

Phone call leads police to patient abducted from Willowbrook bed

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN
and MARK LINSALATA

An anonymous telephone call early today ended a 20-hour search for a 28-year-old profoundly retarded woman who officials say was mysteriously carried off at dawn yesterday from her bed in a ward of the Willowbrook Developmental Center.

The woman, Juanita Diaz, a 4-foot 11-inch tall quadraplegic weighing 70 pounds, was found lying in the grass about 2:15 a.m. between Building 1 and 27. Sgt. F. Duda of Willowbrook security found Miss Diaz, who is described as a "total spastic" with no ability to communicate, after he received a call from an unidentified man who said he had seen "something" on the lawn between the two buildings.

The area had been searched thoroughly by police yesterday. "Someone had to put her back out there, for whatever reason, nobody knows," remarked Sgt. Robert Maloney of the Emergency Service Division who went to Willowbrook after the woman was discovered. Police and Willowbrook security officers checked the area for additional details, but they reportedly found nothing.

An examination by Dr. Chalotorn Loch, a Willowbrook physician, revealed that the woman was unharmed except for a few scratches on her hands and elbows.

Lt. Thomas Garland, who supervised the police investigation of the discovery of the woman, said that it was still believed that an unidentified intruder had taken the woman. "This woman can't move," he added. Willowbrook officials said Miss Diaz had been living at the developmental center for 24 years and was last visited in 1972.

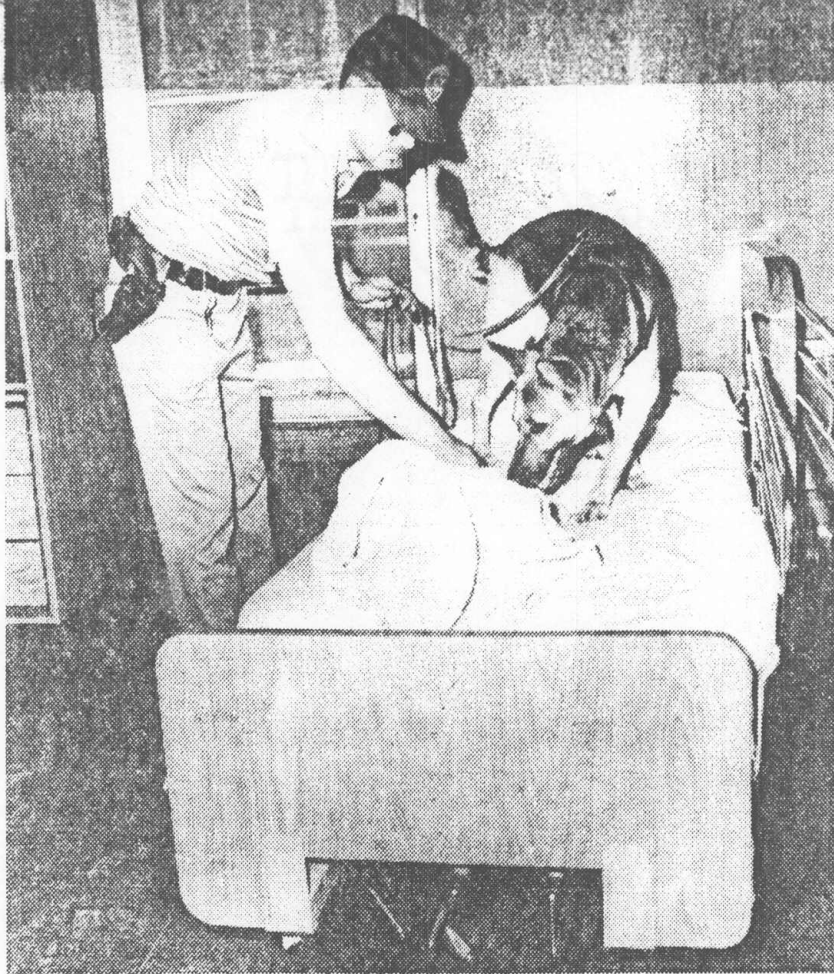
Police said the abductor entered Miss Diaz' ward in Building 25 between 5:15 and 6 a.m. after prying off a screen and pushing up a window directly in front of her bed. "She was forcibly removed," a detective said. "The screen was unscrewed from the outside."

The two attendants on duty in the 24-bed ward at the time said Miss Diaz was asleep in the building when they made their hourly rounds at 5:10 a.m. They found her missing 50 minutes later when



Juanita Diaz, a 28-year-old profoundly retarded quadraplegic who mysteriously disappeared from Willowbrook Developmental Center, is lifted by aides onto a special wheelchair after she was found on the center's grounds. S.I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannante

PAGE 1 of 3 pages



A state trooper has a trained dog pick up Juanita Diaz's scent from her bed in the developmental center.

S.I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannante



Detective David Hall lifts fingerprints from the screens on the window where the abductor apparently forced his way into the building.

Page
2
of
3
Pages

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(From Page 1)

they went to awaken the ward residents. "We wouldn't have heard anything unusual," said one of the attendants, Mrs. Shirley Haynes. "The ward was very noisy. One girl was screaming at the top of her lungs, and she does that all the time."

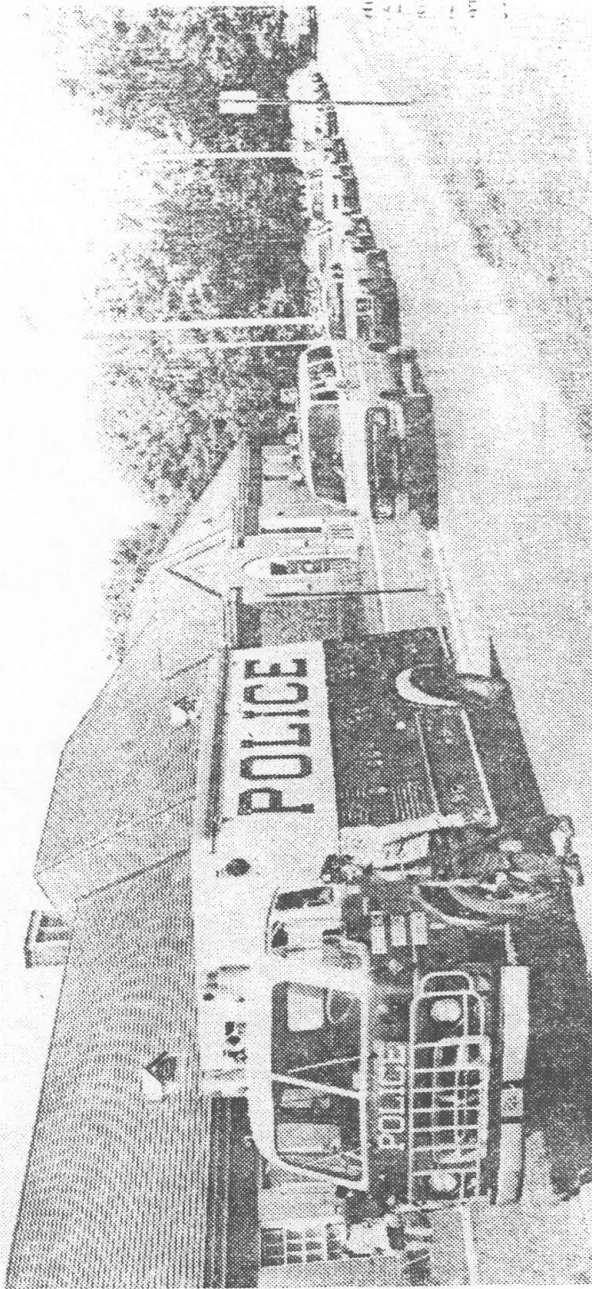
Mrs. Haynes added that Miss Diaz' bed is located in a rear area of the ward — a good distance from the attendants' station in the lobby of the building.

Police and Willowbrook officials launched a massive search effort to find the missing woman. A Department of Mental Hygiene helicopter whirled over the Willowbrook rooftops and ground.

A state police German shepherd dog was flown in from Poughkeepsie by a city police helicopter. After sampling Miss Diaz' scent from bedsheets and a diaper, the dog, named Jicky, led police through the wooded areas around Building 25 but turned up nothing.

"If she were here, Jicky would have found her," the dog's master, State Trooper Arthur Krug, said as he was about to leave Willowbrook with the animal.

In addition, about 30 Staten Island police officers and detectives and scores of Willowbrook employees combed the grounds and searched every building at the institution from "attic to basement. Several maintenance men were even sent through the steam tunnels around the building.



Police vehicles line a street on the center's grounds during the search for the kidnaped patient.

"The ducts were secured, but we can't leave any stone unturned," Detective Sgt. William Bracken said from a temporary headquarters set up in the building for the investigation.

After looking in vain for Miss Diaz for several hours, some detectives speculated that her abductor may have driven her off the Willowbrook campus in a car. They said the kidnaper may have been familiar with the ward and known the bed check routine.

The law officers also said they were

investigating reports that a prowler was seen walking through Miss Diaz' ward over the weekend. It was not immediately clear whether Willowbrook security guards were called when the man was spotted.

Willowbrook officials said Miss Diaz' parents, Mr. and Mrs. Raphael Diaz, brought her to the institution in 1953. The father has since moved to Puerto Rico and the mother lives in Connecticut, according to the officials.

The officials said the woman a "total care" case and could neither talk nor walk. "The only way she could have gotten out of here would have been if someone picked her up and lifted her out," Mrs. Haynes said.

She also said that Miss Diaz, who was wearing only a white smock when abducted yesterday, spent most of her time either in bed or in a wheelchair. "She used to sit on her legs," Mrs. Haynes added. "She really couldn't move much at all."