

Prologue

*I*t was just past three o'clock on a warm Friday afternoon in June when a *Wells Fargo* armored truck was reported late for a scheduled pickup at a Haywood County bank. Three hours later the abandoned truck along with its driver and two guards was finally located on a remote rural road by the Haywood County Sheriff's Department. Both front and rear doors were standing open and the truck was empty.

Two of the guards were found dead near the rear of the truck, the driver was a few yards away and in critical condition. He lived long enough to offer a brief account of what had happened: Six men in two automobiles and armed with Thompson submachine guns forced him off the road, took over the vehicle and drove to this remote location. The two guards in the back refused to surrender and died trying to defend their position. He had been shot while attempting to escape to the nearby woods.

The armored truck was carrying close to a million dollars in cash – almost twice what it would normally have been transporting. Some of the money was being moved from/to local retail businesses and banks, but the majority was destined for a local construction company to handle monthly payroll – almost \$500,000.

A few hours later the two automobiles used in the robbery were located about 3 miles from the truck – both had been set on fire and burned down to their frames.

No clues were discovered at either crime scene and no witnesses could be located.

A lot of money was missing. The identities of the bandits remained unknown and they were still at large.

The robbery happened six months ago. No new evidence, witnesses or information about the robbery had come forth, and it seemed that the case would go cold and unsolved.

That was until today – five days before Christmas 1963.