

III. 03C01-9403-CR-00090

STATE OF TENNESSEE

VS.

GARY WAYNE SUTTON

AND

JAMES ANDERSON DELLINGER

SEVIER NO. 90

Monday, Aug 31, 1992

Slaying victim said last seen with suspects

By JAMIE SATTERFIELD
Copy Editor

A Sevier County woman found dead in her burned-out car in February was last seen alive leaving a Blount County tavern with her accused slayers, court documents say.

In a summary of facts filed in Sevier County Circuit Court, Connie Branam, 34, is said to have been last seen leaving a bar in Blount County with Gary Wayne Sutton, 27, of Vicksburg Lane, and James Anderson Dellinger, 41, of Seymour on Feb. 22.

Branam's burned body was found in her car, also burned, on Clear Fork Road in Wears Valley six days later.

Sutton and Dellinger are accused of first-degree murder in the death of Branam, as well as her brother, Tommy Griffin, 24, who was found shot to death near Little River in Walland Feb. 24.

Sutton and Dellinger are also alleged to have been the last seen with Griffin before his death,

which authorities have pinpointed as occurring between the late evening hours of Feb. 21 and early hours of Feb. 22.

Branam is believed by authorities to have been slain between 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 22.

Both men deny killing the brother and sister, although they admit being together at all times during Feb. 21 and Feb. 22, the facts summary says.

Sutton and Dellinger are charged in Blount County with Griffin's death. A trial date of Dec. 14 has been set in that case. However, no trial date in the Branam case has been set here. Meanwhile, Sutton, who had won an appellate ruling for a new bond hearing here, will remain behind bars after a judge again ruled against bond in the Sevier County case last week.

Authorities contend Sutton and Dellinger killed Griffin and then, in an effort to cover up that slaying, killed his sister, who left her Sevier County home early Feb. 22.

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In search of her brother.

Authorities both here and in Blount County have offered little clues on a possible motive in the slaying of Griffin.

Court documents show the state is in possession of evidence linking Dellinger to Griffin's fatal shooting as empty shotgun shells found where Griffin's body was located matched up with shells found at Dellinger's home.

Likewise, in the Branam case, documents say a spent shell found at the scene of her slaying was "determined by TBI crime laboratory to have been fired from a rifle taken from Dellinger's resi-

shot, an agreement between the state and defense attorneys for Sutton admits the state has "no forensic evidence to prove that the (spent) shell was fired at or around the time of Connie Branam's death."

That agreement also says Dr. William Bass, a forensic expert, "cannot opine that Connie Branam was or was not shot by any firearm."

It further says that Branam had been drinking alcohol on the day the state alleges she was killed.

The state is seeking the death penalty against the pair in Branam's case. However, Blount County District Attorney General Mike Flynn has said he can find no grounds in the Griffin case to

Saturday, February 22, 1992

Shooting complaints dismissed

Two key witnesses cannot be located

By JAMIE SATTERFIELD
Copy Editor

The state was forced Friday to dismiss charges against a Kodak man accused in a spree of drive-by shootings because two of his friends who are key witnesses can't be found.

Seven counts of reckless endangerment with a firearm against Gary Wayne Sutton, 28, of Vicksburg Lane, were dropped Friday in Sevier County Trial Justice Court.

Assistant District Attorney General Charles Poole said the state "cannot proceed" with the case without two key witnesses, Conway Parton and Carolyn Weaver, both of whom were alleged to be with Sutton the night of Jan. 2 and early morning Jan. 3 when he allegedly shot into five occupied homes on Douglas Dam Road.

Sutton is also accused of shooting into Brad Williams' Chevy S-10 truck. The truck was unoccupied at the time.

Weaver, Sutton's girlfriend, and Parton, Sutton's friend, gave Sevier County Sheriff's Department authorities statements implicating Sutton in the drive-by shoot-

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ing case. But Poole said attempts to locate the two have been unsuccessful.

Poole asked Judge Charles Sexton to reset the case, allowing the state more time to find Weaver and Parton, who is on probation stemming from a drug case.

Weaver and Parton "are apparently avoiding service of process" requiring that they appear in court, Poole said. "We need those two witnesses to proceed on this."

Sutton's attorney, David Webb, objected to a second rescheduling of the case. It was originally set for a hearing on Feb. 7 but was continued because the state couldn't locate Weaver and Parton.

"We were ready then and we are ready now," Webb said. "It was agreed upon on this date. My client is once again here. I've hired a court reporter and we're wanting to proceed today."

Sexton refused to reset the case, forcing the state to dismiss the charges.

"I think today is the day," he

said. "We need to make some decision."

Poole said authorities will continue to look for Weaver and Parton and, if the two are found, will either take the case before the grand jury to seek indictments or reissue charges against Sutton through arrest warrants.

Sutton, who has other cases pending, was issued a warning by Sexton.

"Mr. Sutton, you'd better conform your behavior," Sexton said. "You've still got other things pending."

Sutton was accused in a series of drive-by shootings that left one home riddled with 184 holes and residents of Douglas Dam Road shaken and edgy. Blasts from the Winchester 12-gauge shotgun believed to have been used in the shootings narrowly missed striking Larry Maynard in the back of the head.

Homes were shot through kitchen windows, living room windows and paneling. Williams' truck sustained around \$1,000 worth of damage.

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Sunday, February 26, 1992

Mother convinced body is daughter

By LESLIE WILSON
Staff Writer

The mother of a woman missing since Saturday and a man found dead in Walland Monday believes the charred body police found in a burned car in Wears Valley Friday night is that of her daughter.

"I feel like it's her — I felt like she was dead," said Viola Griffin, mother of Connie Branam. "I don't know how anyone would be capable of something like that."

Authorities also believe the body they found around 7 p.m. Friday about one-half mile off South Clear Fork Road in Wears

Valley to be that of Connie Branam, 34, who was reported missing Monday by her mother.

Branam left her Bluff Heights Road home around 1 p.m. Saturday in search of her 24-year-old brother, Tommy Griffin. Griffin was found dead Monday afternoon with a gunshot wound to the head near Little River in Walland. Branam has not been seen by her relatives since then.

"I believe (whoever killed Tommy) told her they would take her where Tommy was ... and then I believe they killed her," Griffin said. "Now she's burnt beyond recognition and my son, my poor, little, old, cripple

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Dr. William M. Bass (at open car door) gathers evidence for his forensic investigation at crime scene Saturday. Photo by Gordon Brugman

BODY

■ MOTHER

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going to check into."

Branam, who was driving a brown 1970 two-door Dodge Swinger when last seen, had a gut feeling something was wrong when her brother did not call or come home, said Viola Griffin, the pair's mother.

"She said, 'I'm going to go hunt my brother ... she really felt like these people who got him out of jail had done something to him. Something did happen to him ... he was shot between the eyes. He didn't even carry a gun.'"

Griffin said Branam and her brother were very close.

"Real close," Griffin said. "When he had his leg torn off in a car wreck we couldn't keep her away from the hospital."

The 24-year-old man had an artificial leg as a result of the accident.

Griffin fears the worst has happened to her daughter, she said.

"She would have called me if she could because I've got a real bad heart condition," she said. "I look for them to find her car in a big old rock quarry with her dead because she found out who killed (her brother). I just believe they've

killed her too."

Branam was to have gone to the Blount County Sheriff's Department to check on her brother's whereabouts, Griffin said, and then call home. She never did.

"She was going to go to the jail in Blount County and then she was going to call me," Griffin said. "I never heard from her. It's kind of suspicious, isn't it?"

Griffin, who lives on White School Road, said her family, including her son who was slain and Branam, have received threats from two men who live near them. She said the two men allegedly shot into one of her family member's cars but could not be positively identified and were not charged in the shooting.

Griffin believes the two Kodak men who posted bond for her son are the same pair that police are questioning in connection with the incident. Police had no comment on whether the two are suspects in the case and did not confirm or deny Griffin's allegations.

"I want them," she said. "God, I want them caught."

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Courtesy of
Time of Death Podcast
by Beth Braden

