

The Virden — Oak Lake Incident

Murder-Auto Theft-Kidnapping-Hostage Taking

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On December 12, 1977, a couple entered the offices of a U-Drive rental agency in Surrey, B.C., and contracted to rent a vehicle for two days to move some articles from their home. The truck supplied to them was a white 1976 G.M.C. van, bearing B.C. licence 78-89-AK. Unknown to the rental agent, the couple then drove to their home, loaded all their worldly belongings into the van and headed east in a leisurely fashion.

Sometime after the two-day rental had elapsed, the rental agency reported to the police that the vehicle was overdue and they therefore considered it stolen. A description of the van was entered on the Canadian Police Information Centre computer system and it was cross-referenced to a suspect by the name of Donald Archer, who was also wanted in B.C. for a number of fraud offences.

On January 21, 1978, the body of a real estate agent was located in his office in Calgary, Alberta, the cause of death listed as suffocation. The partially-clad body had its hands tied behind its back and the office in which the body was located had been left in an impeccably clean condition. Some personal items and credit cards appeared to be the only items missing.

The next day, at 10:50 p.m., a couple driving a white G.M.C. van, B.C. licence 78-89-AK, checked into the Countryside Inn at Virden, Manitoba, and the room was paid for with a credit card in the name of the real estate agent from Calgary, Alberta.

The evening shift at Virden Detachment had experienced a quiet, rather normal Sunday evening, but as usual a member on duty made his routine rounds of the local motels, noting licence numbers of vehicles parked there which he would subsequently check through our C.P.I.C. system. Among the licence numbers noted by Cst. Dennis Onofrey was B.C. licence 78-89-AK on a white G.M.C. van. Onofrey returned to detachment quarters in Virden and began making his C.P.I.C. queries. At 12:31 a.m., he received a "hit" on B.C. licence 78-89-AK, a white 1976 G.M.C. van, reported as stolen from Surrey, B.C. Cst. Onofrey requested other members of Virden Detachment to verify the stolen vehicle with our Surrey Detachment while he returned to the Countryside Inn to conduct further inquiries. He also advised Cpl. R. D. Hornseth, the NCO on duty that evening, of his whereabouts and the reason he was going back to the motel. Hornseth replied that he would return to Virden as quickly as he could to act as backup.

Onofrey talked to the motel owners and determined that the people registered in room 20, in front of which was parked the stolen vehicle, were registered as Mr. and Mrs. R. Crystal. At the same time he obtained the spare key for room 20 in the event that it might be needed for entry. When Hornseth arrived, both members parked their police vehicles in the lane adjacent to the motel, in the vicinity of room 20. Just then Cst. John O'Ray and