a meeting between Ruby and four other men only a few days before Kennedy's death.

■ Dallas police lied to the Warren Commission investigating Kennedy's

CONTRADICTORY REPORTS

He stated that on several occasions he has had difficulty remembering due to his extreme use of alcohol. He knew nothing concerning the assassination of the President, the involvement of JACK RUBY in the killing of HARVEY LEE OSWALD, or of any information concerning the possibility of the receipt of money by JACK RUBY, except the hearsay information he had received from his unknown cellmate.

This excerpt from the Aug. 11, 1964, report of Memphis-based FBI agents Norman L. Casey and Francis B. Cole on their interview with John Franklin Elrod in the Shelby County Sheriff's Office in Memphis, Tenn., indicates they viewed him with suspicion, and that he could not identify his Dallas cellmate nine months earlier.

This subject walked into our office at approximately 12:30 A.M., this date, and stated he had information concerning the murder of Lee Oswald. He had with him a travel bag which contained a sawed-off shotgun.

This excerpt from a letter to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover by Alton C. Gilles Jr., then a Shelby County sheriff's sergeant and today the sheriff himself, shows Elrod did in fact know something of Oswald (Oswald). Gilles' letter was also written on Aug. 11, 1964.

The Houston Post

death, saying Oswald had been kept in isolation and never talked to anyone except law enforcement investigators.

■ The FBI in both Dallas and Memphis either purposely hid the Oswald-Elrod link, or chose to ignore it.

■ Elrod then, and now almost 30 years later, fears greatly for his life.

What Elrod does say — that he knew, albeit briefly, Oswald and that

Please see OSWALD, A-31

The Houston Post

* SUNDAY, November 14, 1993

Tom Paul Hoch

OSWALD: Cellmate won't tell what he knows of assassination

From A-29

Oswald told him of knowing Ruby, the small-time mobster and strip club owner, is enough to send assassination conspiracy theorists into high gear — particularly with the 30th anniversary of the president's death coming this month.

Ruby's shooting of accused presidential assassin Oswald before the eyes of millions of people watching on television and those in the packed basement garage of the Dallas police station set off an immediate rash of speculation.

Ruby silenced Oswald to keep him from talking, was the central conspiracy theme. That was fueled by rumors of pre-assassination sightings of Oswald and Ruby huddled in conversation somewhere, often at a table in Ruby's own downtown Carousel Club.

If true, that would contradict the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald and Ruby acted as two "lone nut" assassins, each in a separate world of derangement.

Elrod's contention today is directly opposite the commission's finding. It is backed by a law enforcement paper trail dating back to his time in jail in Dallas with Oswald and to Aug. 11, 1964, when he walked into the Shelby County (Tenn.) Sheriff's Office to turn in a sawed-off, double-barreled 12-gauge shotgun.

Elrod's story began to surface in February 1992 with the discovery of five Nov. 22, 1963, arrest records in the Dallas police files.

Three arrest records revealed for the first time the identities of the enigmatic "three tramps," whom many conspiracy theorists suspected of being disguised assassins. They had been known only from media photos taken moments after the assassination as the suspects were marched from railroad yards behind Dealey Plaza to the Dallas County Sheriff's Office.

Assassination sleuths saw in the pictures future Watergate burglars E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis and future judicial hitman Charles Harrelson. In reality and reported first in the Houston Post last year, the men were Harold Doyle, Gus Abrams and John Forrester Gedney, all actual rail-riders, circa 1963.

The two other records were for Elrod and Donald Wayne Douglas, a man who had the bad timing to go to police to confess to a Tennessee car theft but who ended up charged with suspicion of murder.

Elrod's record shows he was apprehended at about 2:45 p.m. as he walked along railroad tracks near Harry Hines Boulevard, some 2½ miles north of downtown Dallas and the Dealey Plaza presidential shooting site. A few minutes before his arrest, police had been alerted that a man "carrying a rifle" was seen in the vicinity. Elrod was not armed but was the only person in sight.

He was placed in a fifth-floor jail cell for investigation of conspiracy to murder the president. He was described as "unemployed." However, although he had a history of an alcohol problem, Elrod was at the time working as a restaurant cook and had a satisfactory employment record.

"John told me he was in the same cell with Lee Harvey Oswald, and that he knew Oswald didn't kill Kennedy," says Lindy Elrod, who managed the Oak Lawn restaurant where his younger brother worked and who was called to pick him up from the downtown jail on Nov. 24, 1963. "He was very scared about something that happened."

"He made a 180-degree turnaround and left me in the lurch — never came back to his job," Lindy Elrod says.

A few days after his release John Elrod fled Dallas to the Memphis area. He has not set foot back in Texas.

Nine months later, on Aug. 11, 1964 — a Tuesday — Elrod showed up at the Shelby County Sheriff's Office in Memphis shortly after midnight carrying the sawed-off 12-gauge in a travel bag. When the deputies heard what he had to say, they called the FBI.

Memphis Bureau agents Norman L. Casey and Francis B. Cole closeted themselves with Elrod in the sheriff's office that morning. Their two-page report of the interrogation went unnoticed for 28 years, until released in October 1992 through a Freedom of Information request by a Silicon Valley computer programmer and part-time Kennedy

assassination researcher, Bill Adams.

Agents Casey and Cole reported Elrod was troubled by the events surrounding Kennedy's assassination, but that he knew nothing about it. They referred to his cellmate as "unknown." They also noted he had a drinking problem.

That same day, Shelby County Sheriff's Sgt. Alton C. Gillless Jr. prepared a report of his own. In the report to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Gillless, today the sheriff, wrote of Elrod: "The subject walked into our office at approximately 12:30 a.m., this date and stated he had information concerning the murder of Lee Oswald (Oswald)."

Gillless' report to Hoover was not made available to the Warren Commission.

The FBI today declines to comment on the contradiction. Its Washington headquarters declines to discuss any aspect of the Kennedy assassination, referring questions instead to Oliver Revell, Special Agent in Charge of the Dallas FBI field office. A spokeswoman for Revell said Friday that the bureau there does not want to comment either.

While Casey and Cole generally discounted Elrod's information there was something in their report of his interview, that — coupled with Gillless' to Hoover — should have sent the red flags flying. It was:

"The cellmate stated that five men had met at a motel, and they had been advanced some money under some type contract. ... that this cellmate at some time had told him that one of the

men who had been at the motel referred to had been Jack Ruby."

The report also noted Oswald had identified to Elrod another man who had been at the motel meeting after he and Elrod had seen the man being led by law officers through the Dallas jail hallway.

That would be Lawrence Reginald Miller, then 33, who had been arrested Nov. 18, 1963, after a high-speed chase through downtown Dallas. Arrested with him was the driver of the car, Donnell Darius Whitter, then 43. Both were suspects in the theft of military weapons from a National Guard Armory near Terrell.

Miller received four years in the federal penitentiary in Texas. He died of acute alcohol intoxication at age 43 and was found in an apartment owned at the time of Kennedy's assassination by Bertha Cheek, a Ruby associate and the sister of Oswald's last landlady, Earlene Roberts.

Whitter was employed by Ruby as a car mechanic. Evidence compiled by Dallas-based journalist Seth Kantor, Warren attorneys Burt W. Griffin and Leon D. Hubert Jr. and other investigators has long linked Ruby with gun-running activities intended to furnish arms for anti-Castro Cuban groups.

Whitter received a four-year term and was sent to the federal prison hospital in Springfield, Mo. He died in 1991 in Temple.

Despite Whitter's death and the recent release of nearly 1 million pages of assassination-related materials, he remains a restricted subject. The FBI has not granted the National Archives permission to make public a 14-page document on Whitter.

* SHOULD BE
'DID WORK FOR'
PLM

← ORIGINALLY 'REDISCOVERED'

*Elrod, John Franklin*Date August 11, 1964

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JOHN FRANKLIN ELROD, an inmate of the Shelby County, Tennessee, Jail, as of August 11, 1964, furnished the following information:

ELROD currently lives at Memphis, Tennessee, and has been staying at the Harbor House, Memphis, prior to the time of his arrest for which he was placed in jail on August 11, 1964. The Harbor House, 1369 Court Avenue, Memphis, is a home for alcoholics, and ELROD stated that he, himself, is an alcoholic.

ELROD had come to the Shelby County Sheriff's Office during the early morning hours of August 11, 1964, after having consumed some beer and vodka. He was at that time in possession of a sawed-off 12 gauge shotgun which had a pistol grip. He stated that he had begun to think of the possibilities of killing his wife from whom he is now separated. Inasmuch as he had the sawed-off shotgun and the desire to kill her was known to him, he decided he should come to the Sheriff's Office and talk, which he did.

He further advised that he had been somewhat troubled by events which occurred immediately following the assassination of President JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY at Dallas, Texas, on November 11, 1963.

Shortly after the assassination of the President, ELROD, who had been about two and one half miles from the scene of the assassination at Lemon and Oaklawn Streets in Dallas, was arrested by the Dallas Police Department and placed in the City Jail. His arrest had nothing to do with the assassination of the President, and he knew nothing concerning the assassination of the President. At the City Jail in Dallas, he was placed in Cell 10 on the fifth floor, and at that time his cellmate was a man whose identity he could not recall. An individual, whose face was smashed up, was brought into the hallway of the jail where ELROD and his cellmate could observe him. At that time the unknown cellmate made some mention that he had known this man with the injured face as a result of meeting him at a motel. The cellmate stated that five men had met at a motel, and they had been advanced some money under some type contract. One of these men was reported to have

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Commission No.
FBI 1472

On 8/11/64 at Memphis, Tennessee File # DL 44-1639
SA FRANCIS B. COLE and
by SA NORMAN L. CASEY/lh Date dictated 8/11/64
ME 44-1165

This document contains neither recommendations nor conclusions of the FBI. It is the property of the FBI and is loaned to your agency; it and its contents are not to be distributed outside your agency.

DL 44-1639

ME 44-1165

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received \$5,000. The man with the injured face had received some money, and he was reported to have been driving a Thunderbird automobile with a large quantity of guns contained therein. ELROD advised he was confined in the Dallas City Jail for a period of 72 hours, and he was confused at this time concerning the events which occurred. He stated he could not recall whether JACK RUBY's name had been mentioned prior to the time of the killing of LEE HARVEY OSWALD, but that this cellmate at some time had told him that one of the men who had been at the motel referred to above, name and location unknown, had been JACK RUBY. This was all the information which ELROD could recall.

He stated that on several occasions he has had difficulty remembering due to his extreme use of alcohol. He knew nothing concerning the assassination of the President, the involvement of JACK RUBY in the killing of HARVEY LEE OSWALD, or of any information concerning the possibility of the receipt of money by JACK RUBY, except the hearsay information he had received from his unknown cellmate.

ELROD is described as follows:

Race	white
Sex	male
Date of birth	November 12, 1932
Place of birth	Bassett, Arkansas
Height	5'11½"
Weight	180 lbs.
Complexion	medium
Occupation	cook
Wife	JACKIE PAT ELROD nee Richards, 2816 Morris, Dallas, Texas
Father	HOBSON ELROD, Bassett, Arkansas
Scars and marks	one and one-half inch cut scar on forehead; little finger, left hand, off at first joint; left arm is undersized.

DL 44-1639

The identification record of JOHN FRANKLIN ELROD, FBI number 91 666 E, dated August 12, 1964, which follows, does not reflect incarceration of ELROD in the Dallas City Jail as claimed:

CONTRIBUTOR OF FINGERPRINTS	NAME & NO.	ARRESTED OR RECEIVED	CHARGE	DISPOSITION
PD Dallas Texas	John Franklin Elrod #E-17848	5/23/61	DWI & Inv (via State Barb Law)	
SO Dallas	John Franklin Elrod #116211	2/14/62	DWI #15345-C	3 das jail & F & C Pd in JOL
SO Dallas Texas	James F. O. Elrod #116211	11/15/62	T/over #9921	no billed GJ
SO Quitman Texas	John Elrod #1057	3/19/63	Simple aslt	
SO Memphis Tenn	John Franklin Elrod #29001	8/11/64	inv Hom Div	hold for Fed Auth

POLICE DEPARTMENT
CITY OF DALLAS
SP-26-586

ARREST REPORT
ON
INVESTIGATIVE PRISONER

File

FIRST NAME John		MIDDLE NAME Franklin		LAST NAME Elrod		DATE 11-22-63	TIME 2:45 P	HT. THUMB PRINT	I. D. NUMBER	ARREST NUMBER	
RACE WHITE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COLORED <input type="checkbox"/>		SEX MALE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FEMALE <input type="checkbox"/>		AGE 31	DATE OF BIRTH 11-12-32	HOME ADDRESS 3314 Knight					
ADDRESS WHERE ARREST MADE 3400 Elk Harry Kings				TYPE PREMISES (IF BUSINESS, GIVE TRADE NAME (L.S.)) Railroad Tracks							
CHARGE Inv. Hardest & Co. Vag				BUSINESS WHERE ARREST MADE HAS: BEER LICENSE <input type="checkbox"/> LIQUOR LICENSE <input type="checkbox"/> STATE LIC. NO. _____							
HOW ARREST MADE ON VIEW <input type="checkbox"/> CALL <input type="checkbox"/> WARRANT <input type="checkbox"/>				LOCATION OF OFFENSE (IF OTHER THAN PLACE OF ARREST) 400 Block Elm St.							
COMPLAINANT (NAME-RACE-SEX-AGE)		HOME ADDRESS-PHONE NO.		BUSINESS ADDRESS-PHONE NO.							
WITNESS		HOME ADDRESS-PHONE NO.		BUSINESS ADDRESS-PHONE NO.							
WITNESS		HOME ADDRESS-PHONE NO.		BUSINESS ADDRESS-PHONE NO.							
PROPERTY PLACED IN POUND (MAKE, MODEL, LICENSE NO. OF AUTO)				PROPERTY PLACED IN PROPERTY ROOM							
NAMES OF OTHERS ARRESTED AT SAME TIME IN CONNECTION WITH THE SAME OR SIMILAR OFFENSE											
NAME OF AND/OR INFORMATION CONCERNING OTHER SUSPECTS NOT APPREHENDED											
OTHER DETAILS OF THE ARREST											
This man was arrested on railroad tracks a few minutes after radio call was dispatched that man was walking along railroad carrying a rifle. This man was not carrying rifle at time of arrest. This suspect is unemployed, states he has been in Dallas for two weeks. Lost his job last week at El Fenix. States he has been arrested for theft and D.W.I.											
CHECK ALL ITEMS WHICH APPLY: DRUNK <input type="checkbox"/> BRINKING <input type="checkbox"/> CURSED <input type="checkbox"/> RESISTED <input type="checkbox"/> FOUGHT <input type="checkbox"/> INJURED BEFORE ARREST <input type="checkbox"/> INJURED DURING OR AFTER ARREST <input type="checkbox"/> OFFICER(S) INJURED <input type="checkbox"/> SPECIAL REPORT <input type="checkbox"/>											
ARRESTING OFFICER C.M. Barnhart		I. D. NO. 924		ARRESTING OFFICER M.A. Rhodes		I. D. NO. 974					
OTHER OFFICER E.M. Hart		I. D. NO. 678		OTHER OFFICER T.A. Hollingshansen		I. D. NO. 2497					
INVESTIGATION ASSIGNED TO		CHARGE FILED		FILED BY		DATE		DATE-TIME TO CO. JAIL			
RELEASED BY		DATE-TIME		H.C. BOND BY		DATE-TIME		COURT		DATE	TIME
DISTRIBUTION: (REMOVE CARBON—CHECK ORIGINAL FOR RECORDS BU.—CHECK COPY FOR EACH BUREAU CONCERNED) RECORDS BUREAU <input type="checkbox"/> SPEC. SER. BUREAU <input type="checkbox"/> HOMICIDE <input type="checkbox"/> AUTO THEFT <input type="checkbox"/> BURGLARY <input type="checkbox"/> FORGERY <input type="checkbox"/> JUVENILE <input type="checkbox"/> TRAFFIC <input type="checkbox"/>											
USE REVERSE SIDE IF MORE SPACE NEEDED											

Good Love



0/93

SHELBY COUNTY
MEMPHIS 3, TENNESSEE

Drive Carefully...Today — Work Tomorrow!

M. A. HINDS
SHERIFF
J. L. CARLISLE
CHIEF DEPUTY, CMB
R. K. LAND
CHIEF DEPUTY, ASBL

W. E. ARMOUR
CHIEF DEPUTY, JAIL
A. S. FLOYD
CAPTAIN TRAFFIC DIV.
J. LEE EDWARDS
CAPTAIN CIVIL OFFICE
A. L. SMITH
CAPTAIN GENERAL SESSION

August 11, 1964

OUR FILE NO. _____

YOUR FILE NO. _____

Mr. J. Edgar Hoover,
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington 25, D. C.

RE: JOHN FRANKLIN ELROD

Lee Oswald

Hunter
Lee

Dear Sir:

Please have the enclosed prints searched through your files to ascertain if the above captioned subject has a criminal record or is wanted by any law enforcement agency.

This subject walked into our office at approximately 12:30 A.M., this date, and stated he had information concerning the murder of Lee Oswald. He had with him a travel bag which contained a sawed-off shotgun.

The local office of the F.B.I. has been informed of this subject and stated they would conduct an investigation.

Please wire reply collect.

WIRE ANSWER

RECORDED
AUG 12 1964
IDENT. DIV. 9

Yours truly,

Alton C. Gillespie, Jr.
Alton C. Gillespie, Jr.
Sergeant
Bureau of Identification

*act. by 7/10/64
copy made 7/10/64
copy made 7/10/64*

REC 27 105-72556-4672

EX-108 AUG 20 1964

WAD
RAT

CITY OF DALLAS
TEXAS
POLICE DEPARTMENT

April 17, 1964

The Honorable Waggoner Carr
Attorney General
State of Texas
Austin, Texas

Subject: Check of Garages and Service
Stations Patronized by Jack Ruby


Dear Sir:

Several days ago I was contacted by Mr. Vince Drain, of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, regarding a check of garages and service stations patronized by Jack Ruby.

On April 5, Lieutenant E. L. Cunningham contacted four such places which, from papers found in Ruby's car, indicated he might have patronized. A copy of Lieutenant Cunningham's report is enclosed.

Donnell D. Whittier, named in the enclosed report, formerly worked at the Texaco Service Station, Clarendon and Ewing, serviced Ruby's car when he came to the station. As you will recall, Whittier was arrested by officers of this department on November 18, 1963, at which time two machine guns and two Browning automatic rifles were recovered which had been taken in a burglary of the National Guard Headquarters at Terrell, Texas. According to our records he was convicted in Federal Court and is now serving time for this offense.

Very truly yours,


M. W. Stevenson
Deputy Chief Commanding
Criminal Investigation Division

MWS/as
Enc.

April 5, 1964

Mr. J. E. Curry
Chief of Police
Dallas, Texas

Subject: Papers found in Jack Ruby's Car

Sir:

I contacted Mr. Leo Navarro, 1323 Claude, who owns the Navarro Garage at 815 South Denley Drive. He stated he had never met Mr. Ruby, but that a friend of his, a Mr. V. E. Moralli, had given Ruby his name and the address of his garage when Ruby asked Moralli where he could find a good mechanic. Ruby never brought his car to Navarro for repair work.


Mr. V. E. Moralli, 715 West Pembroke, WH 8-9795, states that Jack Ruby traded at his Texaco Service Station at Ewing and Clarendon for about one year. However, he did not know Ruby very well. He gave Ruby a card with Leo Navarro's address on it when Jack asked him where he could find an honest mechanic. Moralli never did see Ruby with anyone that fit Oswald's description.

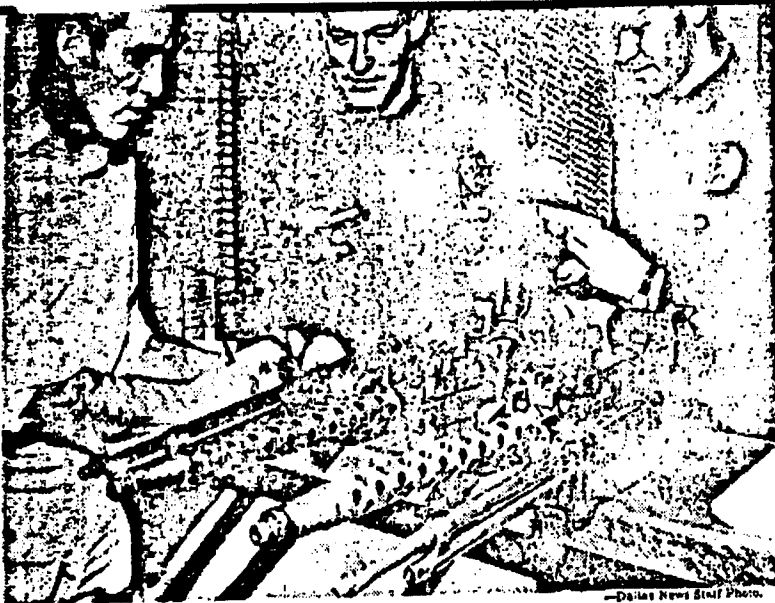
Donnell D. Whittier worked at Moralli's Service Station and took care of Ruby's work for him. Moralli states he does not know if they were friends or had relations other than that of customer and station attendant or not. Whittier was arrested November 19, 1963 for burglary of National Guard Armory in Terrell, Texas. I understand that he has been convicted of this burglary in Federal Court.

Mr. A. J. Wilson, 3000 Blackburn, JA 1-7131 was contacted. He stated that he knew Jack Ruby when he run the Silver Spur in 1948. He met Jack about two weeks prior to November 22 in the Merchants State Bank. They greeted each other and Jack asked Wilson what he was doing for a living. Mr. Wilson gave Ruby his business card and told him to come to see him. Mr. Wilson states that to his knowledge Ruby was never in his place.

The Texaco Service Station at 8th and Thornton Freeway was purchased by a Mr. Howard on the 15th of March, 1964 from Mr. E. D. Harris. Mr. Howard does not know where Mr. Harris could be contacted.

Respectfully


E. L. Cunningham
Lieutenant of Police
Forgery Bureau



—Dallas News Staff Photo.

Police property room clerk B. J. Smith checks in the arsenal recovered by officers J. B. Allen, center, and J. R. Sales Monday night.

Police Nab 2 Ex-Convicts With Load of Stolen Guns

NOV 19 1963

By JOHN RUTLEDGE - 3-1 ✓
A 60-mile-an-hour police chase ended in the capture of two ex-convicts hauling a load of stolen machine guns in a swank sports car at 8:40 p.m. Monday at Gaston and Hall.

Nabbed were Lawrence Reginald Miller, 33, who gave police his address as Route 4, Canton, and Donnell Darius Whitt, 43, a time loser who listed his address as 328 S. Edgefield.

Miller received deep face cuts when the black 1962 sports car crashed into a utility pole.

In the car police found two air-cooled .30-caliber machine guns, a .45-caliber "grease gun" sub-machine gun and two Browning automatic rifles. The weapons were identified as part of the loot from the Wednesday burglary of the Texas National Guard armorer's shop at Terrell.



Whitt

The chase started, patrolmen J. B. Allen and J. R. Sales said, when they saw the northbound car run a red light on Hall at Allen. When they tried to stop the car, it roared north at speeds up to 60 miles an hour. Five blocks away at Hall and Junius, the contraband-laden convertible plunged between two autos halted for a red light. It sideswiped both and squealed on toward Gaston.

There the outlaws' car crashed head-on into a utility pole. Sales said Whitt scrambled from behind the steering wheel and ran 30 feet on foot before Sales tackled him. Miller, his face hacked by glass when his head plunged through the windshield, remained in his seat. He was treated at the Parkland Hospital emergency room, then jailed along with Whitt for burglary. Whitt was later taken to Parkland under guard when he claimed he was ill.

Allen and Sales found the stolen guns piled on the back floor boards covered by a layer of pop bottles, and a gas heating stove.



LAWRENCE R. MILLER



DONNELL D. WHITT