

Missing Bishop Car Found in Smokies

3/11/76
By Donald P. Baker
Washington Post Staff Writer

Bradford Bishop's station wagon was recovered yesterday at a resort area campsite deep in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, setting off an intensive search for Bishop in the mountains of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee.

The station wagon, believed to have been used to transport the bodies of Bishop's slain wife, mother and three sons from their blood-stained Bethesda home to a swamp in eastern North Carolina on March 2, apparently was abandoned four or five days later near Gatlinburg, Tenn.

The 1974 Chevrolet wagon was first seen parked in the Elkmont camp grounds, about 15 miles from Gatlinburg, on March 5 or 7, but residents there did not report it to park rangers until yesterday.

Meanwhile, Bishop 39, was indicted by a Montgomery County grand jury yesterday on murder charges. He

had previously been sought as a suspect in the killing of his family on warrants secured by county police and the FBI. An FBI "wanted" poster bearing two pictures of him was widely distributed yesterday.

The only witness to appear before the county grand jury in Rockville yesterday was County Police Cpl. Clarence Orbin, who has been investigating the Bishop slayings. Afterward, neither police nor prosecutors would discuss what evidence was presented to the grand jury, but Montgomery State's Attorney Andrew Sonner said it was primarily circumstantial.

It was still not known whether police had discovered a possible motive for the brutal beating deaths of Bishop's wife, Annette, 37; mother Lobelia, 68; and sons Brad III, 14, Brent, 10, and Geoffrey, 5. His mother was buried in North Hollywood, Calif. yesterday. The bodies of the other victims have



BRADFORD BISHOP
... indicted for murder

been cremated, and private family services for them are to be held soon in California.

Yesterday, in the mountains on the Tennessee-North Carolina border, Roy Ownby, a farmer and carpenter who lives on the edge of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, realized that what turned out to be Bishop's station wagon had been parked in the Elkmont camp grounds for two weeks. So he finally stopped a park ranger yes-

See BISHOP, A6, Col. 1

Bishop's Car Found in Park

BISHOP, From A1

terday afternoon and asked him to investigate.

"It's not unusual for hikers who go out to the primitive camp sites to leave their cars for several days," Ownby said, "but this one had been there a little too long."

The ranger Ownby alerted Carl Hinichs, called park headquarters at Gatlinburg and asked for a check of the station wagon's license plate, Maryland tag DFL-896. Within a short time ranger Hubert Penny at headquarters got the results from the FBI-police network's computer. "It was a hit," Penny said.

Another person who had noticed the station wagon some days ago was J. T. Higdon, 49, who with his sister, Midge, serve as caretakers for a group of privately owned cabins within the campgrounds. Higdon said four other cars had been parked nearby for several days, "so I didn't think much of it."

None of those who had seen the car had heard about the killings of the Bishop family.

Higdon said he looked in the parked car once but saw only "things" he could not describe. Ranger Penny said that when he peered into the car yesterday he saw what appeared to be a man's clothing on a seat. Neither Higdon nor Penny saw any blood.

Ownby said he had "intended since the first of the week to stop the ranger" and tell him about the car, "but it slipped my mind. I'm sure glad now that I remembered it," he said after being told by a reporter about the Bishop murders.

Higdon, who has lived in the rugged mountain area for 26 years, said it would have been relatively easy for someone to have hitched a ride out of the park in the last two weeks, because unseasonably warm weather had attracted scores of hikers to the park.

It also would be possible for someone to leave the area by foot, following any of the many trails that criss-cross the mountain park. The Appalachian Trail, which follows the mountains along most of the East Coast, is within a few miles of where the car was recovered.

"A fellow could walk along that trail to Atlanta," said Higdon.

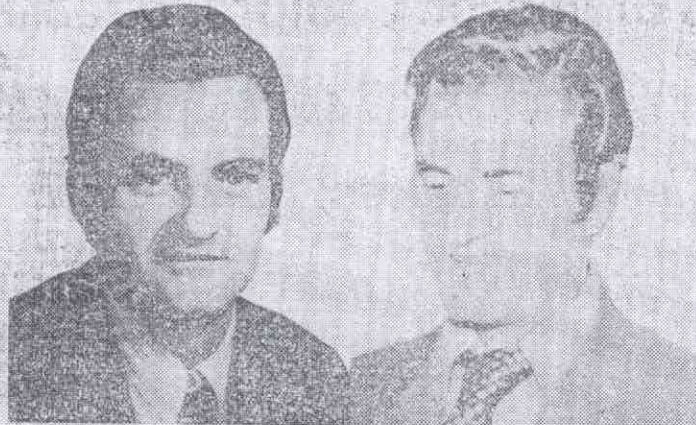
Rangers said there were no reports of stolen cars in the area, and a check of the cabins in the Elkmont park grounds failed to show any burglaries.

The Elkmont camp ground was opened in the 1920s, before the area became part of a national park, and 50 to 60 families, mostly from the Knoxville area, still own private cabins and land within the park. The area also has an old, frame hotel, the Wonderland, that rents

WANTED BY THE FBI

INTERSTATE FLIGHT - MURDER WILLIAM BRADFORD BISHOP, JR.

FBI No. 497,002 L7



Date photographs taken unknown

This "wanted" poster for Bishop has been widely distributed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

rooms to tourists in the summer.

By nightfall, investigators from North Carolina and Tennessee, joined by FBI agents from the Knoxville office, had cordoned off the area and begun a search for Bishop. The station wagon was towed to a service station at the edge of the park to be examined.

Residents of the area said they did not recall seeing anyone near the vehicle, and also did not see a dog. The Bishop's pet golden retriever, Leo, has also been missing since the slayings.

The station wagon was parked in front of a cabin owned by a Knoxville beer

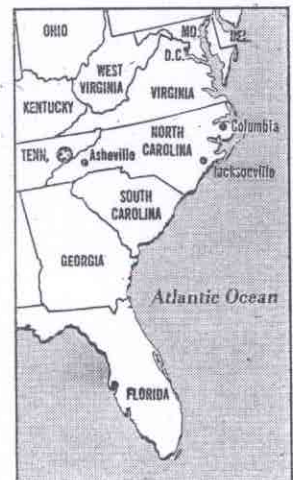
distributor, F. B. Kuhlman Sr. Hidgon said the Kuhlman cabin is nearly at the end of the dirt road, known as Jake's Creek Road, that runs off Tenn. Rt. 73 between Gatlinburg and Maryville.

The parking area near Kuhlman's cabin can accommodate a dozen cars, and is frequently used by hikers who set off from there to the deep woods.

Recovery of the car switched the search from Bishop from eastern to western North Carolina.

The only previously known evidence of Bishop's trail was the discovery last week that he had used his bank Americard to buy \$15.50 worth of sporting goods in a store in Jacksonville, N.C., which is about 100 miles south of Tyrrell County, N.C., where the victims' bodies were discovered set afire in a shallow makeshift grave.

The recovery of Bishop's car casts doubt on many unconfirmed sightings of Bishop in the coastal area of North Carolina, including one report that had him causing a fuss in a pancake house in Wilmington, N.C., last Thursday.



The Washington Post

'X' marks place where Bishop car was found.