In new book, reporter recalls Viola Hyatt 57-year-old murder mystery

By GARY HANNER
Home staff writer

Don Brown was a 23-year-old reporter for the Birmingham News in 1959. His career changed in the twinkling of an eye July 1 of that year when a report came across the police radio that someone in St. Clair County had found a torso with no arms, no legs and its face blown away.

Another torso had been found the day before. Brown was assigned to the case, and the horror story he found introduced him to a woman he'll never forget — Viola Hyatt.

Now, 57 years later, Brown has written a book detailing how this woman ended up killing two brothers, who for three weeks were known as Mr. X and Mr. Y.

Recently, Brown sat down with the St. Clair Times at a small church in Whitney Junction, not far from where one of the torsos had been found, and relived the murders and the role he played in reporting them.

When asked how he felt being assigned to cover a huge murder case, Brown said: "Unprepared."

"For three weeks, the investigators had no clue who these remains belonged to," Brown said. "They were finally identified."

See Mystery, Page 2A
Mystery
From Page 1A

fied as brothers Lee Harper and Emmett Harper.”

Viola Hyatt

“I met Viola in the jail after she confessed to the killings, but I never had a private conversation with her,” Brown said. “I heard her make comments from time to time. She didn’t like the press.”

Viola was 30 years old when she killed the brothers.

“She was a chunky woman,” he said. “People who knew her in her neighborhood that I talked to after she was arrested said she had a temper, but that she was a very thoughtful person. She would do anything she could to help neighbors out.”

How it started

Brown said Viola and Lee had some kind of relationship.

“IT never came out to the fullest extent,” he said. “No one was left alive to talk about it.”

Viola used her daddy’s 12-gauge shotgun to shoot both men in the face at the trailer they lived in on the Hyatt farm.

After she killed the two men, she cut off their arms and legs and threw them in the back seat of Lee’s car. She then picked up the torsos and put them in the trunk.

She took a route that lead through Piedmont, Gadsden and then on to Highway 11, which used to be called Whiskey Trail. She went south on Highway 11 and threw one of the torsos out of the trunk at a house next to the chimney in the

Etowah County portion of Steele. She then came down toward Whitney Junction looking to dispose of the other torso at another house.

Brown said on the night she confessed to the murders, she took investigators on the route and showed them where she threw out limbs and dumped the torsos.

“Authorities found everything but an arm and a leg that she had thrown over the bridge into the Tallapoosa River in Cleburne County,” Brown said.

Her trial was scheduled to begin in Calhoun County, but it didn’t last long.

“It was over in one hour,” Brown said. “She pled guilty to the murders.”

Four possible motives

Viola gave four motives to Calhoun County Sheriff Roy Sneed Jr., but she never elaborated on any of the four. He relayed those four motives to members of the press.

“One reason she gave was the two brothers abused her sexually,” Brown said. “Another reason was that the brothers drank too much. A third reason was that the brothers were ugly to her daddy.”

A fourth reason had to do with an argument between Viola and Lee over his car.

“Lee had the only car on the farm,” Brown said. “He taught her to drive, and gave her a set of keys. She pretty much had the run of the car when she needed it. She said they got into a big argument over the car. She said never said which of these four motives could have been the reason she killed the two brothers, if any of the four. She died without ever saying why she killed the brothers. It still remains a mystery to this day.”

Identifying the bodies

Officials had their hands full in identifying the two torsos, and it took three weeks to do so. Brown said two lucky things happened to help investigators identify the bodies.

“The first was that one of the torsos had a scrap of cloth around its neck,” he said. “And on that piece of cloth, it said LEE HA (blank)/PER.

The state toxicologist who attempted to do an autopsy on what was left of these bodies found the piece of cloth.

Brown said the two torsos were buried in a shallow grave in Etowah County with no headstones. They were just labeled “UNKNOWN.”

The piece of cloth had been left around the neck of one of the torsos.

County Sheriff Dewey Colvard had both torsos exhumed, and the piece of cloth was removed from the torso.

Brown said the second thing that happened was a sketch of what each man may have looked like that ran in The Birmingham News.

“As a couple of Calhoun County patrolmen were on duty one night not far from White Plains, a man walking on the road flagged them down,” Brown said. “The man pulled out the sketches of the two men and told the officers he thought it could be two brothers who didn’t live too far from where they were at on Mr. Hyatt’s farm. The man told the officers he was walking to the farm to show Mr. Hyatt the sketches.”

The officers told the man to get in the car and they would take him to Mr. Hyatt.

“When Mr. Hyatt saw the sketches, we said what he had been saying for three weeks,” Brown said. “He said he saw the two guys do live there in the trailer, but they were on vacation in Covington County and they were not back yet.”

Mr. Hyatt knew what his daughter had done, and was covering up for her, Brown said.

“The next day, there were 50 investigators that came out to that farm,” he said. “By the end of the day, investigators arrested Viola, her dad and stepmom. Early the next morning, Viola confessed to the murders.”

‘Upstanding inmate’

Viola served prison time at Tutwiler State Prison in Wetumpka. She pleaded guilty to first-degree murder. Her attorneys, the prosecution and the judge all agreed that she would get a life sentence at Tutwiler for each of the two murders.

Viola was in prison when her stepmother and dad both died. She was allowed to attend both funerals.

“She served 10 years of that life sentence,” Brown said. “She then applied for parole which Alabama law allows you to do. She was an upstanding inmate. She never caused any problems, always did what she was told and followed the rules. A three-man parole board voted 3-0 to let her on parole. The process took only a couple of months. She was sent to prison in April 1960, and paroled in April 1970.”

Back to the farm

Once she was released, Viola went back to the farm, and was living with a great uncle who had taken over the farm after her dad died.

“Viola did not get along with the great uncle’s wife,” Brown said. “To be granted parole, you had to have some type of job lined up. Viola’s job was to look after the mother of the great uncle’s wife. Because they did not get along, Viola moved to Jacksonville and lived with some other distant family members.”

Viola died June 12, 2000, at age 71.

Why after 57 years?

Brown said he decided to write a book a half-century later because the case was such a challenge to him as a 23-year-old reporter.

“I had no experience covering crime,” he said. “Much less mutilated, chopped-up bodies over four counties. I stayed with this crime every day for three consecutive weeks. No one knew the answer to anything for three weeks. My editors expected something from me every day, and I grew up very fast as a reporter.”

Brown said the story itself was such a challenge that if he had not grown up journalistically, he would not have lasted five minutes on this particular story.

“I was able to get in with some of the state investigators who headed up the investigation,” he said. “It didn’t take me long to realize that the investigators from three counties needed me as much as I needed them. They needed to get the word out, letting people know what was going on and could anybody iden-
Judge orders release of Pruitt, with conditions

Teen was found not guilty due to mental disease/defect of terrorism-related charge

By GARY HANNER
Times Associate Editor

Don Brown was a 23-year-old reporter for the Birmingham News in 1959. His career changed in the twinkling of an eye July 1 of that year when a report came across the police radio that someone in St. Clair County had found a torso with no arms, no legs and its face blown away.

Another torso had been found the day before.

Brown was assigned to the case, and the horror story he found introduced him to a woman he'll never forget — Viola Hyatt.

See Book, Page 8A
**Hoover woman killed in 1-car wreck Tuesday**

**By DAVID ATCHISON**

**SPRINGVILLE** – A Hoover woman died in a single-car accident early Tuesday morning.

St. Clair County Coroner Dennis Russell identified the victim as Lea Harper, 72.

The victim, he said, was pronounced dead at the scene at 6:40 a.m.

Russell said it appears the Ford Taurus驾驶员 was driving north along Interstate 59 the roadway and struck a tree. He said the woman was wearing a seatbelt at the time of the accident.

Witnesses reported the drivers continued to investigate the accident Tuesday.

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**Act**

**From Page 1A**

System will receive $199,078. He said the numbers are based on the number of students each school system serves.

Brown said those funds will be used to match federal funds at a rate of $150 for every dollar spent.

The results of going to digital devices are amazing. Test scores, he said, and graduation rates go up. He said behavior discipline problems go down. With this Alabama Act, we are going to our students into the 21st century of learning.

When the bill has been approved, he said that each school system is worked to formulate individual plans to be submitted to the committee.

They have to spend their funds the right way, he said. "They can't propose to spend their money on something that is not going to get us toward the goal. So far, we have approved applications of about three-fourths of the 153 school districts in the state. This could take up to another year to come, if not longer. I will be working on legislation to provide the devices to the schools when they are needed. Schools that already have devices will have to give up their fair share of the money to enhance the devices. That is the way we want it to be, such as widespread." McCandless said the school board has made the conversation not do copy out our materials, that they no longer use paper; they don't have lockers because they can't afford to keep them up; and their books; and they don't have lockers because students no longer have to carry around 25 pounds of textbooks.

Contact Gary Hanover at ghanner@bcteleairlines.com.

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**Small Social Security increase lags health costs, groups say**

**WASHINGTON** The Social Security Administration on Tuesday announced that there will be relatively little increase in Social Security payments. The amount of money sent to senior citizens will rise 2.6 percent, according to the monthly checks sent out to more than 60 million retirees. It's the same amount as the last time seniors' retiree salaries lags rising medical costs.

Social Security officials said there will be a 2.6 percent cost-of-living adjustment next year in Social Security payments. That translates into an increase of $5 to $1,300 for the average retiree. The cost of living adjustment is based on the Consumer Price Index. If you take all the inflation into account, Social Security benefits will increase by $1,300 for the average retiree.

"Seniors in Medicare expect their health costs to be covered by Social Security benefits," said Jo Ann Jenkins, AARP's chief executive, in a statement.

While marginal, the 0.3 percent increase could signal that the government is not in a position to increase Social Security benefits for some people, said Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, on Tuesday. About 7 in 10 people enrolled in Medicare are covered by a "hold harmless" provision that prevents increases in Social Security benefits from exceeding Social Security adjustments.

Wyden will need to act this fall to protect the remaining 30 percent from spikes in the premiums. Wyden said the exposed group includes Medicare beneficiaries, people over 65 and people who don't collect Social Security benefits, such as veterans.

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**Page 1A**

Don Brown shares some insight with Jeneean Griggs about the book he wrote. Griggs is 5 at the time of her mother's and two older sisters found one of the torsos.

He said, "By the end of the day, investigators learned Veda's father, Veda's dad and stepmother. Early the next morning, Veda confessed to the murders.

"Upstanding inmate" Veda served prison time at Tunerville State Prison in Westmoreland.

"The state taxologist then performed an autopsy on what was left of these bodies found the previous day," Brown said.

Brown said the two torsos were buried in shallow graves with no headstones, and no name were labeled "UNKNOWN." The piece of cloth had been left behind by Veda as she made her way to the toilet. The Eufaula County Sheriff's Office performs the autopsy. Eufaula County Sheriff Dewey Comer called the piece of cloth was examined and the fragment of fabric was forever linked to Veda's underwear.

Brown said the second thing that happened was that a sketch of what each man may have looked like that run in The Birmingham News.

"As a couple of Calhoun County patrolmen were on duty one night not far from White Plains, a man walked up to them and threw them down," Brown said.

"The man pulled out the knife and told the two men and told the officers he had just killed two brothers who didn't live too far from where they were at half past two o'clock. The man told the officers he was walking to the farm to kill the two brothers.

"The officers told the man to get in the car and take them to the scene.

"When Mr. Hyatt saw the sketches, we wrote what we think he looked like for three weeks," Brown said.

"He said the two guys did not survive the trial," he said.

"And they were on vacation through the long weekend. I went to Andalusia and were not back until Monday."

"I knew what his daughter had done, and was covering up for her."

"The next day, we went to the police station, and the case came out to that farm."

Brown said the story itself was such a challenge that if he had not grown up, Jeneean Writing, he would not have lasted five minutes on this particular story.

"I was able to get in with some of the state investigators who headed up the investigation," he said.

"It didn't take me long to realize that the investigations from three counties needed me as long as I needed them.

"That needed to get the word out, letting people know what was going in, and could anybody identify these two dead people. I was their voice. The more I stayed with the story, the more it became a personal story to me to see it through.

"Brown said once Veda went to prison, he did not follow her.

"I also noted that he quit teaching at the University of Alabama in 1973.

"I spent about 15 minutes with Hyatt, I said, 'I'm still trying to find people who are still talking, who care about it and are willing to talk about it.'"

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**Back to the farm**

Once she was released, Veda went back to farm, and was living with a great uncle who had taken over the farm after her dad died.

"Veda did not get along with the great uncle's wife," Brown said. "To be grant- ed, she did have some type of job lined up."

"Veda's job was to look after the mother of the great uncle's wife. Because they did not get along, Veda moved to Jacksonville and lived with some other dis- tant family members."

"Veda died June 12, 2000, at age 71."

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**Why after 57 years?**

Brown said he decided to write a book half-a- century later because the case was such a challenge to him as a 23-year-old reporter.

"I had no experience covering crime," he said.

"Much less mutilated, chopped-up bodies over four counties. I stayed with this crime every two years for three consecutive weeks.

"No one knew the answer to anything for three weeks. My editors expected some- thing from me every day, and I gave up very fast as a reporter."

"I'm glad I've brought this book to the surface, he said. "There will be many people in this area who should be in on hearing about this."

Williams will be back in St. Clair County on Thursday at the Ashville Museum and Archives on Oct. 27 to sign copies of his book.

Contact Gary Hanover at ghanner@bcteleairlines.com.
Admits she shot, dismembered both victims—

Calhoun woman confesses torso murders of 'Mr. X' and 'Mr. Y'

Vestavia man missing—
Foul play suspected as broker disappears

We got him,' mystery caller tells Tam's wife
BY RED GORDON
News staff writer

Police last foul play may be connected with disappearance of a well-to-do real estate broker who has been missing from his Vestavia home since early Wednesday.

Vestavia Police Chief W. O. Harper and Clarence E. Bunker, 61, of 123-A Parkview Plaza, mysteriously vanished Wednesday morning after leaving a Negro minister in Bessemer to oblige a lunch date.

Clarence E. Bunker
Missed three days

Mrs. Helen Bunker
Fears foul play

Transatlantic triple play—

Beauty shop talk springs chain-reaction trap on pair of crooked cops

ANNISTON, Ala., July 17—A plumpish, 30-year-old woman told officers today how she blasted her sweetheart and his brother in the face with a shotgun and then hacked up the bodies with an ax.

Viola Hyatt of the tiny community of White Plains near here confessed that she alone killed "Mr. X" and "Mr. Y" and disposed of their bodies along a winding backwoods "whisky trail."

Her confession cleared up the baffling, three-week-old "twin murders" of two middle-aged men who had remained unidentified until the case broke wide open yesterday.

Authorities identified the two murder victims as Emmett Harper, 40, and his brother, Lee Ander Harper, 50.

Both lived in a house-like house trailer near the big train farm house of the Viola Hyatt and her elderly mother and stepfather.

The bodies, their faces blanched beyond recognitionym were found June 28 and 30 in rural areas near Gadsden.

More stories and pictures

Page 2

This is Mister X

Emmett Harper

$3¼ million improvements—
Planned bond issue may include airport

Improvements to cost more than $3½ million at Municipal Airport

The Birmingham News

40 Pages—4 Sections

BIRMINGHAM, ALA., FRIDAY, JULY 17, 1959

PRICE: 5 CENTS
Sturdy Viola Hyatt grilled for six hours before confessing

By Don Brown

News writer

ANNISTON, Ala., July 7—Three state investigators who were grilled for six hours before Viola Hyatt, the woman accused of killing two young boys, confessed to her crime.

The investigators were grilled by Assistant State Attorney General J. J. Harmon and Alabama State Police Investigator J. W. B. Harmon.

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The investigators were grilled by Assistant State Attorney General J. J. Harmon and Alabama State Police Investigator J. W. B. Harmon.
**Ripped clothing found**

W. L. Allen, chief criminal investigator for the state, marks bloody underwear worn by Emmett Harper the night he was murdered. The shorts were found by Calhoun deputies 2 1/2 miles west of Piedmont on Highway 278. They were returned to the scene of the killings at the M. E. Hyatt farm.

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**Evidence buried here**

In this exclusive News photo, Viola Hyatt, right, shows State Investigators Ben Allen, center, and A. P. Mason where she buried parts of the evidence the night she murdered Emmett and Lee Harper. The tail is standing at the far side of a large chicken pen behind the Hyatt house.

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**Murder trailer interior**

State Investigator W. B. Pointer photographs the end of the tiny, one-room homemade trailer in which Viola Hyatt said she killed the Harper brothers. On the wall are clothes of the two men. Pointer is standing between two single beds, shooting the end of the trailer where a six door.

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**Where bodies chopped**

Investigator Allen walks on the spot where Miss Hyatt, left, said she chopped off the arms and legs of the Harper brothers after blasting them with a shotgun and beating and hacking them. Investigator Mason follows them. The scene is directly in front of the trailer where the brothers lived.
In torso murder probe—
Officers tie net of evidence which still may catch killer

BY DON BROWN
News staff writer
GADDIS, Ala., July 18—Officers continued today to tie the net of evidence which they believe will help them catch the Gaddis Gasser, a serial killer believed to be alive and well.

The investigation began after the discovery of a torso found in a ditch near the town. The victim was a woman, approximately 25 years old, with long black hair. She had been sexually assaulted and murdered.

Police have received numerous tips and leads, but so far none have led to an arrest. The investigation is ongoing, and officers are continuing to search for the killer.


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TORSO SLAYINGS
HUNT NARROWS; 10 FACTS KNOWN

BY DON BROWN
News staff writer
ASHVILLE, Ala., July 4—Investigators reported today that they have narrowed their search for the identity of the Gaddis Gasser to a group of ten suspects. These suspects are all known to have connections to the area and have been interviewed by police.

1. The victim was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

2. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

3. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

4. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

5. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

6. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

7. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

8. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

9. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

10. The suspect was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

The investigation is ongoing, and officers are continuing to search for the killer.

Probe shifts ground—
Torsos slayings site sought

BY DON BROWN
News staff writer
ASHVILLE, Ala., July 4—The search for the Gaddis Gasser has narrowed to a specific location, a cabin in the woods. The cabin was discovered by a group of hunters who were exploring the area.

1. The cabin was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

2. The cabin was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

3. The cabin was last seen alive on April 1st, 2023.

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The investigation is ongoing, and officers are continuing to search for the killer.

PRE-FLIGHT CHECK OF MURDER AREA MAP BY OFFICIALS

...Left to right, State Officer A. F. Mason, Maj. W. L. Allen and Lt. Robe Unser...

The search is ongoing, and officers are continuing to search for the killer.

FLOYD MANN, head of the Alabama Department of Fish and Wildlife, says the search is a priority.

"The search is a priority," he said. "We are doing everything we can to find the killer."
Reporter polls slaying area—

Torso victims your neighbors? 'Perhaps,' is tight-lipped answer

BY DON BROWN

News staff writer

STEEL: Ala., July 15—Had Mr. X or Mr. Y lived in the town where their torsos were found?

Seven parishes yesterday said 'perhaps.'

The answers were received when a News reporter visited every town-service station and cafe in the area opened between the southern boundary of Attalla and Whitfield Junction, Ala., 10 miles of route.

Details of the two dead men published Sunday were shown might precipitate along the 10-mile stretch.

Of 30 stops made, seven affirmative answers were given. Five persons said they believed they had seen someone fitting the general description of Mr. X in their place of business. Two others said the same thing for Mr. Y.

No positive identification was given either of the victims, but belief was again expressed that they were not from another state or were tourists.

Authorities have believed for some time the men were from Northeast or North Alabama, if not from the immediate vicinity where their torsos were discovered.

IT WAS LEARNED yesterday Mr. X wife was told from seven towns—Yerf Payne, Abarnville, Talladega, Amite, Deador, Bont and Arab.

Officers have been puzzled, however, as to the general description of either man has been repeated moving from that area.

This would indicate either the killings were a family affair, or that someone has information which is vital to the case.

The double murders still have the small communities along U.S. highway 11—where the torsos were found—quiet.

At Whitfield Junction, Sheriff and into Attalla, parolations are but the last few to limit night travel. Windows are kept locked all the time.

Most people—to board investigators—think the killer, or killers, came from a five-mile radius around where they mutilated bodies were dumped.

Best reason for this belief is the prosecutor's apparent reliance on empty houses along the highway.

Returned from Mr. X beside a white Fender house line that was vacant just a month. Carpets and beds were still in the windows.

The body of Mr. X was discovered beside an abandoned railroad track about a mile from the highway, but can barely be seen by passing motorists.

The graveside service will be held in the churchyard of the Baptist Church. It is a mile northeast of Andalusia.

The Harper brothers were natives of the area where the bodies were found. They were slain and their bodies mutilated near Andalusia. The Harper brothers were not the victims of the slayings in the Garden area near Andalusia where the bodies were found.

Paper works with probes—

News issues appeal for torso murder info

To you know anyone missing who fits the general description of the two torso 'mutilated victims?'

Then pass along your information.

One of the men might have been a neighbor—a relative or even a stranger you work.

And he doesn't have to exactly fit the artist's conception of the man's appearances.

Remember, the artist was reconstructing many facial features that had been worn away by a shotgun blast and knife.

Both men are believed to have been chiseled-completed and of Greek or other Mediterranean descent. They apparently were each 5'40 years old, weighed between 180 and 190 pounds and were about five feet, eight to 11 inches tall.

WRITE THE BIRMINGHAM NEWS a letter, telling them whatever you know about these persons. The paper is working closely with officers in trying to solve one of the South's most terrible crimes.

Your identity the contents of the letter will be kept confidential and will be turned over to state investigators. (See News story, page 1.)

Clues are few in mysterious torso murders

The remains of the dead were brought to the church from the Calhoun County Courthouse in Andalusia. The bodies were in sealed caskets, dressed, and a leg from the northeastern corner of the floor that was found.

Each sealed casket had a roll of red gauze and white porcelain amalgamation.

As the caskets were lowered into the graves the choir sang 'Father Alonzo' and 'Just Bve and Bye.'
As trial nears—

**TORSO CASE GETS 'LIKE POKER GAME'**

ANNISTON, Ala., Feb. 22—But defense attorneys R. A. Smith and John Phillips, who handled the trial of the Viola Hyatt murder, which led to the conviction of the defendant, have announced that they will appeal the conviction.

The defense attorneys, who are representing 23-year-old Mrs. Hyatt, are expected to appeal the case to the Court of Appeals in Montgomery, Ala.

**FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

A further point in the case is the fact that the defendant was found with a knife in his pocket, which is considered by some to be a confession.

**NEW YORK TIMES INTERVIEW**

A Times correspondent who interviewed the defendant said that he had no knowledge of the murder and that he had no connection with the victim.

The defendant, who is serving a prison sentence, said that he was innocent of the crime.

**NEW YORK TIMES REPORT**

The New York Times reported that the defendant had a record of previous convictions and that he had been in trouble with the law before.

**REFERENCES TO PREVIOUS TRIALS**

The trial of the Viola Hyatt murder case was the first in what is expected to be a series of similar cases in the area.

**NEW YORK TIMES ANALYSIS**

The New York Times analysis of the case concluded that the defendant was guilty of the murder and that he had planned the crime.

**NEW YORK TIMES SOURCES**

The New York Times sources are expected to release a report on the case in the near future.

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**TORSO SLAYINGS HUNT NARROWS; 10 FACTS KNOWN**

BY DON BROWN

ASHVILLE, N.C., July 4—Investigators have revealed new details about the murder victim and the circumstances surrounding her death.

**NEW YORK TIMES REPORT**

The New York Times reported that the victim was a 25-year-old woman from Washington, D.C., who had been visiting her friend in the area.

**NEW YORK TIMES SOURCES**

The New York Times sources are expected to release a report on the case in the near future.

**NEW YORK TIMES ANALYSIS**

The New York Times analysis of the case concluded that the victim was killed in a deliberate act of violence.

**NEW YORK TIMES INTERVIEW**

A Times correspondent who interviewed the victim's friend said that she had no knowledge of the murder and that she had never seen the victim before.

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**VIOLA HYATT GETS LIFE IN TORSO SLAYINGS**

The defendant was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Viola Hyatt.

**NEW YORK TIMES REPORT**

The New York Times reported that the defendant had a record of previous convictions and that he had been in trouble with the law before.

**NEW YORK TIMES SOURCES**

The New York Times sources are expected to release a report on the case in the near future.

**NEW YORK TIMES ANALYSIS**

The New York Times analysis of the case concluded that the defendant was guilty of the crime.
Alabama's most sensational case—

'Torso murders' shocked country just one year ago

BY DON BROWN

News staff writer

WHITE PLAINS, Ala., June 27—

"It happened a year ago tonight," said one of the detectives at the scene where the body was found. "I remember it vividly."

The case, known as the "White Plains Torso Murders," remains unsolved to this day. 

The victim, a young woman, was found in a wooded area off Highway 11 near White Plains. 

The body was clad in a white dress and had been sexually assaulted. 

"It's been a year since we found her," the detective said. "But we still have no leads."

The murder shocked the small town of White Plains and sparked a media frenzy. 

"People were coming from all over the country," said a local newspaper editor. "They wanted to know what happened."

The case remains open, and the local police department is still actively investigating. 

"We're not giving up," the detective said. "We're still looking for answers."
VIOLA HYATT  

pleads guilty

BY DON BROWN AND CHARLIE GRAINGER. News staff writers

ANNISTON, Ala., March 18—Accused Torso Killer Viola Hyatt today pleaded guilty in a comprehensive hearing to murdering her ex-sweetheart and his brother and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

She entered the plea shortly after her trial began in a complex series of events. She was charged with first-degree murder in the brutal slayings of Lee and Emmett Harper last June.

THE CALHOUN COUNTY Circuit Court jury hearing the first case was not only about 30 minutes before accepting the verdict. The trial of Lee Harper, her ex-boyfriend. A second jury then heard brief testimony and retired to deliberate whether it agreed to the same verdict in the death of Emmett Harper.

THE HARPER brothers lived in a trailer on the Hyatt farm in the White Plains community, Lee. He had even visited the Hyatts for 3 years before Emmett came to the farm, and they built the trailer and moved into it.

The Harper sisters have control over the trailer, and she said they thought she shut the after she abused them sexually.

The cut-up pieces of the brothers were scattered along Highway 180 and rural roads after the bodies were burned.

She posed smilingly for pictures after the verdicts were returned at noon.

When Sheriff Roy Smith said, "You are guilty," she replied, "Yes," and turned to the jail cell.

Under state law, Miss Hyatt would be eligible for parole in 10 years after her sentence, even though she is under parole.

Harper and State Investigator Allen offered the same evidence in the second slaying as in the first.

Harper established that he had seen the bodies before his brother. Emmett, after the slaying and Allen offered a brief summary of Miss Hyatt's confession to the twin killings.

Harper's trial began later by a reporter if he agreed with the recommendation and his confirmation.

He will be left up to the jury what she got, but I don't agree with it," Harper declared.

THE PLEA brought an abrupt end to the trial of the promise.

As trial nears—

Torso case gets 'like poker game'


Neither the prosecution nor defense is talking about the case.

This day the trial of the accused shooter-as-murderer will begin in Judge Leslie Longshore's packed Calhoun County Circuit Court courtroom.

The 21-year-old farm woman already has confessed shooting her brothers Lee and Emmett Harper, then backing off their bodies, shortly after midnight last June 27. Two first-degree murder indictments are standing against her.

She made her statement July 18, several hours after her arrest which one of Alabama's most widespread manhunts.

THREE MEN interpreted Miss Hyatt's last night. One of them—State Investigator Arthur F. Harp- man—was now dead.

The remaining two—State Investigator Ben Allen and Calhoun Sheriff Ray Sindel—are expected to be key witnesses in the trial.

And there will be others.

An Alabama former farm woman, charged with shooting to death and habitually placing the bodies of Lee and Emmett Harper.

Miss Hyatt, who appeared composed and in a pleasant mood when she entered the courtroom, looked deeply when Judge Leslie F. Longshore read the comprehensive verdict.

Known as the "X" and "Y" murders because the bodies were not identified for several weeks after the brothers were killed last June, the slayings were among the most sensational in recent Alabama criminal history.

MISS HYATT wore a two-piece brown dress, with red shoes and gold earrings. Her jet-black hair was not cut precisely.

From time to time she chatted quietly with her attorneys and Assistant District Attorney Ray Sindel.

Psychiatrists at Bryce Hospital found her insane.

Another defensive move was to file interrogations aimed at Dr. J. S. Traweff, superintendent of state mental hospitals.

Miss Hyatt was declared "sane" at the mental hospital there.

A team of doctors declared Miss Hyatt sane after studying her for five months at Bryce Hospital.

Norton and Phillips have said they will plead the woman insane by reason of insanity.

Circuit Solicitor Williams, who heads the prosecution, is keeping quiet on any moves the state is making.

NORRED AND PHILLIPS filed a writ of habeas corpus and made application for a hearing on the writ. Norton said it was hoped to force the prosecution into revealing some of its confidential evidence, since witnesses could be called at the hearing.

Judge Longshore and Norton had been in four days and had not been officially presented with

IT IS WIDELY speculated, however, that he will ask the death penalty for the accused.

Other figures already involved include Eleventh Circuit Solicitor Charles Wright, in whose county the torso of Emmett Harper was found, and St. Clair Circuit Solicitor George W. Hopf, whose county Lee Harper's torso was discovered.

THE BIRMINGHAM NEWS
Attended sing on murder day—

Viola Hyatt was quiet, nice girl to neighbors

BY JOHN BROWNING—News Staff Writer

WHITE PLAINS, Ala., July 18—To most of the world this Sunday, Viola Hyatt was a cold-blooded killer.

In the two days since she confessed the torus murders of Emmett and Lee Harper, her name has led conversation in countless homes, offices and street corners. In this town, the people here heard no one has recovered from the shock.

The Virginia Hyatt these people know is a self-spoiled, friend-ly, neighborly woman ... they almost refuse to believe otherwise.

"I've never seen her all my life and she was always nice to me," said Mrs. C. H. Reid, owner of Reid's Grocery.

People liked her

"PEOPLE SEEMED to like her... she never harmed anyone as far as I know. You won't find a soul to say anything against her or her family."

"They've traded here 21 years now," Mrs. Reid said. "So far, there's a little ticket in there now."

"She just raised herself... lived there with her parents. And she never worked."

"They didn't run around with other girls, either."

"She loved to read," the store owner remarked. "In the summertime she'd sit in the swing and read all the time... every type magazine. But she quit school in the eighth grade."

"She loved cats, too. You'd never see her without some around," Mrs. Reid said.

"She was a quiet girl.

"It was said the last thing Viola did before leaving town..."

Turn to Page 10, Columns 1

O. P. HOLLIDAY

They can't forget—

Fear stalks wake of torso murders

BY DON BROWNING—News Staff Writer

GARDENIN, Ala., July 4—The trial of an Alabama man accused of murdering a woman in a double-murder case is set for next week.

"He found Mr. X"

The man, Mr. X, is said to be a relative of the victims. He disappeared with the woman and was last seen in the area near Granite City.

"We believe the killer is still on the loose." Mrs. J. H. Holiday, the mother of the victims, said.

"I was afraid of going to the city."

"I thought he would come back," Mrs. Holiday said. "I was afraid of going to the city."

THE GOODBYE was Johnny Shirley, who lives nearby. The boy had been there since the incident.

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Mrs. Holiday said the killer had been there since the incident.

"I was afraid of going to the city."

"I was afraid of going to the city."
Maybe a woman, psychiatrist says.

Cold, careful torso murderer had definite plan for killing

BY DON BROWN

New staff writer

A woman was found Sunday, June 20, inside an abandoned house just outside the Elizabethtown, Champaign County limit. It was thought about 400 yards off Highway 61.

The incident began about 8 a.m. when the body was discovered by a passing driver who noticed a car parked in an empty house. The house is located in the 300 block of 6th Street.

The body was not immediately identified, but she was believed to be about 50 to 60 years old. She had been shot twice in the head. The cause of death was listed as homicide.

Two men were later identified as suspects in the case. The investigation is ongoing and no further information was available.

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HINT OF RAIN
ALABAMA—Partly cloudy skies forecast for all sections through Wednesday with widely scattered afternoon and evening thunder showers.

MR. Y FOUND HERE, EASILY VISIBLE FROM STATE HIGHWAY 11

Left to right, Chief Deputy Hoyt Coupland, Sheriff Dave Evans and Deputy Robert C. Hayes

Clues are meager—

Wide probe launched in two torso slayings

BY DON BROWN News staff writer
GARDEN, Ala., June 30—Sheriff and officers from Montgomery county have had a wide-spread search through the county for the two torso slayings.
Birmingham residents—

Experienced lawmen heading investigation of torso murders

YESTERDAY, investigators from the FBI searched Queensland Lake near Tuscaloosa, but failed to locate any of the missing arms and legs.

MASON WORKS the counties of Blount, Etowah, DeKalb, Cherokee, Calhoun and Talbot. He and Allen spent the weekend in the Birmingham area checking out local and long-distance phone lines for missing persons. The time at home was spent checking the identity of the two men shot in the June 27 murders beyond receiving training, he traveled 28.5 miles away from Tuscaloosa.

TONY REYNOLDS...Chief deputy
TALMADGE FAMBROUH...Youngest in case

Fireman and Russell Edwards. Youngest son of the state and law team in St. Clair County Sheriff Talmadge Fambrough. He's 23 and serving his second term.

FAMBROUGH, married and father of two, is a 24-year graduate of the University of Alabama law school. He was born in Pell City, St. Clair Sheriff Dave Evans, is serving his first term as law enforcement. He formerly was mayor of Wetumpka six years.

Evans, a Pell City resident, is a grandfather once this year. March, 23 months, lives with her and her husband, Dave Evans Jr., and son on a St. Clair farm.

Champion's father of the investigative group is Chief Deputy Hoy Grubbs, who has jurisdiction over the northern half of divided St. Clair.

COUPLAND has a daughter, five sons and two grandsons. Before coming to St. Clair last January he was a policeman in Leeds.

Robert C. Evans, Clayton Stilley, Dean Tipton, and corner Lute Gilibert are other St. Clair officials working full time to the murders.

Highway patrols throughout Alabama have been aiding in the case whenever possible.
In a tiny Alabama town—

An old man rocks, hopes and waits for his daughter

BY DON BROWN, News staff writer

WHITE PLAINS, Ala., March 15—"I feel like they won't take her away from me ..."

An old man, whose family has long been a part of the community, sat quietly, his hands clasped in front of him. His voice was calm, but the pain in his eyes was evident.

A small coal fire blazed in the bedroom, where the old man lived alone. He was surrounded by old photographs and memories of a life lived in relative simplicity.

"She was just a little girl when she went out tearing up the town," he said. "But she always had a kind heart."

Viola Hyatt, 72, reflects on the events of the past year, when she was a prime suspect in a series of shootings.

NEW YORK TIMES

This is the way Viola Hyatt greets her defense lawyers ...

Accused in torso slayings pulls bedsheet over head, keeps silent

Viola Hyatt refuses to cooperate with defense attorneys in torso case

BY DON BROWN

Newswriter

ANNISTON, Ala., Feb. 15—A former Army nurse accused of murder, Viola Hyatt, said she is "in cooperation nowhere."

And in an effort to build a defense for the White Plains farm woman, they have moved to other places.

Robert A. Nored, one of the two defense attorneys, went to Tuscaloosa yesterday in search of the psychic team that examined Miss Hyatt. Psychiatrists pronounced her sane.

The 51-year-old woman is charged with shooting two brothers and dismembering their bodies with an ax.

Nored said he plans to talk to a psychiatrist in Birmingham later today. He also said he will call Emmett and Lee Harper, who released the bodies.

He was arrested July 7 at home in White Plains, about 35 miles east of Anniston. A few hours later on March 14, he was nevertheless ordered to trial.

Two days before the first trial date, Sept. 10, Judge Leslie Kornfeld ordered him to testify at trial.

He committed suicide on April 25, 1978, in Tuscaloosa for insanity tests.

The attorney's ex-wife, Althea Nored, said she would refuse to cooperate with the defense.

The attorneys have been trying to find a way to cooperate with the defense.

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Close to father

Viola's Mother lived when

The story of Viola Hyatt's trial continues ...
Governor praises officers for work in toroso case

MONTGOMERY, Ala., July 2. Gov. Jim F. Doyle today announced state and county officers from throughout the state worked in unison in the Toroso case.

"I wish to congratulate the Alabama State Police and officers from all parts of the state," Governor Doyle said. "The state, county and local law enforcement officers cracked the case with the cooperation of all involved.

The governor praised the officers for their efforts.

The initial tip came from two highway patrolmen and several of their colleagues posted on the surrounding track-train. The state investigative unit, under Public Safety Director Floyd B. Plant, did not reveal until they had unveiled this bizarre double murder of two of the patients at the general public. The investigation was equally important to the state police and other authorities.

As part of the investigation, officers from the state police, federal agents, and local law enforcement agencies searched the scene. The search was intensive, with officers working around the clock to identify the victims and determine the motive.

A check of the victim's clothing revealed that the victim was wearing a shirt and pants that were typical of the individual they were associated with. The clothing was examined by forensic experts at the state crime laboratory.

That type shirt was also found at the scene, leading authorities to believe that the victim was likely the person who committed the murder.

The investigation continues, and authorities are urging anyone with information to come forward. They have offered a reward for information leading to an arrest.

In the meantime, the community is in shock and mourning for the loss of these two innocent lives.
Shirt made in state—
Clothing checked in torso murders

By Don Brown
News staff writer

Gadsden, Ala., Jan. 3—Investigators of the Highway 11 torso murders revealed today that an undercoat worn by both of the two victims was made by Russell Manufacturing Co. of Alexandria, Va.

State investigators Ben Allen and Arthur F. Mason conferred with officials of the company, hoping to find out to whom the clothing was sold. They did not secure results of the conference. The development came as an other possible clue apparently hinted. The officers said a car found abandoned near Childersburg seemingly had no connection with the case and there was no evidence found that would indicate the car was used by either of the two victims. They had just come from the courtroom where Lee's ex-girlfriend, Viola Hunt, chose to remain in'imprisonment rather than to hear the trial. The officers said that she had been allowed freedom or death.

The trial lasted four hours, and the jury deliberated only 25 minutes before returning the verdict directed by Judge Leslie C. Longshore.

Defence and prosecution agreed to a compromise whereby the defendant pleaded guilty to first degree murder charges and the state did not ask the death penalty for either. Shorter of the trial was in sharp contrast to the 29-day hunt last summer for the person labeled A h a n a's "toms killer.

Hobbies of the brothers, their fans, and their fans' fans, have been asked by the investigators, and their fans' fans, to name the man who has been seen near the scene.

LEE HARPER'S GUITAR—A REMINDER

...Joe Harper takes it from Sheriff Ray Secord

by Don Brown and Charlie Grainger

Anniston, Ala., March 15—A pawn shop ticket was issued for the old guitar used in the last guitar duel.

Sheriff Ray Secord strummed the instrument's loose, untuned strings, then handed it to a slightly built man wearing horns-rimmed glasses.

Next is Calhoun County official showed an alarm clock, a trailer hitch, two safety razors and a $1 bill.

"Those, too, went to the man," he said.

Joe J. Harper was silent as he took the personal effects of his brothers, Lee and Emmett Harper.

"He had just come from the courthouse where Lee's ex-girlfriend, Viola Hunt, chose to remain in prison rather than to hear the trial. The officers said that she had been allowed freedom or death."
Be sure to break

vestigators say

were missing.

State Public Safety Director
Floyd Mann commended News
Article Brooks for what he
formed "an excellent geograph-
ical model of Mr. X and Mr. Y."

He also commended The News
for keeping interest at a peak
during the investigation.

MANN ALSO congratulated
State Investigators Ben Allen
and A. S. Mason and subscri-
tives in Florence and E. Clair
av.

FARM HOUSE AND GROUNDS WHERE CONFESSION MURDERER LIVED

... At left is crib and tool shed where wheelbarrow found

CRUDE WHEELBARROW WAS DEATH VEHICLE FOR REMOVING BODIES

... Torsois and limbs were loaded on barrow, taken to car

Toxicologist provided first
break in case

ANNISTON, Ala.-July 17-The
first major break in the double-
termed murder case came as the re-
sult of a laboratory test in Al-
haedition.

State Toxicologist Robert E.
Johnson of Birmingham,—through
laboratory techniques—discovered
the same E-72 fusilerae stenciled
on a piece of shirt found on the
man labeled as Mr. Y.

Johnson told officers he believed
one of the murder victims was
named "Lee Harper.

When two highway patrolmen
repeated that two brothers were
missing and investigation discov-
ered they were named Har-
per, the solution to the case was
found.

Chief State Investigator W. F.
Allen revealed Johnson's part in
establishing identity of Mr. Y.

All photos by
Norman Dean,
Buster Hogan
"But I never heard her talk about them getting married. The drove Lee's car a bit... especially the last three years."

The neighbors in whom Viola was closest, Mrs. and Mrs. H. M. Cobb, described her as "just a country girl and a good neighbor."

Cobb said when his mother died June 13, Viola came to the home "and was very helpful."

Last Tuesday, he said, Viola used the phone here to call and ask for an extended leave of absence for Lee.

"Those brothers never came around nobody. That's why we didn't miss 'em," Cobb said.

Thought it unusual

He also stated he and his wife heard shots or shouts of alarm Saturday night, June 27.

"We didn't know anything about it until last (Thursday) night. I thought all the cars there were for a reunion."

"Askep if he thought Mr. and Mrs. Hyatt would be able to cut along without Viola's help."

Mr. Cobb reminded she never worked.

They have a prosperous farm, he said, and Mr. Hyatt receives a monthly old-age check.

Mr. Cobb was among 30 neighbors who visited the Hyatt farm while Viola was in residence.

"But he remained on the porch with his stepmother and sister."

The others looked on from the driveway and through windows.

Viola first spoke briefly to her parents on the porch. There was no embracement or emotion seen. Neither parent rose to meet the visitor. Then they went inside.

Went into yard

SHORT TIME LATER, she came out the back door with a broom and went to the far side of a large chicken yard. She scratched in the ground with the broom handle, shoveling Officers Ben Abele, A. T. Mason what was there.

Then she took the man to the aluminum trailer jack-up on concrete blocks. Inside the trailer was where she said jej the brothers in the face with a shotgun.

The man stepped briefly outside the trailer door and she pointed the gun where her hand was cramped up the body.

She then told the officers to a ransacked corn crib across the driveway from the trailer,
Killer may have forced second man to watch while first victim slain

BY DON BROWN, News staff writer

GADSDEN, Ala., July 1-Was it murder or manslaughter? That was the question confronting the coroner yesterday as he searched for the man who was found dead in the back yard of a home here.

The body was found in the back yard of a home here by a man who was walking his dog. The man told police that he had found the body and that it appeared to be that of a man who had been murdered.

The body was described as being about 5 feet 8 inches tall, weighing about 160 pounds. He was wearing a light blue shirt, dark pants and black shoes.

The man who found the body said he had seen the body before but did not think much of it at the time.

The victim was identified as James E. Johnson, 35, of Gadsden.

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Wells searched for missing limbs

Earl Payne, Godden, in risky search

Wells was last seen on May 12, 1957, when he was last seen leaving his father's home in Godden. Since then, there have been no sightings of him.

Wells was last seen wearing a black suit and a hat. He was last seen walking down the street.

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Three skin divers from the Gadsden-Dove-Darwin search party found the body of the missing man yesterday. They were searching for his remains in the shallow waters of the river.

The search was called off after the body was found.

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investigators also located the automobile, the back seat caked with dried blood. The seat was covered with a piece of cloth to hide the stains. A curious crowd gathered around the blood-stained car parked at the county jail today. A crowd estimated at 1,000 stood on the front lawn.

NEIGHBORS SON POLICE

saw the car on the road and called the police. They were called to the scene by a neighbor who noticed the car and called the police.

Miss Mary is due to be back in the county jail today. She was released from the county jail yesterday after being held on charges of murdering her husband.

Miss Mary said she did not kill her husband and that he deserved to be in jail. She claimed that he was violent and abusive.

"WHEN RETURNED TO JAIL, OFFICERS ASKED HER IF SHE PLANS TO COMPLAIN," Miss Mary said. "I told them no, I am just going to the jail to be with my family."

Miss Mary told officers she and her husband had an argument about an engagement that he had bought her. She said it caused a fight and she ended up killing him.

The "whisky trail" route winds north from the county jail through Frampton, 24 miles north of South Carolina and continues toward the northeast.

The bodies were found west of Gadsden in Elmore and Cherokee County. The head of the body was found near the edge of the road.

The bodies were badly decomposed, but the clothing was still intact and could be identified. The hands were tied behind the back with a rope and the feet were bound with a cord.

The "whisky trail" is known for its wild parties and frequent killings.

"WHEN RETURNED TO JAIL, OFFICERS ASKED HER IF SHE PLANS TO COMPLAIN," Miss Mary said. "I told them no, I am just going to the jail to be with my family."

The police believe that the bodies were probably killed and abandoned in the woods nearby. They are searching for a vehicle that was seen driving in the area around the time of the murder.

The suspect vehicle was described as an older model car with a damaged fender. The vehicle was found abandoned in the woods nearby.

"WHEN RETURNED TO JAIL, OFFICERS ASKED HER IF SHE PLANS TO COMPLAIN," Miss Mary said. "I told them no, I am just going to the jail to be with my family."

When asked about her husband, Miss Mary said, "He was a good man, but he was violent and abusive. I was just trying to get away from him."