

NEWS-PRESS Charlotte

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Reports From Staff Writers,
Bureaus And Wire Services

Life in prison seemed harsher than death — Raleigh Porter's trials aren't over

By PETER G. JOHNSON
Charlotte Bureau Chief

MOORE HAVEN — Fifty years in prison. There is the minimum sentence for the murder of Raleigh Porter. Porter will have to serve it if he is sentenced to two consecutive terms of life in prison.

And that might be what swayed the minds of jurors when they were asked to determine Porter's fate. "I think some of the jurors felt 50 years was really harsher in some ways than death," Diana Carlson, one of the 12 jurors, said after Porter's trial ended Friday. "Now he'll have no conscience what he's done for 50 years."

Defense provides shirttail justice

News-Press Bureau

MOORE HAVEN — A good defense attorney would do more anything for his client, even if it meant giving him the shirt off his own back.

Assistant Public Defender Robert Jacobs didn't go quite that far in his efforts to defend Raleigh Porter, but it was close.

Porter wore two different shirts during his trial on first-degree murder charges. This week, both were laundered from stains.

By the way, the shirts fit Porter pretty well.

A teacher at Moore Haven High School, Mrs. Carlson was one of 12 Glades County residents who listened to and weighed the evidence against Porter in his three-day trial this week.

On Thursday, the 12 jurors unanimously agreed Porter was guilty of murdering 74-year-old Harry Waltham and his 67-year-old wife Margaret Ann August.

On Friday, eight of them said 22-year-old Porter should be sentenced to life in prison on both counts of first-degree murder.

In a capital crime like murder, the jury is asked to recommend a sentence. But the presiding judge does not have to accept their recommendation.

In the case of Raleigh Porter, if Circuit Court Judge Richard M. Mosley follows the jury's recommendation, Porter will be 72 years old before he is eligible for parole.

According to Mrs. Carlson, there was almost no discussion of the death penalty when the jury retired to consider sentencing.

When the jury first went behind the closed doors, the foreman, Ronald Moss asked if anyone had any strong opinions one way or the other, Mrs. Carlson said.

A few members spoke up but just a few, she said.

The foreman then began polling the members of the jury but stopped after the first eight had voted in favor of life imprisonment.

By PETER G. JOHNSON
Charlotte Bureau Chief

MOORE HAVEN — This week's trial on first-degree murder charges wasn't Raleigh Porter's first visit to a courtroom and it likely won't be his last.

Porter, who two years ago pleaded guilty to receiving stolen goods, faces yet another trial later this month on two criminal charges stemming from an October jail break.

According to Assistant State Attorney Gene Berry, Porter is scheduled to stand trial on Dec. 12, the day after he is sentenced for the murders of Harry and Margaret Waltham.

On Thursday, Porter was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder for the August slaying of the Walthams, an elderly Port Charlotte couple.

The same Glades County jury that found Porter guilty has recommended he be sentenced to life in prison on both murder charges.

Porter's trial was moved to Glades County because of the extensive publicity generated

by the murders, Porter's arrest and his subsequent escape from jail.

Porter was arrested Aug. 23, barely 22 hours after the bodies of 74-year-old Harry Waltham and his 67-year-old wife Margaret were discovered in the den of their Port Charlotte home.

Forty-nine days later, in the early morning hours of Oct. 18, Porter escaped from his cell in the Charlotte County jail, slipped through a window and disappeared into the night.

A massive manhunt was launched for the murder suspect and he was recaptured about 13 hours later, not more than two miles away from the jail.

But while Porter was still at large, Pasta Gorda's assistant chief of police was killed when he was struck by a car at a roadblock that had been set up to capture the 25-year-old convict.

Though many lawmen felt Porter was indirectly responsible for the death of Lt. Richard Bender, he was not charged with it.

He was, however, charged with escape and aggravated battery, the latter charge a result

of an apparent attempt to steal a car.

According to court records, Porter approached a woman in the parking lot of the Aqua Etna shopping center and tried to take her car keys from her.

When she resisted, Porter is alleged to have struck the woman in the mouth.

Berry said he fully intends to take Porter to trial on the two charges, regardless of his conviction on the two counts of first-degree murder.

He said the only thing that could prevent holding a trial is if Porter pleads guilty to the escape and aggravated battery.

Both charges are second degree felonies, with maximum penalties of 15 years in prison.

The first time Porter was sent in prison was after he entered his plea of guilty to receiving stolen goods in 1974.

He was sentenced to five years in prison and was paroled after serving two years. He was released from the state prison about three months before the murders took place, according to officials.

even when he had the opportunity he would have said "I don't do it and I don't want to die" — the said.

Other members of the jury asked for a comment after the conclusion of the trial would not talk with reporters.

Computer system expanding

By KEVIN BLOOM
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — When Monday morning rolls around at the Charlotte County courthouse, it will be to a computer system nearly double its present input capacity.

Computer consultant Zol deSully said the system, which now utilizes 38 terminals, will have the capacity to handle 72.

In addition, deSully said, in the event of a breakdown in one system, operators will have the capacity to switch to a back-up system with the flip of a switch.

The county's Etrax 400-50 system has the capacity to store 286 million characters of information. Each series of terminals has access to its respective part of the memory system.

Essentially, deSully said, the county operates three separate systems. With the revisions being carried out over the weekend, any terminal will have the capability to switch to another system.

"Think of it as partitioning," deSully said. "With each terminal having access to its own partition, in an emergency, deSully said.

The county leases the system at a cost of about \$100,000 a year, deSully said.

Charlotte County is a little unusual.



Computer consultant Zol deSully works at one of the original 38 Charlotte terminals.

Signs of red tide lessen

By KEVIN BLOOM
News-Press Bureau

PORT CHARLOTTE — A ban on shellfish harvesting in the waters off Charlotte County could be lifted soon, state officials say Friday.

Bill Lanford, a sanitation official with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in Apalachicola, said water samples taken earlier this week show red tide concentrations in the waters around Charlotte Harbor appear to be clearing up.

"It's looking pretty good for the Charlotte County area," Lanford said. "They're still a bit high around Lee County and they are strong down in Collier County."

Lanford said concentrations in the waters off Charlotte County were close to waters a fortnight ago.

If consecutive samples, taken within a week from the most indicative red tide organisms, have filtered out, DNR will consider lifting the ban on shellfish harvesting.

Lanford said sampling shellfish is the last stage in the testing procedures before a ban can be lifted.

Red tide organisms — *Cyrenoidium brevis* — always are in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico but for unknown reasons, the organisms

Investigators starting a review of Pikuritz murder case details

By KAREN FELDMAN
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — Charlotte County Sheriff's Department investigators are going back to the beginning and reviewing all the facts in the Linda Pikuritz murder case.

After almost three months, investigators have questioned more

than 75 persons, arrested one man for perjury and, according to Public Information Officer Byron Snowden, have run out of suspects.

The 15-year-old Port Charlotte girl was abducted on her way home from a local convenience store then burned to death in a field Oct. 12.

"There are no new suspects," Snowden said Friday. "The investigators are going over everything from the start."

He added that the Hississ man sought for questioning last month spoke with investigators last week but has not been questioned since.

Brian Patrick Kane, 25, is being held by Sarasota County jailers, but is expected to appear in court on a charge of fleeing when incarcerated.

Sheriff Adam Leffler said last week, however, the fact that no charges have been brought against Kane does not mean that investigators have been completed.

Philip Lee Drake, 26, of Port Charlotte, was charged with perjury in connection with testimony he gave to Assistant State Attorney Eugene Berry regarding the murder.

He has since been released on bail. Berry said previously Drake is not suspected of committing the murder but he has been charged with making false statements under oath.

According to court records, Drake denied knowing his 1972 Chevrolet to anyone on the day Linda was abducted and killed.

Inside Today's B-Section

• **FLORIDA TWO SENATORS** send a letter to President Carter supporting Florida Lt. Gov. Jim Williams as a candidate for deputy secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

• **MOBILE HOMES**, a supermarket, a water ranch and a chicken farm are heavily damaged at a mobile home through Pasco County but no one is reported injured.

• **A METEOROLOGIST** who predicted the bitter cold wave of 1977 in the southeastern United States now — and the West is in for colder times.

• **CONVICTED RAPIST** Kenneth Charles Vellous is sentenced to two concurrent 10-year jail terms by Circuit Judge John Gilbert.

Drug information center offers toll-free calls

By KAREN FELDMAN
News-Press Bureau

PORT CHARLOTTE — Florida residents with questions about legal or illegal drugs can now have them answered by dialing a toll-free number.

Up Front, Inc. is a drug education and information center funded by the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services.

By dialing 1-800-822-8228, information on just about any illegal chemical can be obtained, according to Deborah Sternlicht, a registered nurse and Up Front's information specialist.

"We don't take a stand on whether to take a drug or not. That's up to the individual. We're here to help," Ms. Sternlicht said.

The center, which is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., has an executive director, two nurses and a resident pharmacist whose specialty is man's use of drugs, according to Ms. Sternlicht.

Up Front also has a consulting pharmacist to answer questions the regular staff does not know or cannot find in the center's extensive library.

"Our goal is to help people make safe and responsible decisions about drugs," Ms. Sternlicht said.

She added that the center also offers a drug evaluation service for a small fee.

Anyone who has a drug, legal or illegal, and wants to have it analyzed should send a small amount of the substance to Street Pharmacology, P.O. Box 6262, Miami, Fla. 33161.

The drug should be wrapped in foil or plastic, sealed in another container and marked "hand caps" on the outside of the package.

It should also contain a slip of paper with any five-digit number on it, how much the drug cost, what substance it is believed to be, if possible, where it was gotten.

After about two weeks, the person sending in the drug should contact the center and state the five-digit number that was included with the drug.

The center guarantees anonymity for the person sending in the drug. For more information on Up Front, call its toll-free number or write to the center at 280 McArthur Road, Coconut Creek, Fla.