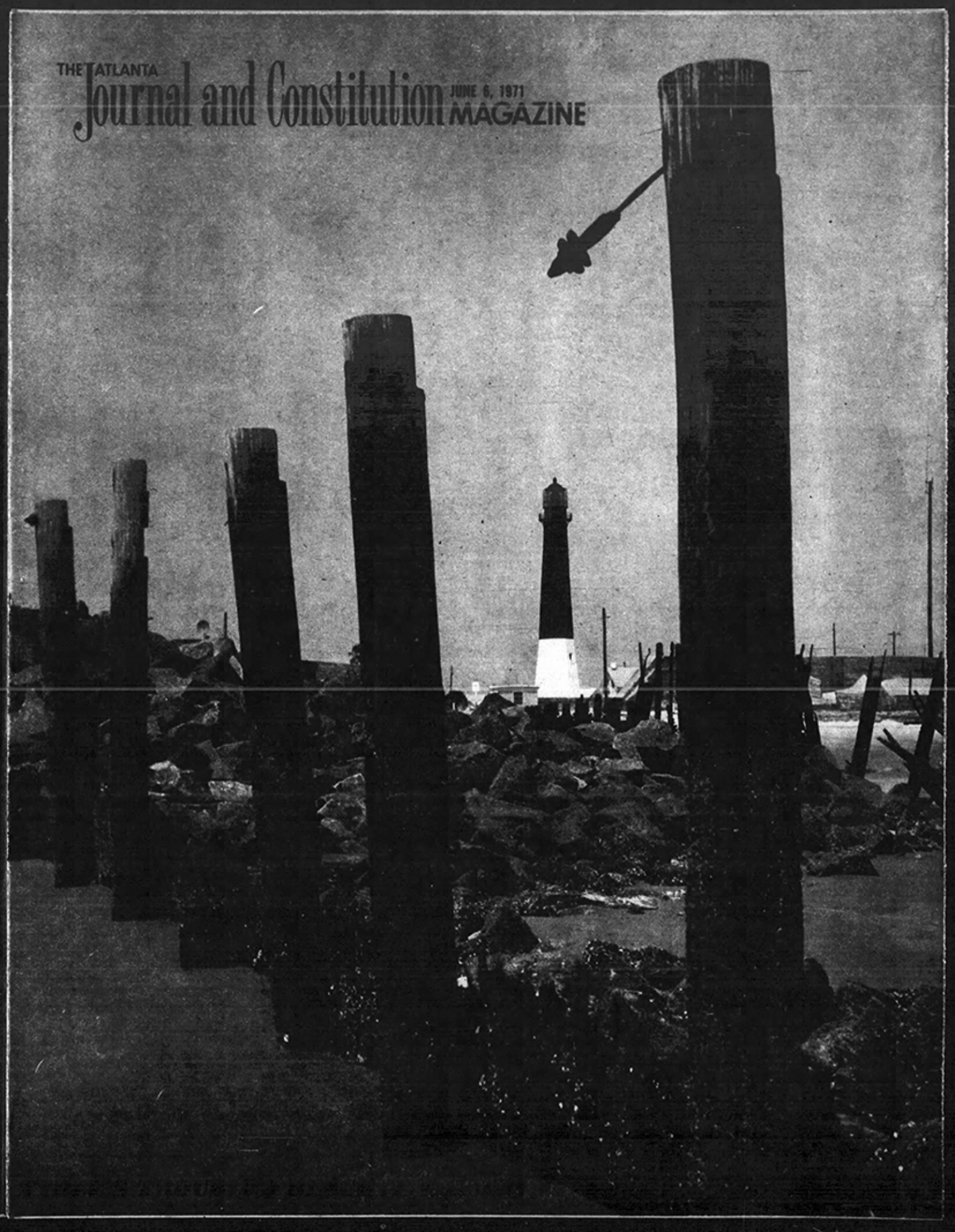


THE ATLANTA

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MAGAZINE



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Dirt for life

Vital Soil

A recent article, "Why You Need Soil for Life," by Lucy Justus we read in class because it fit in what we were doing in science book six.

Some of the information was very interesting, especially about the microorganisms.

Also I was surprised it was written by a lady, but I think she did a very good job.

Mark Phillips
Macon, Ga.

Mark was one of almost a dozen sixth graders at Stratford Academy in Macon who wrote to say they found the article helpful in their study of soils and seeds.

Prisons Chief

I have been dealing with the press in my responsibilities as a corrections official for 14 years. In all of those 14 years, I have never had a story as accurately written as was your fabulous piece in the magazine ("New Prisons Chief Talks About Criminal Justice," by John Pennington).

I can't express my deep appreciation for the work he did on this particular article. It, itself, has given me a base of confidence from the people of Georgia to accomplish change in prisons.

Ellis C. MacDougall
Director of Corrections
State of Georgia

Chattahoochee

Thank you so very much for your article "Chattahoochee's Destiny?" The article was lovely in its sensitivity, dreadful in its account of damage, and hopeful of measures for the preservation of our beautiful Chattahoochee.

That this wonderful natural resource and asset of ours be preserved in its natural state with its natural surroundings is my prayer.

Miss Katharine Simpson
Barrington Hall
Roswell, Ga.



The Cover

Tybee Light near the mouth of the Savannah River looks out over the ruins of past efforts to protect Savannah Beach. The granite boulders, which reinforce a concrete sea-wall, are part of the emergency work done to repair the damages of Hurricane

Dora in 1964. Many things combined—such as dam building upstream and improved farming practices—have caused severe erosion of most of the beaches along the North American coasts. Some authorities say that unless the process can be stopped our sandy shores may disappear in the next few years. Other color photographs and a story about our disappearing beaches on Pages 14 and 15.—Photography by Kenneth Rogers.

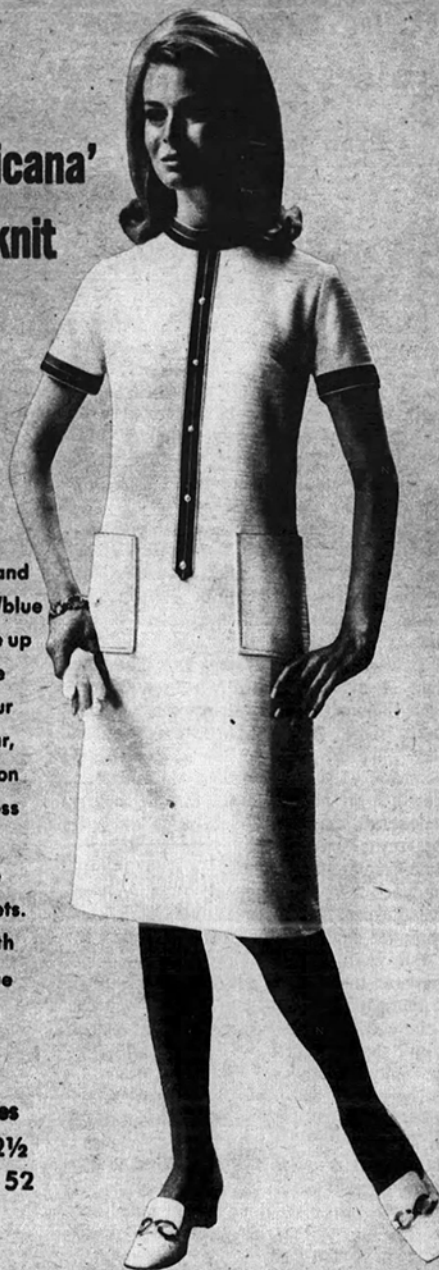
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A party after the Clay-Quarry fight turned into quite a blast

By Margaret Shannon

"IT reads like something out of a storybook. So classical. It's the kind of thing you see on television or in the movies."

Six months after the biggest robbery in Atlanta history, the detective who said this, Lieutenant J. D. Hudson of the Atlanta Police Department, was sure that he and his partner in the case, Lieutenant Joe Amos, had solved the crime. But mystery remained about just when and how it was planned, the robbers hadn't been caught and none of the loot had been recovered. So the story had no ending—a most unsatisfactory state of affairs.

This was the robbery that took place the night of the Muhammad Ali-Jerry Quarry fight. Nothing, it was thought, could top that sports event. Ali, also known as Cassius Clay, was returning to the ring after 43 months of exile occasioned by his refusal to submit to the military draft. Now he was on the national magazine covers in his red boxing trunks and in the sports pages with State Senator Leroy Johnson, and the beautiful black people converged on Atlanta in Rolls-Royses, furs, diamond necklaces, custom-made alligator shoes and living color.

But when a man named William Knox answered the door at 2819 Handy Drive NW at approximately 10:55 p.m. last Oct. 26, the main event of the evening began, and it wasn't the fight. Not for detectives Hudson and Amos anyway.

There were three men at the door, Knox, a Brooklynite, told police later. He let them in, because he thought they were party guests, and they started downstairs to the basement game room. About halfway, one of the three turned on Knox with a pistol and ordered him to take his clothes off and lie on the basement floor.

Four hours later, according to the detectives' estimates, between 80 and 200 guests who thought they were coming to an after-fight party had been similarly treated and robbed of possibly \$1 million or more in cash and jewelry.

This had to be a guess. Indictments two months later listed only six victims and some \$10,000 in losses, not counting a pair of shoes and a set of car keys. It seems simply unbelievable that 200 people could have had half a million dollars in money and \$500,000 to \$800,000 worth of jewelry on them. But that's what the investigators think, and they think they got to know a lot about the victims they never saw or talked to.

So far as could be determined, all the



Guests at a party on Atlanta's West Side found themselves face to face with this sawed-off shotgun.

On the Trail of the Champion Robbers

robbery victims and all the robbers were blacks. Ali's bout with white heavyweight Quarry at the Municipal Auditorium drew the real jet set—the black elite in civil rights, high society, show business and, as police learned, the underworld.

Hudson and Amos are two of the outstanding Negroes in the Atlanta Police Department. Hudson has been on the force for 21 years and was the first black to make detective lieutenant. Amos became a policeman in 1957, got his promotion to lieutenant in 1969 and has a law degree earned since he joined the force.

The first detectives who went to the scene of the crime about 3 a.m. on Oct. 27, some four hours after Ali had scored a third-round TKO over Quarry, were white. Later that day, Clinton Chafin, superintendent of detectives, informed Hudson and Amos that Police Chief Herbert Jenkins wanted them to work the case. They were pulled off of their regular assignments—Hudson, the fugitive squad, and Amos, internal security. Other detectives helped, but it was Hudson and Amos' only assignment for weeks.

"The chief had the idea the victims would probably talk to us more freely," Amos said. "On the night of the robbery, they sent some white detectives out to investigate and people didn't seem to care too much about talking to them about it. We got a little closer to them, I guess, being able to talk their language a little more, and they talked more freely."

POLICE identified the house at 2819 Handy Drive on Atlanta's West Side as belonging to Gordon (Chicken Man) Williams, 37, a one-time lottery kingpin, and Barbara Smith, 28. Some reports described the place as luxurious, almost as if it were a mansion, but any class it had must have been inside. Outside it's just a modest, nice-looking red brick house.

"A lot of people were telling us a lot of things," detective Hudson said, "particularly that Chicken Man was the man who planned the robbery. There were some very strong opinions from some very good detectives, some reliable informers and some concerned citizens."

"However, Lieutenant Amos and I discussed it, and we decided that it would be better if we left our minds open and didn't draw any hard and fast conclusions as to who the perpetrators were."

By the time Hudson and Amos took over primary responsibility for investigation of the case, an outline of the episode already had taken shape—and it was a gas, man. There were these invitations, see, to a birthday party that Fireball and Frank were having for Tobe (no last names given). The invitations said the party started on Saturday, Oct. 24, and went on through Oct. 26, date of the fight.

Mostly, police said, the weekend party was a big crap game. One cat dropped \$16,000 Sunday night, and a friend bankrolled him with \$5,000 for the next night. Next night, the robbers got the \$5,000.

There were five to eight robbers, armed with sawed-off shotguns and with pistols and masked, except for one. They stationed themselves strategically upstairs and down,

made Barbara Smith greet guests at the front door and then forced guests to go downstairs, undress, surrender their valuables and lie down on the floor. The robbers communicated by walkie-talkie. One evidently was stationed outside as a lookout.

The basement got so crowded that floor space ran out, and late guests had to lie on top of others. About 2:30 a.m. the robber stationed near the front door told Barbara Smith, "OK, that's enough," and the gang gathered its loot and fled. Guests scrambled for their clothes, and most of them fled, too—back to their hotels, back to New York or wherever they came from, and not even complaining to police that they were robbed.

SO it was a very peculiar case. Victims weren't hollering for help, but there was plenty of pressure for a solution. City Hall didn't like what the heist did to Atlanta's image, because the crime was so bizarre and so funny, really, that everybody was laughing and making wisecracks about it, and ridicule is just about the worst thing that can happen to an image.

"By the time we got the case, most of the victims had already left town," detective Hudson said. "But just a visual measuring of the basement floor indicated that 100 or more people were robbed. Almost everybody told us a different story as to how many were there."

"Since invitations were issued and people were responding to celebrate the Clay victory, it would be reasonable to assume that a large number came. Many arrived in taxicabs or chauffeured limousines and were left there. I would imagine there were closer to 200 victims."

The detectives soon discounted the theory that Tobe, the supposed guest of honor, or Fireball and Frank, the party-givers, were in on the robbery plot. They identified Fireball as a former Atlantan, a petty bootlegger and lottery man, who went to New York to live about ten years ago. They managed, too, to get a last name for Frank, reputed to be a New York racketeer specializing in numbers and narcotics. Tobe's identity remained a puzzle. They didn't talk to any of the three.

"We couldn't locate Fireball," Lieutenant Hudson said. "We did get information that Frank was living in a Marietta motel. We went by to see him and missed him. We talked to a local hoodlum who knew him, and we asked him to ask Frank if he would talk to us, that we wanted to talk to him in terms of trying to get some help in solving the robbery. All our attempts were unsuccessful."

The investigators were told that Frank and Fireball were at the party and were robbed. Chicken Man, talking scared, showed up at police headquarters with a lawyer two days after the robbery and claimed he'd been plucked of \$941. He said he'd seen Fireball in New York a while before the fight and had agreed to let his house be used for the party for Tobe.

Not everybody at the party was an outlaw, but as the two detectives talked to the few victims who would talk, they got a view of the party as a gathering mostly of types who do not live by bread alone—but by bread and diamonds (Continued on Page 30)



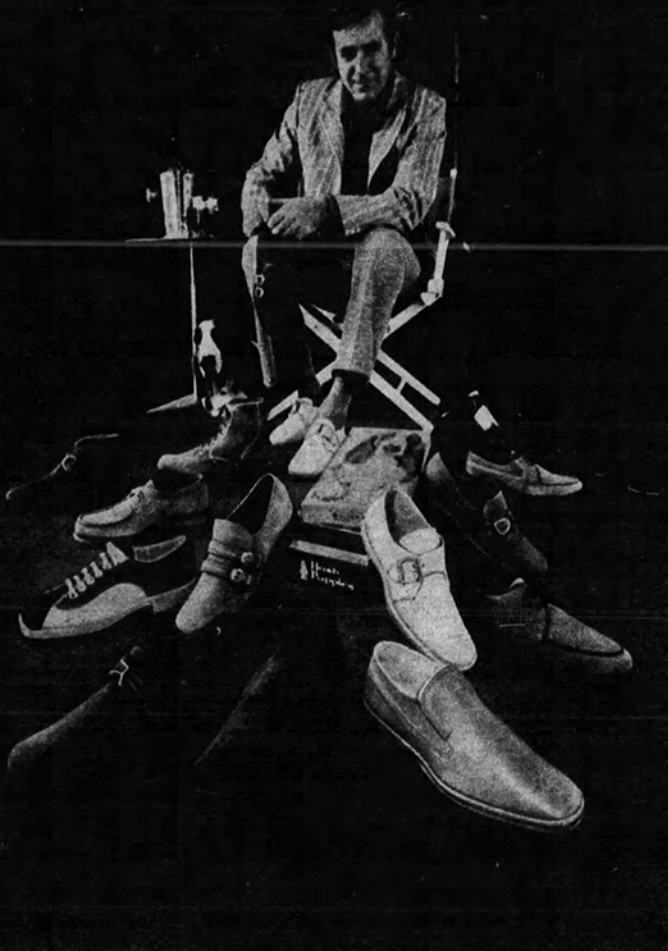
Chief of police assigned detectives J. D. Hudson and Joe Amos, both lieutenants, to investigate million-dollar heist.

Photography by Floyd Jillson



As he fled scene, one robber dropped shotgun and satchel containing walkie-talkie and other items.

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'A constant threat of death was hanging over everybody'

(Continued From Page 9)

and dice and things not so nice.

"Some of the ones we talked to named some of the biggest black racketeers in the country," detective Hudson said. "One fellow had four chauffeured limousines parked in front of his hotel just to carry his party around.

"Another fellow who was robbed had had his chauffeur drive his Rolls-Royce to Atlanta and pick him up at the airport. There was a big-time hoodlum from California. A big hoodlum from Washington, D. C., was allegedly robbed and hit over the head with a shotgun. We were told he's the kind you just don't rob and hit.

"I said at one point that if there's any such thing as a Black Mafia, the Black Mafia was robbed. When you start naming some of the names of who is who in crime around New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Los Angeles, Chicago—these people were robbed. Their women were robbed. I understand that they were some of the best-dressed women that you would ever see."

THE fight crowd had been a show: a man in an ankle-length mink coat and a high hat of mink; another in a tuxedo with ermine lapels; a black satin suit decorated with squares of gold lame; Afro hairdo a foot in diameter; leather suits and sequined suits; green satin shirt beneath a red cape; zoot suits; maxi-skirts and minidresses; purple; char- treuse; pink; orange.

"It was a fashion show more than a fight," detective Hudson said. "These people had on their best of everything. They were wearing expensive jewelry. Most of these hoodlums wear custom-made diamond rings, stickpins, watches. They have large stones. This is what was taken. This is why I estimate the jewelry take to be anywhere from \$500,000 to \$800,000.

The money was for show, too, as well as for gambling and high living: rolls of \$100 bills; \$500 bills in profusion.

It wasn't hard to figure the lack of complaints about the robbery. "If some of these people didn't have legitimate means of support and they come up missing a \$20,000 diamond ring, they would say, 'I would rather lose the ring than have Internal Revenue breathing down my neck for the next two years wanting to know where did I get all this money from,'" Lieutenant Amos explained.

At first everybody was saying that the robbery must have been planned in detail, and maybe even rehearsed, because it seemed to go off with the precision of a military drill.

"A lot of people thought it was a big conspiracy of professional holdup men," Lieutenant Hudson said. "One of the victims all during the while we were talking to him kept on saying, 'They were so cold. They were cold. They were just deadly.' One guy said, 'They just took all the heart out of you.'

"Many of the people who came to the party were armed. They were disarmed by the holdup men. From what people there said, they had a routine that they followed almost to the letter. The constant threat of death was hanging over everybody in the house."

NOBODY died, though, and not a shot was fired. As the investigation proceeded, Hudson and Amos discarded the theory that a bunch of professional gangsters had been imported to Atlanta to rob a group of big spenders lured into a trap.

"We developed the theory that a bunch of local boys did the job," Amos said. "We don't dispute that it was carried out well, but when you're looking down the barrel of a shotgun, you don't look around for mistakes the man with the shotgun may be making. Right then he can't do any wrong but pull the trigger on you."

Hudson and Amos eventually came to believe that maybe the robbers had just gone out to Handy Drive expecting to stick up just a crap game where big money was floating around, and when they found a different kind of party, they adapted their plans to fit the occasion.

And what an occasion it was! The tales that the detectives heard about fancy clothes, dazzling diamonds, big bankrolls and limousines, a mass stripdown and a basement floor covered with unclothed men and women held prisoner by masked robbers were about as sensational as any policeman could expect to encounter in a lifetime.

But the tales didn't solve the crime, and when Hudson and Amos thought of the nature of some of the witnesses—a dope pusher, a pimp, a prostitute, a numbers racketeer, a gambler—they wondered about the worth of their word.

"It really gets back to the old Dick Tracy thing—clues," Lieutenant Hudson said. "This is what we ended up doing. The solution to the robbery came not from the information we received from victims, but from the physical evidence we were able to collect. That evidence is the only thing we have to stand on."

One of the robbers left valuable evidence at the scene, and it led to more. As he fled from the house on Handy Drive, he was holding a young woman

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(Continued From Page 30)

hostage with one hand and a shotgun and black satchel in the other.

"This girl told us later that they were running away from the house when they looked up and a car was driving off," Amos said. "He said, 'I'm sorry, baby, but I got to put you down and get some leather,' meaning he had to dash to catch his getaway car. He let loose of her and dropped the shotgun and satchel and took off."

Police found the shotgun and the satchel in the woods near the house. The satchel contained a walkie-talkie, two pairs of men's shoes, dice, playing cards, a length of venetian blind cord, one blue pillowcase and one yellow-and-white striped pillowcase. The robbers had carried their loot away in a pillowcase.

The barrel of the shotgun showed signs that it had been newly sawed off to just a little over 12 inches in length. The gun was traced to a pawn shop on Peters Street, and here came the first real break in the case. Because of

the federal gun control law, the buyer had to fill out a form and produce identification. He used his driver's license.

THE shotgun left at the scene had been bought by Houston J. Hammonds, who was known to a detective on the police department's pick-pocket and shoplifting detail. That detective, Hudson and Amos went looking for Hammonds. "We were having lunch in a place on a street that Hammonds frequented," Amos said, "and this detective looked up and said, 'There he goes.'"

Hammonds was arrested and jailed, but at first would say nothing about the shotgun purchase except: "I was tricked into doing it." After a visit from his mother, however, he told police that he was paid \$20 for making the purchase and promised more by a man whom he did not know by name. The man was identified from photographs as James Henry Hall, a former Lockheed employe, whom Hudson and Amos later

tabbed as probably the brains behind the holdup.

Records showed that other weapons and ammunition were purchased at the Peters Street shop on the day of the fight by suspects in the case. This was a significant piece of information, because it pointed to the possibility that the crime was of local origin.

"If an imported gang did it, it doesn't seem reasonable that they would dispatch a local punk to buy weapons at a local pawn shop where he would have to identify himself," detective Hudson said.

"If that shotgun had not been left at the scene, we probably would not have been able to determine where the guns came from, because I personally would never have thought that persons pulling a robbery like that would have bought the guns the day of the robbery right here in Atlanta."

A piece of paper found in Hammonds' pocket had a telephone number and extension on it that led the detectives to a hotel. No one was in the room indicated by the extension, but the visit turned up

the presence at the hotel of a group of robbery victims.

"We really just stumbled into them," Lieutenant Hudson said. "After we promised them that we were not interested in who they were or what they did or where they were from, but in who robbed them, they reluctantly agreed to talk."

After some conversation, they seemed to decide to trust the detectives and opened up more. One thing they said was that four of them had calculated their losses in the robbery to total \$78,000.

AFTER hearing that, the detectives raised their estimate of the robbers' haul. "If four people lost that kind of money, then we figured the total had to go up," Hudson said.

James Henry Hall could not be found, but investigation revealed that he'd also been to a Marietta Street pawn shop on the day of the robbery and bought a 20-gauge shotgun, a knife, a hacksaw, hacksaw blades and sandpaper. These were the tools of

crime: the shotgun and the means for sawing off part of the barrel.

One of the best leads in the case came in on the police department's Hot Line, a telephone number for people to call with information about crimes. A man said he'd seen a Negro man buying three walkie-talkies in a radio shop on Peachtree Street on the day of the robbery. The report checked out. Hall, using an alias, had made the purchase for \$123.45.

Hall's whereabouts continued to stump the detectives. For days they couldn't even find out where he lived. The address he'd given in buying weapons was checked repeatedly, and so were the neighbors. There seemed to be nobody there.

Eventually Amos, using a source of his own, obtained information that led to other information that led to locating Hall's apartment, and there the investigators hit the jackpot. On Nov. 7, ten days after the robbery, they took a search warrant and entered the apartment on Jackson Parkway in northwest At-

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Robbery suspects Houston Hammonds, James Hall and McKinley Rogers. Hammonds was caught day after holdup, but other two just seemed to drop out of sight.

lanta. They found evidence connecting Hall and another man, McKinley Rogers, to the robbery.

"This is where we found the other two walkie-talkies that had been purchased," Lieutenant Hudson said. "We found the case that the walkie-talkie recovered at the scene had come from, and the strap off it. We found evidence of the purchase of other weapons, although we weren't able to locate the weapons.

"We had information that one of the robbers had worn a Lone Ranger type of Halloween mask. There was a package of those in the apartment.

"Just accidentally we learned that apparently McKinley Rogers had been living in that apartment with Hall. We found this bunch of snapshots and went to some people with them, trying to get Hall identified, and instead we got McKinley Rogers identified as the robber who was standing at the front door with a shotgun. He's the one who didn't have a mask on."

HUDSON said evidence in the apartment indicated the robbers spent only a brief time there after the robbery. "Apparently a lady lived in the apartment," the detective said. "She left everything. Apparently there was a baby there. The baby's food and clothes were left. Clean diapers were folded on the bed as if the lady had washed them and was standing there folding them when somebody came in and said, 'Let's go,' and she picked the baby up and walked out the door."

Also found were blue and yellow-and-white striped sheets matching the pillowcases that were in the satchel abandoned at the scene of the robbery. The apartment was nicely furnished in a sort of mod way. There was African art, and there were books on guns and karate and about the Black Muslims and Malcolm X.

"Even personal papers were left," Hudson said, "like a marriage license, insurance papers, driver's license application. Suitcases were left. A tag on one indicated that the lady had come to Atlanta in June from New York.

"Hall had some expensive clothes left hanging in the closet and expensive shoes still there; ties, underclothes, razors, blades, cigarette lighters, rings. Even there was food from a fried chicken place on the stove and six slices of pie; six salads.

IT did not appear that anyone slept in the apartment after the robbery. It appeared that maybe they came in and dropped everything but their guns and left. They dumped the walkie-talkies on the bed and even left the ammunition."

"They" were Hall and Rogers and others unknown to the police. The detectives could not say for sure whether they were lacking only two suspects, or as many as six. Witnesses to the robbery did not agree on the number of robbers. The guesses ranged from five to eight. If Houston Hammonds did not participate, at least three and possibly as many as six more men besides Hall and Rogers were wanted.

Or men and women. One victim told investigators he was almost sure that one of the robbers was a woman. He said this robber had a womanlike walk, and when another victim threw a diamond necklace into a grabage can to try to hide it, the robber with the womanlike walk retrieved it with a small, slender, soft-looking, womanlike hand.

"We surmised from Rogers' papers that he was relatively new to Atlanta," Lieutenant Hudson said. "He had been living in New York. From a driver's license application we found, we learned he was from Brunswick, Ga.,

originally. From Hall's traffic record, we found he was from Brunswick also.

"Later we got a call from a detective in Brunswick that a large group of blacks—eight or ten—had been living in a motel there for several days right after the fight. They were conspicuous in that they wouldn't allow the maids inside the rooms to clean up and they wouldn't come out of their rooms. They had their food sent to their rooms.

"When they checked out of the motel," Hudson said, "they went downtown and spent a lot of money—bought a lot of clothes and other things. One of the merchants became suspicious because they were spending so much money and seemed to have so much money, and he called the police.

"A local policeman stopped this group of cars as they were leaving Brunswick, going north on U. S. 17, and he got identification from Hall and Rogers and identified several other people, both male and female, who were in the cars. We were able to find out where some of them lived in Atlanta.

"It seems that Hall and Rogers went to school in Brunswick and were either classmates or schoolmates," the detective said. "After the robbery, they went home, which probably was the safest place for them. We assumed they had gone north or west, but they were just here in Georgia, down home."

ON Dec. 15, 1970, Houston J. Hammonds, the gun buyer who'd been in jail since the day after the robbery, pleaded guilty in Fulton Superior Court to other charges pending against him in an earlier case. He'd grabbed a money bag containing \$525 at a suburban department store, but was caught in the act. Judge Osgood Williams gave

(Continued on Page 55)

Robbery

(Continued From Page 33)

him five years, three probated, for theft by taking and 12 months for simple battery on the arresting officer, with the sentences to run concurrently.

On March 23 this year, Hammonds filed a demand for final disposition of the armed robbery indictment against him. If he was not tried within the next two terms of court after that date, the detainer which would hold him for Atlanta police after his present sentence would be cancelled. He is eligible for parole in August.

Six months after the robbery, Hammonds was the only person who figured in it whose whereabouts were

known to Atlanta police, except for a few of the victims. Barbara Smith had dropped out of sight; another woman who was a hostage had been lost track of; Fireball, Frank and Tobe had not been heard from, and James Henry Hall, McKinley Rogers and their unnamed companions had been seen no more by the law.

Then suddenly, late in May, the detectives got word that two men tentatively identified as Hall and Rogers had been found dead in the Bronx. Murdered. Hudson and Amos weren't surprised. There are some crimes that not even the underworld likes.