

Not at Fault In Bail-Jump Case, DA Says

First Assistant District Attorney James L. Alcock today denied the DA's office was guilty of any wrong-doing in the case of Gerald Dawson Norris, a frequent bail-bond jumper in New Orleans who has been turned up in a North Carolinian jail.

Norris' location was revealed yesterday by attorney Harry Connick, who said he tracked down Norris after the DA's office was unable to locate the fugitive. Connick found Norris, a native of Seminary, Miss., serving a sentence for burglary in North Carolina.

IN THE PERIOD from June 7, 1967, to Dec. 8, 1968, Norris was arrested three times by New Orleans police, twice on narcotics charges and once on a burglary charge. He posted a total of \$20,000 in bail bonds during that period but was never brought to trial on any of the charges. The bail bonds were forfeited, but never collected.

Alcock said:

"The district attorney's office did everything it could under the law to bring Norris to trial and convict him.

"Trials were set but had to be postponed because the arresting officer in the case was injured and could not attend. Trials also were continued on the request of defense counsel.

"THE RIGHT to be free on bail is clearly stated in the U.S. Constitution and under prevailing law neither this office nor Criminal District Court judges have the right to deny Norris bail.

"It's interesting that President Nixon and his staff are presently considering laws that would deny bail to persons considered likely to commit further crimes if they are released from detention.

"At present, it would be unconstitutional to have denied Norris bond."

SOME TIME AFTER failing to appear for trial on a narcotics charge on Oct. 17, 1968, Norris disappeared from New Orleans. Sixteen months had passed since he was first arrested.

Alcock noted two co-defendants with Norris were convicted and a girl friend of Norris' was accused and convicted of attempting to bribe police officers. All three are currently serving sentences at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Alcock said.

"It was unfortunate that the key witness against Norris was ill and could not testify and that the trials were continued," Alcock said. "We believe that Norris fled because he knew that law enforcement officials here were going to take action against him."

ALCOCK ALSO said the failure of the DA's office to collect the \$20,000 bail bonds forfeited in Norris' case has nothing to do with the fugitive's flight.

Norris' case gained notoriety in the furor over the Maryland National Insurance Co., which posted bond for him on two occasions.

Maryland National allegedly owes the city \$700,000 in forfeited bail bonds.

Connick has maintained that Norris has been accused of at least five crimes since his original arrest in New Orleans and if prosecution effectively had been pushed or a high enough bail bond set, the one-man crime wave would have ended.

ALCOCK SAID it is rarely possible to get judges to agree to high bonds and that there are prohibitions against unreasonable bonds.

"We feel this office did all it could do under the law," Alcock said. "It is cases like this one that has caused many leading jurists to ask if some reforms in our approach to law-breakers isn't in order."