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Jurors Hear Prison Gas Death Witness

By Robert B. Allen
Staff Writer

MUSKOGEE — A former Oklahoma State Penitentiary convict, who claimed earlier he heard a dying inmate plead for a doctor before the victim was given a gas mask to "help his breathing," spent 45 minutes Monday before a federal grand jury here.

Thomas Bell, who was released from prison last month, was one of eight witnesses called during the day as the jury began looking into the gassing death of Robert Forsythe.

Bell was not permitted to talk to newsmen, but it was known he earlier told investigators he heard Forsythe asking for a doctor and someone to help him. Forsythe's body was found in his prison cell last May 27, two days after a tear gassing incident in the prison's isolation unit.

At the time Bell talked to special investigators, he said he saw a guard give the 35-year-old victim a gas mask and, on the day before Forsythe died, he (Forsythe) told Bell he had slept with the gas mask on his face.

Bell in his earlier statement also related that he heard three or four thumping sounds which he thought were blows to the body.

U.S. Atty. Richard Pyle said Bell was one of about 30 present and former inmates who probably will appear before the secret panel during its probe into gassing and other conditions at the state prison in McAlester.

Among others testifying Monday were Warden Richard A. Crisp, who entered the grand jury room with a number of riot weapons including a 35mm gas gun commonly referred to as "Big Bertha." It took four persons to carry the equipment into the closed-door session.

Crisp was in the room nearly one hour, apparently demonstrating or showing the use of the gas guns. He also is believed to have made available to the investigative panel reports concerning the use of chemicals.

Just before the warden went behind closed doors with the probers, state Corrections Director Russell E. Lash entered the room carrying guidance manuals for inmates and employees and reports on the use of chemical agents.

The May gassing incident, which according to an autopsy took the life of Forsythe, occurred before Lash and Crisp assumed their present positions.

After leaving the jury room, where he spent less than five minutes, Lash told reporters, if any indictments were returned against correctional employees, he plans to retain the employees until they are proven guilty in a court of law.

"There's a serious inequity in the state inasmuch as Oklahoma provides no legal defense for state employees," Lash said.

"Even the most vicious criminals in the state of Oklahoma are afforded court-appointed attorneys, but state employees aren't even afforded that much."

Before leaving the courthouse, Lash added: "We pay our correctional employees less than garbage collectors and treat them worse than the most vicious criminals."

During the day, shortly after a 23-member jury was sealed, the grand jury summoned Bill Arnold, prison administrator, as the first witness. He was followed by H. D. Van Arsdell, a member of the highway patrol unit which was on duty at the state prison at the time of the fatal tear gassing incident.

Two present convicts, both of whom were reported injured in the gassing and hospitalized for a brief time, also were heard. Claude Willis is known to have told investigators during an early investigation that he saw guards beat four inmates.

The other inmate testifying was Ronald Evans and it was speculated he also was quizzed about tear gassing and the general treatment of prisoners in the state penitentiary.

Oklahoma City TV

Tuesday — Stations responsible for last minute changes. — Jan. 7

6:30 a.m.
(5) Sign On
6:55
(5) Morning Devotion
8 a.m.
(5) Sunrise Semester
6:15
(4) Test Pattern
(5) Give Us This Day
7:30
(2) Bulletin Board
6:15
(5) Down to Earth
6:30
(5) Farm News and Weather
(5) New Zoo Revue
(5) Farm and Market News
7 a.m.
(4) Today Show
(5) AM America
(9) Mr. Magoo Cartoons
7:15
(4) Today in Oklahoma
7:30
(4) Today Show
(5) News
8 a.m.
(4) Captain Kangaroo
(5) Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood
8:30
(2) Today in Oklahoma
8:35
(4) Today Show
(5) America
9 a.m.
(4) Dinah!
(5) The Mike Douglas Show
(9) The Joker's Wild
(11) Sesame Street
9:30
(9) Gambit
(2) Course of Our Times
10 a.m.
(9) High Rollers
(9) Now You See It
(11) Government
(2) Oklahoma History
10:15
(11) Urban Studies
10:30
(9) Hollywood Squares
(9) Brady Bunch
(9) Lotto of Life
(9) Broad and Butterflies
(2) Villa Alegre
10:45
(2) Dress Man
10:55
(9) Food 'n' Fitness
11 a.m.
(2) Zoologi
(2) Password All Stars
(2) The Young and the Restless
(5) Villa Alegre
(2) Teachers Now Film Preview
11:30
(2) Blank Check
(2) Split Second
(2) Search for Tomorrow
(2) Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood
11:45
(2) U.S. History Part I
11:55
(4) NBC News
Noon
(4) (2) News
(5) All My Children
(11) Public Service Films
(2) Oklahoma History
12:25
(4) Hunnybunnies
12:30
(5) Let's Make a Deal
(9) As the World Turns
(11) Correspondents
(2) Your Future Is Now
1 p.m.
(4) Days of Our Lives
(5) The 100,000 Pyramid
(9) The Guiding Light
(11) Music 2
1:15
(5) Spanish 1
(9) America
1:30
(4) The Doctors
(5) The Big Showdown
(9) The Edge of Night
(11) Career
1:45
(11) Public Service Films
2 p.m.
(4) Another World
(5) General Hospital
(9) The Price Is Right
(11) Spanish 1
(2) U.S. History Part I
2:15
(11) Oklahoma History
2:30
(5) Our Life to Live
(9) The Match Game
(9) The Electric Co.
2:45
(11) Urban Studies
3 p.m.
(4) Somerset
(5) Money Game
(9) Mod Squad
(9) Today's Vega
3:30
(4) Bewitched
(5) Green Acres
(9) Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood
4 p.m.
(4) Bonanza
(5) Star Trek
(9) Steve Griffin Show
(9) Sesame Street
5 p.m.
(4) Bonanza
(5) ABC News
(9) Villa Alegre
5:30
(4) NBC News
(5) News
(7) CBS News
(9) The Electric Co.
6 p.m.
(4) (2) News
(5) Truth or Consequences
(9) Zoom
6:30
(4) The Sullivans (Saturday film)
(5) Let's Make a Deal
(9) The Newsmakers
(2) Your Future Is Now
7 p.m.
(4) Adam-12 "Routine Patrol" (repeat)
(5) Happy Days: "Open House" (repeat)
(9) Good Times
(11) America
(2) Living Better
7:15
(9) Guten Tag! (German language course)
7:30
(4) Movie: "The Dream Makers," starring James Franciscus.
(5) Movie: "Let's Switch!" starring Barbara Eden.
(7) M.A.S.H.
(9) The Journal of Jim
(11) Course of Our Times
(2) Bonanza
8 p.m.
(5) Hawaii Five-O
(9) Zoom/Theatre
8:30
(5) Sneak: "What Do They Do in Three?" Oklahoma's legislative personnel.
(9) Tom Brown's Schoolhouse (Episode 1)
★ 4:00 tomorrow on ABC After School Special PRESENT MAKE MEEMAW'S ASTER TOU!
9 p.m.
(4) A RAPE THREATENS DR. KILEY'S CAREER WATCH TONIGHT'S MARCUS WELBY, M.D.
(4) Police Story
(5) Marcus Welby, M.D.: (First Run)
(9) Barnaby Jones
(2) Lyndon
9:30
(5) Indiana for Indiana: (New Time)
10 p.m.
(4) (2) (5) News
(9) Today's Vega: (New Time)
10:30
(4) Tonight Show
(5) The F.B.I.
(9) Movie: "Bananas: Let's Hear It for a Living Legend," starring George Peppard
(11) Captioned ABC News
11 p.m.
(5) Wide World of Mystery
11:30 Midnight
(4) Tomorrow
1 a.m.
(4) Tonight in Oklahoma
(5) The Millionaire
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(See complete TV schedule in The Sunday Oklahoman)

Lodges Ask Funds To Allay Costs

By Ray Parr

Rising costs have made it necessary to ask the legislature for a supplemental appropriation for state lodges, Lt. Gov. George Nigh said Monday. Nigh is chairman of the Tourism and Recreation Commission.

He estimated the seven state lodges will need from $300,000 to $350,000 from the legislature to enable the lodges to continue present services.

Nigh said the lodges have not had a legislative appropriation for the past three years. He said before revenue bonds were paid off the lodges received money collected in park fees and also received a legislative appropriation for administration.

Nigh said revenue from lodges the past fiscal year reached $3.8 million, up $400,000 from the previous year. But he said labor costs alone have gone up $475,000 the past year.

He said the Fair Labor Standards Act was amended to extend coverage to all state employees effective last May 1.

"This act hit the lodge division extremely hard both in the area of overtime restrictions and minimum wage requirements," he said. "The average lodge wage jumped by 40 cents per hour and took another 10 cents per hour increase Jan. 1. A 20 cent increase is scheduled for Jan. 1, 1976. This act alone will result in an additional cost of $345,700 in the current fiscal year and a $464,000 increase in the next fiscal year."

Nigh said the state $35 per month cost of living increase effective last July 1 will cost $35,400 per year. He said an additional 120 hourly employees have been covered with state insurance and retirement at a cost of $70,000 per year.

Nigh said the lodge division has reduced the total manhours worked during the first five months of this fiscal year by 8½ per cent but personal service costs still rose $136,880 over the same period last year.

Nigh said in addition to asking for a supplemental appropriation, the Tourism and Recreation Commission will request a legislative appropriation for the next fiscal year. He said the figure has not been determined.

Nigh said all costs are up for the lodges. Laundry costs have increased 27 per cent this year, he said. Nigh said the commission is in the process of adjusting food prices and room rates and there are now 50 fewer employees than there were last year.

He said the occupancy rates at state lodges are up and the state's tourism program is doing well compared to other states.

34TH GOVERNOR of California, Edmund G. Brown Jr., was sworn into office Monday in Sacramento. Brown, a Democrat, is the son of a former California governor. (AP Wirephoto)

Exposure Charge in Tulsa Names Country Entertainer

TULSA (AP) — Country and western singer Faron Young was charged in district court on Monday with indecent exposure in an alleged New Year's Eve incident here.

Authorities said Young, of Nashville, Tenn., allegedly exposed himself in front of five or six persons at a show he was giving.

An arrest warrant was signed by Associate Dist. Judge Bill Beasley and was to be mailed to Nashville.

Young was quoted by the Tulsa Tribune as denying the charge.

"I don't know what they're talking about," he said. "I don't make sense. The only thing I saw there that night was walk-to-and drinks."

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