

Boy, 2, Kidnaped as Father and Panthers Fight, Is Found Safe

Child, Missing 24 Hours, Appears in Park After Police Get Anonymous Phone Call; 1 of 2 Suspects Surrenders

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A 2-year-old boy kidnaped during a fight between his father and several Black Panther Party members in South-Central Los Angeles was returned to his parents unharmed late Thursday, almost 24 hours after he disappeared.

Police said the child, Chico Fowler, was found after an anonymous telephone caller said a boy answering the youngster's description was near a park at 51st St. and Avalon Blvd.

Less than an hour earlier, one of two suspects sought in the abduction, Panther member John William Washington, 24, voluntarily surrendered to Municipal Judge David J. Aisensohn.

Washington denied any knowledge of the kidnaping. A second Panther, Russell Eugene Washington, 20, who police said is not related to John Washington, still is being sought.

Police Theory on Abduction

Police said the abduction Wednesday apparently culminated a long-standing feud between the boy's father, amateur boxer Roosevelt Fowler, and the Panthers over Fowler's criticism of the Panthers and his refusal to be recruited into the militant group.

After the child was found, he was taken to the Newton Division Police Station to be reunited with his parents and immediately gulped down two cartons of milk and some crackers.

He was unable to tell officers where he had been, and his mother, Gloria, explained that he "doesn't talk too well yet."

She said she and her husband would take their son home "to give him a bath and a hot meal." He appeared to be in good condition although he had a runny nose from a cold.

John Washington was booked on a charge of kidnaping, and Judge Aisensohn, who first set bail at \$25,000, reduced it to \$10,000 at the request of Washington's attorney,

Leo Branton Jr. A preliminary hearing was set for Jan. 15.

Branton admitted Washington had fought with Fowler Wednesday but said when Fowler threatened to call police, Washington "took off." He described Washington as "almost indigent."

He added, "If someone took the child, my client has no knowledge of it," and said that in his opinion "the Black Panthers are not involved."

"It is their practice to feed children, not to kidnap them," he said. "That would be inconsistent with their philosophy."

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HAPPILY REUNITED—Amateur boxer Roosevelt Fowler and his son, Chico, 2, at Newton police station 24 hours after the boy was kidnaped during fight between Fowler and Black Panthers. Times photo by Cal Montney

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Elaine Brown, Panther minister of information, also said in an interview that the Panthers "don't know anything about the incident, at all. We don't have anything to say about this kind of madness."

She accused Fowler of "bringing 100 armed policemen into the black community."

But Dep. Dist. Atty. E. Lee Cogan told Judge Aisenson witnesses had seen Washington with the child and also said Washington had threatened Fowler.

The episode which led to the boy's disappearance began shortly after 5 p.m. Wednesday when the 42-year-old Fowler and the boy stopped at a store near the Panther headquarters at 4115 S. Central Ave., about 10 blocks from where the boy eventually was found.

He said he had his son by the hand and was walking toward the store to buy the child some potato chips. It was an evening ritual, he said.

But he was accosted by John Washington and several other Panthers and, fearing trouble because of previous run-ins with Panther members, he returned the boy to the car, Fowler continued.

He started back to the store alone and was attacked by the Panthers and hit in the face by John Washington, also known as "Long John," he said. Washington called him a "dirty black pig" and referred to an incident last month when Fowler made a citizen's arrest of a

Panther member, he added.

Fowler said he drew a .38-caliber revolver he had taken from the glove compartment of his car and fired two shots into the air.

Then, he went on, he flagged a county marshal's car, which stopped and called for police.

By the time Fowler returned to his car, however, the boy was gone, and witnesses reported seeing two men carrying the crying youngster down a nearby alley.

Believing that the child might have been taken into Panther headquarters, police called for community leaders to conduct a search of the building but did not enter themselves.

A police spokesman noted that the headquarters had been the scene of a violent police-Panther shootout Dec. 8, 1969, and explained that officers were "trying to prevent a confrontation" that might result in injury to innocent persons. He described the atmosphere as "explosive."

One of the persons who aided in the search, James

Williams, a field deputy for Assemblyman Bill Greene (D-Los Angeles), said the group, accompanied by four Panthers, "completely examined the inside of the building and ascertained that there was no one there."

Fowler told police he has had a long-running dispute with the Panthers since he refused recruitment by them in 1967.

"I guess they got it in their head that I was working with the police or something like that," he said.

He said he carried the revolver for self protection, and police said they have not yet investigated a complaint by Panthers that he was carrying a concealed weapon illegally.

"He was in fear of his life because of the Black Panthers," said a police spokesman. "He's a boxing coach down there. He has preached against joining the Panthers, and there have been some words between him and the Panthers. Apparently, the boy was taken in retaliation, that's all."

Fowler works in the food services department at John Wesley County Hospital but in his spare time conducts boxing clinics for young black children at neighborhood youth centers. His wife is a nurse's aide at the County-USC Medical Center.

They have two other children, Ali, 1, and Venus, 4.