

SHOE

by Jeff MacNelly



## Man infiltrates biker club, says group dealt in drugs

Associated Press

CORPUS CHRISTI — A government informant testified Tuesday he gradually infiltrated the Bandidos motorcycle club and used government money to incriminate club members in alleged drug trafficking operations, although he feared for his life.

Four Bandidos club members are on trial on charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamines.

The four are James Lyndon Cheatham, 31; Steven Robert "Boo Boo" Barbour, 39; Patrick "Rawhide" Ledoux, 44; and Karen Brown, 31.

Government informant Robert Armstrong, who has been convicted in several states on burglary and theft charges, said he knew some motorcycle club members in Corpus Christi.

Armstrong testified he first talked to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration officials about an unrelated case last May. He said that during the conversation, agent Jim Anderson asked him if he knew whether Bandidos club members were in-

involved in drug trafficking.

Armstrong said he had to think for a few days before agreeing to become an informant. Assistant U.S. Attorney Jesse Rodriguez asked him why he had to think about it that long.

"Because I was fearing for my safety and for the safety of my family," Armstrong replied.

He testified he was given money by Anderson to buy a motorcycle to entertain club members so he could gain their trust.

Armstrong testified he bought methamphetamine from the three male defendants last November and December and in early January. Brown is accused of packaging the methamphetamine.

Armstrong said there were times when the defendants snorted the methamphetamine and smoked marijuana, but he never did, telling them that the drugs would cause a reaction with prescription medicine he was taking.

In afternoon proceedings, defense attorneys tried to discredit Armstrong as a witness. He was on the stand for more than five hours.

Cheatham is accused of conspiracy and six counts of possession with intent to distribute. The other three each are charged with conspiracy and two counts of possession with intent to distribute.

If convicted, they face 15 years in prison and a \$125,000 fine on each charge, Rodriguez said.

The four are among 10 arrested in Corpus Christi Feb. 21 in a nationwide crackdown of alleged drug trafficking operations by Bandido club members. The other six are expected to be tried later this month.

A total of 22 suspected Bandidos were arrested in Texas in February with most of the arrests in Corpus Christi and Lubbock, where an armored personnel carrier was used to round up the suspects.

During the opening statements, one of the defense attorneys, Jose Ramos, tried to discredit Armstrong.

"The evidence will show that Mr. Armstrong has taken the government for a ride of \$20,000," Ramos told jury of nine men and three women. "Mr. Armstrong is a crook. That's the person the government is going to want you to believe."

## Pilgrims celebrate 'El Nino'

Associated Press

ESPINAZO, Mexico — It is said a healer once lived here and that he died before his time.

It is believed by many that the healer's work continues, that his spirit empowers his followers to heal others as he did.

Twice each year, thousands of believers gather here to celebrate the birth and death of the healer, Fidencio S. Constantino — El Nino, or "the little boy."

On March 19, about 15,000 fedencistas jammed the main street of this isolated rural community in the northern Mexican state of Nuevo Leon, normally populated by scarcely more than 200 people.

They were singing "Las Mananitas," the birthday song, to El Nino, who was legendary for his powers of healing even as an adolescent.

The festival of the Nino's birth was a mixture of piety, con artists, food stalls and sellers of soft goods — everything from underwear to religious memorabilia.

From a cemetery on a hill south of Espinazo, one looks north toward town across a broad, dusty valley of the Sierra Madre Oriental, from the state of Coahuila into the state of Nuevo Leon.

The cemetery is one of several places in and near Espinazo where groups of pilgrims gather with group leaders who "take on the spirit of the Nino" to perform a multitude of healing and blessing rituals.

They also lead processions of penitents, who punish themselves in order to feel worthy of the Nino's "friendship," and those who have made promises of devotional acts in exchange for a favor from the Nino.

The processions, which range in size from half a dozen to several hundred, make their way three times around the Pirulito, a pepper tree where, it is said, the Nino once fought a demon and where, according to the songs, the spirit of the Nino descends from heaven to earth.

The processions end at La Tumba, where Constantino is buried in a large building that once was his hospital but now is a shrine filled with memorabilia and testimonies from those who claim they have been healed by the Nino.

Adjacent to the shrine is the mudhole where pilgrims bathe with muddy, mineral-laden water said to have healing qualities. The Nino created the mudhole for use by hospital patients.

During his lifetime, Constantino was besieged by supplicants. The details of his life are a hazy blend of myth and history, but detractors and adherents agree that he was an extraordinary man.

Those who knew him say he was melancholy and self-effacing, that he lived simply in spite of his fame, that he went hatless and shoeless, spending hours and days at a time in solitude and prayer in nearby mountain caves and at the Pirulito, where he would await the twice-daily train that runs through Espinazo between Monterrey and Monclova.

Constantino came to Espinazo from Guanajuato to be a houseboy in the hacienda of the Von Berlich family. There is disagreement about the year of his birth, but all agree he was a relatively young man when he died in 1938.

## Men picked up in police sting fear for careers

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Attorneys representing men arrested in a Houston police prostitution sting operation say the experience has left their clients fearing for their marriages and careers.

All but one of the 119 arrests made in the month-long operation late last year have resulted in pleas of no contest or guilty, police vice squad Capt. Jack Fullbright said.

But the lone man to go to trial — Jim Faizi, 23 — was found innocent last week by County Court-at-Law Judge Bill Ragan on charges of soliciting prostitution.

"Their (the police's) objective is good," the judge said. "Their tactics just exceeded what's permissible."

Defense attorneys polled by The Houston Post said the ruling means many of the men also could have been found innocent if their cases had gone to trial.

But attorneys said their clients preferred to quietly admit guilt to the Class B misdemeanor rather than admit in open court that they visited the model studio, where policewomen posed as prostitutes.

"If I were not married and if I didn't have a good job, I could almost laugh this off," said one of

the arrested men.

He spoke with The Post only under the conditions he would remain anonymous.

"But because of my marriage and my job, I have everything to lose," he said.

Attorney David Berg said one man who pleaded guilty to the charge received a notice in the mail despite efforts to ensure that such a thing did not happen.

"He has a wife who cried for two or three days" after reading the notice, Berg said.

Another attorney, Travis Johnson, said a 20-year-old client has had to postpone a job search because of the charge.

In some professions, even a misdemeanor could make a person ineligible for employment, Johnson said.

"It's almost like you've got the plague," said the attorney, who is trying to arrange for the man's record to be wiped clean if probation is successfully completed.

Attorneys said the people caught in the sting, which ran from late November through late December, included doctors, lawyers and business executives.

But Ragan said he believed it constituted entrapment. Berg agreed.

## Residents shocked by deaths

Associated Press

ANSON — An hour after he talked to a priest about his daughter's marital problems, Abel Flores, Sr. and his daughter apparently were gunned down by her distraught husband.

Authorities say Flores' son-in-law, Roy Herrera, shot Flores, his daughter Sonia and then turned the gun on himself near St. Michael's Catholic Church Sunday afternoon.

On Monday, many of the 2,700 residents of the West Texas city near Abilene were in shock. Anson High School, where the couple had attended school, was quiet.

"The whole school is stunned," said Donella Spurgin, who taught English to Sonia during her sophomore and junior years.

An hour before the shooting, the Rev. Frank Nelan talked to Flores. "He said, 'We've got trouble,'" Nelan said Monday. "I said, 'What are we going to do about it?'"

Authorities say Herrera, 21, went to some storage buildings near the church about 3:30 p.m. and shot Flores in the head with a .38-caliber pistol. He then shot his 19-year-old wife, from whom he was separated Saturday.

He then turned the gun on himself, sheriff's officers said.

Herrera and his wife died at the scene, and Flores, 37, was pronounced dead on arrival at Hendrick Medical Center in Abilene, about 20 miles from Anson.

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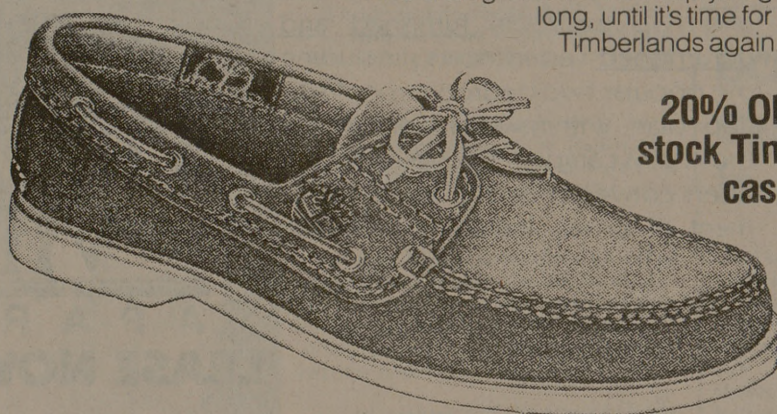
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