

Editor Relates 49 Hours of Terror

Reg Murphy, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, wrote this account of his kidnapping for his newspaper. It was made available to the Associated Press.

By Reg Murphy

ATLANTA, Feb. 23—When the tall, heavy, garishly dressed stranger appeared at the door, it was clear this was trouble.

He said, "I'm Lamont Woods," in a southern accent quickened by exposure to speech patterns elsewhere.

I let him into my living room for a moment, but hustled him out quickly because of the anxiety within him.

My wife, Virginia, stayed out of sight but went to the window as we left and noted that he was driving a dark green Ford Torino. She tried for the license plate but couldn't see it.

And so I went driving into the Wednesday dusk with a man we both knew was trouble. Neither of us guessed then it would amount to 49 hours of terror at the hands of a kidnaper telling a bizarre political tale and demanding \$700,000 ransom.

We turned off North Decatur Road and I began to study his features. Dark hair, close

shave, no beard, short chin, double chin, maroon hat turned up in a cowboy flare, green nylon windbreaker and maroon pants.

He had told me he wanted to contribute 300,000 gallons of fuel oil to some charities, and that he wanted me to choose them. I had made a few preliminary inquiries and found it was possible—though somewhat improbable—that he could get a tax break. I really had no choice but to go with him, for newspapermen have to lead open lives and be available to anonymous or strange people.

We turned onto Briarcliff Road, and my worst suspicions were realized. "Have you ever heard of the American Revolutionary Army?" he asked.

"No."

"Well, more about that later." Which meant I wasn't going to his lawyer's office to sign any fuel-oil papers. He drove out Interstate Highway 85, preaching the need for fuel conservation and insisting he always drove at 55 miles per hour.

He pulled up short. "We got to talking and I drove past the exit," he said. He was talking about Jewish domination of newspapers, corporations and governments. He turned around

and came back to Beaver Run Road, to the Peachtree Corners turn, and rustled his windbreaker.

"Mr. Murphy, you have been kidnapped," he said. "We're going to straighten out this damn country. We're going to stop these lying, leftist, liberal news media."

A nickel-plated gun lay in the elbow crook of his right arm, with which he drove. He cocked it with his left thumb. I could see two cylinders on either side. I assumed that was the death weapon. He made me tape my eyes, and I assumed that might be the last time I would see.

He forced me to loop a white nylon clothesline around my feet. He stopped the car. He pushed me to the back. He bound my hands and feet, and tied them together behind my back. He shoved me into the trunk of the car, where there was a pillow and a blanket. He slammed the trunk lid, and started an hour of twisting and turning through the streets.

Lying on my left side, unable to see or move, I came close to panic. The carbon-monoxide fumes came in. I thought that might be the way it would end.

See KIDNAP, A6, Col. 1

Editor Relates 49 Hours of

KIDNAP, From A1

In an hour, he pulled into a driveway and backed into a carport (I think). He opened the deck lid, asked for somebody he could call at the paper. I gave him Jim Minter's name and phone number . . .

Jim Minter is the managing editor of The Constitution, a calm and gifted man. He also is a touch cynical. When the man who began to identify himself as Colonel One called, Minter came on the line.

I said, "Jim, this is Reg Murphy. I've been kidnaped by the American Revolutionary Army." He cracked that was better than some other kidnapers—assuming I was teasing him. I told him I was lying in the trunk of a car, and the Colonel snatched the phone away.

The lid slammed. "If he makes a sound, kill him," the Colonel said. Nobody answered, but I had heard other footsteps. I kept quiet.

After a while, at perhaps 9:45 p.m., I was brought inside. Again the political diatribe began. "Did you know that eight Jews run this country, and they weren't even elected?" he asked.

He named Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, federal energy coordinator William Simon and others. "Even Ehrlichman," he said, meaning former presidential assistant John Ehrlichman.

I talked as hard as I could, explaining we didn't share political philosophies but I ought to hear his side of the story. A "silent partner" across the room accepted his offer of a cigarette.

At 11 Wednesday night, he stopped talking to watch the news on Channel 5. Ten minutes into the broadcast he said, "They're not even going to use it."

"Colonel," I said, "they may not know about it yet."

"I called them," he said.

There were footfalls in the hall. "They just got Sugarman," he said.

"Jule Sugarman, the as-



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Reg Murphy demonstrates how his hands were bound.

Terror During Kidnaping

sistant to the mayor?" [The reference is to Atlanta mayor Maynard Jackson.

"The real mayor," he said harshly. "Don't you know he runs it?"

I was led to a bedroom. We began to make a tape. I said essentially that things were all right, tried to talk about what he thought, and then he began to hamble in his own voice on the tape. He talked again about the "leftist press."

"I've been overruled," he said later. "They don't want my voice on the tape."

They stuffed me between a bed and a chest of drawers to spend the night. When I rolled over somebody shined a flashlight on my face.

We made another tape the next morning, and then I was bound again. The adhesive tape blindfold had stayed on, and was augmented by cotton stuffed under it.

Then he asked me who he should call, a friend. I asked for William Zachary Jr., a Decatur lawyer and friend. He called. As is always the case, Zachary was out. His secretary took the \$700,000 ransom demand.

Zachary was at my home at that instant helping build a fire in the fireplace, but I was scared and upset. The first thing I said to him later was, "Zachary, don't you ever stay in your damned office?"

The Colonel said, "Well, we've gotta go to Knoxville." He bound me hand and foot and stuffed me in the trunk again.

An excruciatingly painful journey began. It turned stifling hot in the car trunk. My hands lost their feeling. Sweat poured off me. The car stopped. It began going again. It stopped again. I heard the Colonel open a telephone booth door.

When he started again he said "Mr. Murphy, I've mailed the tape and told them where to pick it up." Afraid to answer and afraid not to, I said, "Great, Colonel." He talked to me from the front seat in a loud enough voice for me to hear in the trunk.

We rode for three hours.

When it seemed I couldn't breathe again, he opened the trunk so that I got a few gulps of fresh air. "Colonel, I'm not going to make it," I said.

"Hold on 15 minutes," he said. "I'm going to gas up and come right back here." He didn't drive more than a mile, and I was quiet while the attendant filled the tank.

We drove another mile and he seemed to back into the garage again. I stumbled and nearly fell after I got out. He said, "Come on now, Mr. Murphy you're nearly cracking up."

After three hours in an overheated, fume car trunk bound and blindfolded, his description probably was accurate.

We went inside and he wanted to tell me all about the American Revolutionary Army. He said they considered choosing Mayor Maynard Jackson, Don Elliott Heal of WSB-TV, Sen. Leroy Johnson and others.

In one of his occasional flashes of macabre humor, the Colonel said, "We decided against the mayor because he wouldn't fit in the trunk of a car. You tell him that when you see him."

At that moment, I didn't give a damn about his humor, but it interested me mightily that he was thinking of things for me to do in the future.

He kept asking me to ask him more questions. About the American Revolutionary Army, he said:

It has 223 members and six colonels. He commands American Eagle Division, located in the Southeast. The Northeastern section is called American Falcon. He couldn't be specific about some details, and knew little political philosophy.

The army, he said, had plastic explosives, handguns and automatic weapons. It didn't have to organize much on the West Coast "because there are enough radicals out there to follow our lead."

"If we're caught, you tell them we know all about the Symbionese Liberation Army," he said.

He went to elaborate detail to lead me to believe three other men and a woman were involved. They

may have been produced by sound effects. He never allowed the others to speak.

That talk over, we got into the car at 4:30 Thursday afternoon. He got very edgy because the tape I had made in the morning had not been played on the radio. He started calling.

Then we drove out of town. My sense of direction was none too sharp as I lay under a heavy pink blanket on the back seat of his car, occasionally being allowed

to lift my head to get a breath of fresh air.

"Jack can't find a motel," he said. I started telling corny jokes, pieces of folklore, odds and ends to relieve the tension. We got to a motel at about 9:30 and the Colonel began looking for two ground-floor rooms. The first motel said it had only second-floor rooms and the Colonel explained to me that he couldn't afford to take me blindfolded and staggering to the second floor.

The second motel had what he wanted. I stumbled into the room. He turned on the television. Around 10 o'clock the station broke into its programming to play the tape. He relaxed. I was trying to go to sleep. "Don't you want to see the news?" he asked. I couldn't see, but agreed to talk to him again.

His favorite song, "Dr. Feelgood Over Troubled Waters." The second favorite: "Why Me,

Lord?" "If anything happens to me, I want them played at my funeral. My wife knows that.

"You know my all-time favorite musician?"

"No, Colonel, I don't."

"Ahhh. That fellow with the Boston Pops..."

"Fiedler?"

"Yeah, Arthur Fiedler. He's a great musician."

The 11 o'clock news had William H. Fields answering questions about the tape recording. The questions were pointed, and they frightened me. The Colonel was very sensitive about them.

He kept checking the window, and I finally went to sleep.

Friday morning we awak-

ened and he turned on the "Today" show. The local news came. The girl announcer said there were lines waiting for gasoline on Wade Hampton Boulevard. That had to mean Greenville, S.C. But we hadn't driven that far. This had to be Anderson, S.C.

As I write this, I still don't know if it was Anderson, but I'll bet it was close.

The Colonel was in a good mood. He allowed me to shower. He gave me a pair of his fresh socks. "These are big, Colonel."

"Size 13," he said. Another detail for the impending identification if I lived.

We had eggs, hashed browns, bacon and toast. He had milk and I coffee, and he went to the restaurant to pick it up. It was the first food I had eaten since Wednesday, and the last I would eat until the ordeal was over.

Now the terrible time really began. Eight hours curled on my right side on the back seat of a car under a pink blanket, sweating and trying to relax the Colonel with small talk.

The Colonel and a woman led me by the arms to the car. I didn't know if the woman worked for the motel or was an accomplice. So I tried to leave a clue.

"Colonel, am I going to need my coat, or will I have to get under the blanket?"

He didn't fall for it. "Depends on what you want to do," he said.

Now I had to begin assimilating proof of where I had been in case I was freed. Very carefully I stuffed pink blanket lint into my pants and shirt pockets.

Very cautiously I lifted the blindfold enough to see the two-tone suitcase he carried. Very carefully, I measured the ridges in the upholstery. Slowly I moved enough to see the silver outline on the seat in front of me.

Finally, I slipped my wife's automobile ignition key behind the seat cushion. That gave me a moment of panic. It jangled against the other keys when I removed it from my pocket. The Colonel wiggled in his seat but said nothing.

"You thirsty?" he asked. "How about some orange juice?" He went into a store and bought two glass quarts of juice.

Then began the long series of phone calls to negotiate the release. Under a blanket and in the traffic, I couldn't hear much of them. But the broadcasts carried FBI agent-in-charge Pat Conroy and Bill Fields in their press briefings. The Colonel loved that.

The Constitution's executives wanted to know I was alive and well. He wouldn't let me get to a phone to assure anybody.

"Call my secretary, Mary Murphy. Tell her to cancel my speaking engagements at West Georgia College on Feb. 27 and at Berry College on Feb. 28. And tell her I'll make everybody pay their coffee money Monday morning."

The Colonel instead called Minter, told him about the speeches and forgot about the coffee money, which I tease my colleagues about when they fall to chip in.

That was not good enough proof. But the Colonel could be persuaded. I was allowed to go to the phone. I told Minter that everything would work out. Just as I was talking, the newspaper had worked out its own signal: "Where and with whom was Murphy when he lost his watch recently?"

The Colonel would never let me say with Hal Gulliver, Sam Hopkins and Terry Adamson at the Ansley Club playing tennis. All I could do was say, "We didn't play tennis this morning. I'll tell you that." It was enough to convince them I was alive and functioning.

"We are ready," Fields said. The Colonel and I both were happy to hear it.

This is really crucial now, the Colonel said.

He made a call, and then another. He got back in the car.

"Is everything going all right?" I said.

"Well," he answered, "I called one guy and he couldn't get it straight. So I called somebody else. We'll see."

It turned out his random call had been to Pam Grant. If either of us had known then that Pam Grant was an 8th-grade student at Peachtree High School, we would have had a heart attack. But Miss Grant performed perfectly under the most trying conditions, and I love her sight unseen.

We parked alongside a road. The radio said the delivery of \$700,000 had begun. "You'll be so rich you can do anything, Colonel."

"It's not for me. I won't keep it. It's for the Army," he insisted.

He suddenly started the car very fast. "There goes the money," he said. He apparently was watching Jim Minter drive an open jeep in cold weather in his shirt-sleeves. He drove behind him, swerved off the road once (which must have been at a roadblock) and then stopped. He slammed two bags into the trunk. We took off again.

"We'll see if we're being followed," he said. He didn't seem to think so. He doubled around for a while. Then I asked, "Is everything going all right?"

"I didn't like that car back there following us," he said. But he didn't see it anymore, he added. We went to a phone booth again. The man must have had a hundred dimes in his pockets.

All I could hear him say was, "Are you going to come over here to pick it up?"

Then he drove a short distance and we sat. "I have a feeling it's not going right," he said. I asked what, but he wouldn't say. He had told me they sold the \$700,000 for \$500,000, and I thought perhaps that was the key.

He suddenly got out of his car and unlocked the trunk. He unzipped the suitcases. He threw something in the front seat, slammed the door and got back in.

"You ever smelled any filthy lucre?" he asked.

"Colonel, that smells like freedom to me," I said.

"Well, they just call it filthy lucre, you know?"

Sure, I knew. I knew that the corporation for which I

work had been willing to pay him that kind of ransom for my life. If you don't think that will bring a tear to blindfolded eyes, try it sometime. On second thought, don't try it; just think about it.

A car drove up. The Colonel pulled what I took to be the light switch twice. There was a pause. Then he pulled the same switch twice more, leapt out of the car and made some changes in the trunk. I could hear two voices, but could not understand them.

The Colonel jumped back in the car and started it. "Is everything going all right?" I asked from under the blanket.

"I'm going to give you 30 cents," he answered and reached back with four nickels and a dime. "I'm also going to give you a hundred bill and then I'll send you a \$2,000 certified check for your assistance. Of course, with your conscience you'll probably give it back to The Constitution."

Bosses, take note.

We started driving. The radio was on. It took 23 minutes to get from the exchange point to the motel at the Shallowford exit.

"You want me to let you out by the side of the road, or at a phone booth, or what?"

"A phone booth, Colonel."

"It's awful cold. How about at somebody's house?"

"How about my house, Colonel? Why don't you drop me off there."

"I might. I'm just that daring," he said.

"No, Colonel. I don't think that would be safe for either of us."

"Tell you what I'll do, I'm gonna let you off at the Ramada Inn. Who you gonna call first?"

"My wife," I said.

"Then I'll call Mr. Minter, and then let you out. I'll just stand you in the parking lot and when you hear me drive off you can take off the blindfold."

By then, after so many hours of lying on my right side in the back seat of the car, I could hardly stand erect, and my eyes wouldn't focus. But it was cold, and there was hard ground under me, and the car was roaring into the cold night, and in a few steps I would be safe.

I staggered into the motel stinking like a goat and car-

rying an adhesive tape bandage that looked like it had come off an old wound and a sweat-caked face. To tell the truth, I was afraid they would mistake me for a troublemaker.

So I got to the phone in the rear of the lobby as quickly as I could and called my wife.

She didn't believe me!

"Tell me something to make me believe you are right," she said.

"You want Karen's (my daughter's own) phone number?" I asked.

"Darlin', (she's a Southern girl) I'm glad you're free," she said.

I told her where I was, but that I wouldn't leave unless uniformed officers showed up. The room clerk by then had realized my identity, concluded I wasn't drunk, but thought I might need a stiff belt. He was almost offended when I turned him down. He gave me a private room and I called the paper as well as trying to get Jack Tarver, the president of Atlanta Newspapers and the entirely unknown hero of this whole long 48 hours. I will always regret that his number was busy and I couldn't get him at that moment.

Instead of a police officer, I got a friend at the locked door. "Who's there?" I demanded.

"Terry, Adamson," came back. And there spilled into the room a very few of the friends who had braced my wife and daughters through-out the ordeal.

The reunion has been chronicled elsewhere. But I left to go to the FBI offices to be debriefed, and I personally am ready to fight anybody who attacks the professionalism of that group.

At 2:15 in the morning a man came smiling through the door to announce, "We just went in. There is money all over the house."

And within 25 more minutes I had the greatest combination thrill and sense of worth to the paper in my career. I was able to dictate to them the official announcement of the arrest of William A. Williams, the Colonel, the man who had endangered my life, frightened my family, and struck still another blow at the institutions of freedom that have made this nation worth living in.