

## REX BRINLEE: THE MAN AND HIS ESCAPE



*By Jack Anthony Reavis*

“A bad seed, always getting into trouble,” is an unusual comment for a mother, but that is how Betty Brinlee, mother of Garland Rex Brinlee Jr., described her son.<sup>1</sup> Brinlee’s court record dates to 1959, just a few years after he dropped out of high school to work as a plumber. Over the years Brinlee earned a reputation for criminal activity with rumored ties to organized crime. Brinlee once wrapped up an impromptu interview with a reporter by describing himself as individualistic in his lifestyle and business. “I’m like a rattlesnake. I won’t come looking to bother you, but if you bother me, you’ll hear my rattles,” he concluded.<sup>2</sup> A search of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections website reveals only three convictions, one of which resulted in incarceration for the remainder of his life. Brinlee’s conviction and subsequent imprisonment brought relief to many in northeastern Oklahoma who had heard Brinlee’s rattles, but occurred too late for a few who suffered his bite. The imprisonment of a hardened criminal whose intimidation, violence, and murder

terrorized his community did not end his threat to society, because putting Brinlee in prison proved easier than keeping him there.

One of Brinlee's early brushes with the law in 1963 involved him and two of the employees from his 740-acre ranch near Chelsea. He used his Cessna airplane to look for a silo unloader to steal. Spotting one from the air, the men returned after dark, dismantled it, and loaded it onto a Mayes County truck that Brinlee had borrowed in the town of Adair. When the unloader was found in his barn several days later, he claimed he had no knowledge of how it came to be there.<sup>3</sup> He also made use of his airplane to locate and steal cattle. He called attention to his illegal activities by wearing a leather belt imprinted with "Mayes County Flying Bandit." He was arrested for cattle rustling and stealing a truck in 1963 and was eventually convicted for the larceny of livestock after two hung juries in Mayes County. He was sentenced to three years in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary (OSP).<sup>4</sup> In 1965 the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals reversed the conviction with instructions to dismiss the charges before he served a single day of his sentence because officers trespassed on Brinlee's property without a search warrant, making the stolen cattle inadmissible as evidence.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after the dismissal Brinlee was charged in five counties with cattle rustling and possession of stolen property. Eventually these charges were dropped for a lack of evidence.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1969 Brinlee was a suspect in a more serious offense: Tahlequah police questioned him in the bombing of the vehicle of the assistant district attorney of Cherokee County, William "Bill" Bliss, whose truck exploded as he started it in his driveway.<sup>7</sup> Bliss received lacerations to his face and stomach. A Tahlequah City Hospital spokesperson reported Bliss's injuries were not considered critical and listed his condition as serious.<sup>8</sup> His daughter Angie, who was playing in the garage, was not seriously injured, but suffered temporary loss of hearing and cuts from broken bits of glass that were removed from her body for several weeks.<sup>9</sup> Brinlee was released without any charges being filed.<sup>10</sup> A Muskogee federal grand jury convened in August 1969 to investigate the Bliss bombing and called Brinlee and Vernon English, a Stilwell produce manager, to present testimony.<sup>11</sup> Although no one was ever convicted in the attempt on Bliss's life, his wife Joyce commented, "I think he (Brinlee) was in on it with three or four other bad people in the area." Mrs. Bliss mentioned Leo Lowry, who was found "beat to death" at a rural night club east of Tahlequah, and Vernon English as possible accomplices with Brinlee.<sup>12</sup> Brinlee later admitted to Bill Bliss, "They messed up yours and all the others but when I do it, I have

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it done right.” Bliss said that Brinlee knew who had bombed him but would not disclose that information.<sup>13</sup>

On Saturday, October 17, 1970, Don Bolding, his wife, and daughter were on the Swinson Chevrolet car lot in Tulsa. He purchased a Volkswagen for his commute to work from Bristow to Stroud, where he was an employee of a trucking company. His wife Fern inherited his pickup truck. On the car lot Bolding recognized a man in a “brownish colored jacket” looking over a “white-over-yellow” Chevrolet pickup with a camper attached.<sup>14</sup> The man he recognized was Rex Brinlee, now a resident of Tahlequah. Brinlee was suspected by Tahlequah police of involvement in a series of crimes. The car lot manager returned Monday to find the truck Brinlee had been inspecting was missing. On the evening of December 1, 1970, just north of Tahlequah, Oklahoma Highway Patrol Trooper Lieutenant Don Menzer stopped a white-over-yellow Chevrolet pickup, driven by Beatrice Coppetti, who worked at a tavern owned by Brinlee. The probable cause for pulling the car over was a faulty tail light. Trooper Menzer was actually working on a tip from Agent James R. “Dick” Wilkerson of the Oklahoma State Crime Bureau that the truck was stolen. Brinlee arrived after the stop, as did Agent Wilkerson and Tahlequah Chief of Police Gene Bolding, the brother of Don. Chief Bolding and Agent Wilkerson were able to confirm that the hidden serial number on the truck did not match the serial number on the truck door.<sup>15</sup> It was not until February 9, 1971, that Brinlee was arrested near Tahlequah by Oklahoma Highway Patrol and bound over for trial for auto theft. He was arraigned before Associate District Judge Bill Bliss, who set his bond at \$300.<sup>16</sup>

Don Bolding was set to appear as a witness on February 5, 1971, the original date of Brinlee’s trial for larceny of a motor vehicle. Tulsa District Attorney S. M. “Buddy” Falls regarded Bolding’s testimony as “highly significant,” because it would place Brinlee at the scene of the crime.<sup>17</sup> Three days before he was to present testimony Fern Bolding, a Bristow school teacher, went to warm up the truck her husband had usually driven. When turned, the truck ignition detonated a bomb that blew her body over her small house into the yard of the next-door neighbors as her five-year-old daughter Kim watched morning television. Kim eluded injury, although the house suffered severe damage. Law enforcement officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the state crime bureau, local Bristow police, and county sheriff’s office searched across neighborhood lawns into the early evening, sifting through debris for clues.<sup>18</sup> Brinlee used high-grade military explosives to create a bomb he placed in the pickup truck to keep Bolding from testifying against him in the auto theft case that

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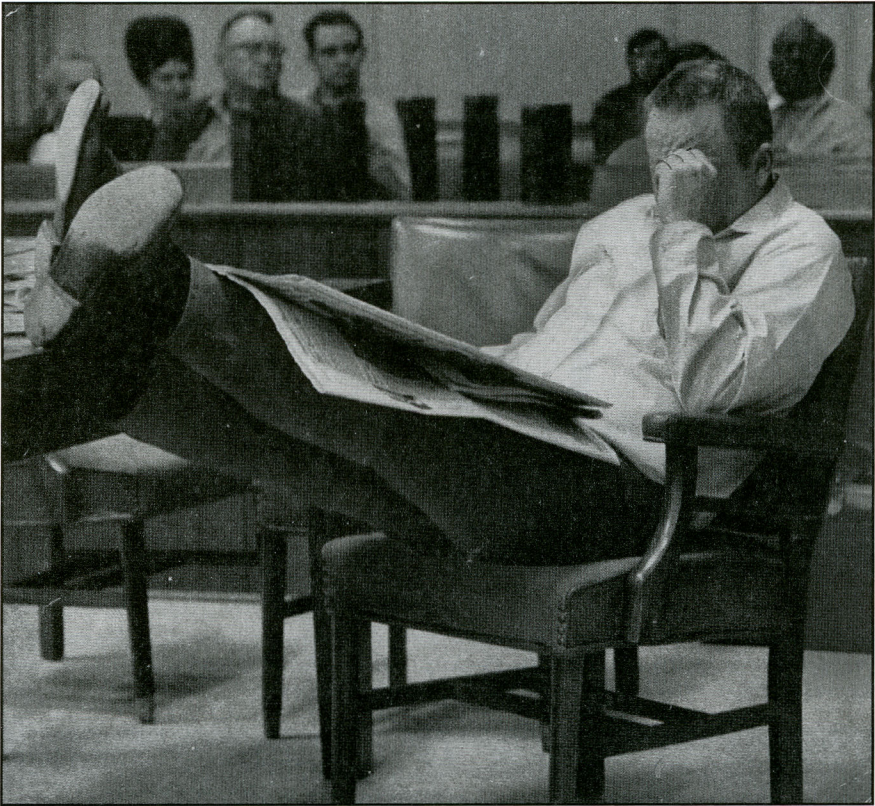
*Rex Brinlee in court on charges of murder in the February 2 truck bombing death of Fern Bolding, a Bristow kindergarten teacher June 15, 1971 (OPUBCO Collection, OHS Research Division).*

*Brinlee going up the steps of the Creek County Courthouse for his arraignment on a murder charge for the death of Fern Bolding. County Sheriff Brice Coleman hurries to keep up, 1971 (OPUBCO Collection, OHS Research Division).*





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*Brinlee during a court recess, 1971 (OPUBCO Collection, OHS Research Division).*

had been filed in Tulsa County <sup>19</sup> Brinlee was later quoted as saying Mrs. Bolding's death was a case of "the wrong horse in the stall."<sup>20</sup>

Just weeks after burying his wife, Don Bolding gave key testimony at Brinlee's trial, placing him at the scene of the crime. On April 22, 1971, after three hours of deliberation, a jury found Brinlee guilty of the October pickup theft. As the jury reported the verdict Brinlee showed no emotion. Associate District Judge Robert F. Martin set bail at \$7,500 and formal sentencing for April 30, when Brinlee received from four-to-twelve years in prison.<sup>21</sup>

Before the Bolding bombing, a Tulsa County grand jury had convened to investigate criminal activity in the Tulsa area, particularly the activity of Albert McDonald of Glenpool and Tom Lester Pugh of Collinsville, bombing suspects. While this investigation was in process, the grand jury expanded its investigation to include the Bolding bombing. Just hours after he was charged with auto theft, Brinlee was

called by the grand jury. He presented testimony that eventually led to his own indictment for the murder of Bolding and indictments of McDonald and Pugh.<sup>22</sup> Several witnesses who gave testimony before the Tulsa County grand jury later died violently. Vernon English, along with Brinlee, had been questioned during the 1969 Muskogee federal grand jury investigation into the Bliss bombing; he presented testimony as a closely guarded mystery witness. Security during his testimony was so tight that English was not even identified when he appeared before the jurors. After English testified, a charred body presumed to have been his was found in a burned-out tavern near the Arkansas state line. Consulting pathologist Dr. Robert Fogel with the State Medical Examiner's office reported, "The victim's body was so badly charred it would be difficult to positively identify it, or to determine if foul play was involved."<sup>23</sup>

The indictment of McDonald and Pugh predate the murder charge and conviction of Brinlee, but produced evidence relating to the murders of three grand jury witnesses and the near fatal bombing of Tulsa District Judge Fred Nelson on August 25, 1970. His car exploded when he attempted to start it to drive to the polls to cast his ballot in his own election. The judge was critically injured, but survived the explosion.<sup>24</sup> The two men were also charged with the deaths of Cleo Epps and Aries Delbert Self. Epps had earned the title "Queen of the Bootleggers" during the 1940s and 1950s when possessing, purchasing, and manufacturing liquor was illegal in the Sooner state.<sup>25</sup> She mingled with legislators, lawyers, and judges who possessed political and judicial power and influence. When Epps was called before the Tulsa County grand jury, she was said to have identified (while wearing a red wig trying to conceal her identity) McDonald and Pugh as the bombers of Nelson.<sup>26</sup> Grand jury testimony is supposed to be confidential, however, a story surfaced that Epps had "sung" before the jurors. The last time she was seen alive, Epps was entering a car with McDonald and Pugh. Three months later, in February 1971, her body was located and removed from the bottom of a septic tank south of Tulsa, an autopsy revealed two bullet holes in the head.<sup>27</sup> Self was found dead in his apartment from a gunshot. Both were murdered shortly after appearing before the Tulsa grand jury as witnesses.

While sitting in the hall of the courthouse waiting to be called before the grand jury, Brinlee openly talked about encounters with the law to *Daily Oklahoman* staff writer James Johnson. On February 15, 1971, Johnson asked Brinlee, "Did you do it?" "Hell, no!" he responded and added, "And that's the first time any reporter or policeman has asked me that question." In his interview with Johnson, Brinlee traced

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his life from dropping out of Tulsa's Central High School at fifteen to finding work as a plumber <sup>28</sup> He claimed that at one time he owned the "third largest plumbing contracting business in Tulsa" and considered himself a business success until he was charged with cattle rustling. "I got the idea of going to Tahlequah while the cattle thing was going on. They needed housing for students at Northeastern State College, so I went there and put up a thirty-eight-room apartment house." In Tahlequah he had conflicts with established merchants. According to Brinlee, "I figure I've invested almost a half million dollars when you think that the apartment house is worth \$38,000 and my private club, tavern and steak house are worth \$75,000. I also own 10 acres in Cherokee County" <sup>29</sup>

Shortly after the Bristow bombing several threats were made against residents of Tahlequah, Associate District Judge Bill Bliss, Cherokee County Sheriff August Martin, and Tahlequah Chief of Police Gene Bolding received verbal threats that were considered credible.<sup>30</sup> Local businessman Jim McSpadden owned a propane gas company and sold propane to Brinlee at his place of business, the Hereford Steak, which was in the same building that housed two other Brinlee businesses, a bar called the Keg and a dance hall known as the Library Mr McSpadden also had an eighteen-thousand-gallon propane tank located just south of the Brinlee business.

McSpadden recounted an incident he had with Brinlee after the Bolding bombing:

Rex had gotten behind on his gas payments but he would always bring by a big load of hamburger meat and say, "Here take this and I will pay when I can." I always let him just pay what he could when he could. At that time he always seemed to be good for his word. One day I was driving by his steak house and I saw a competitor's gas truck putting propane in our tank. I went to the office and I called Rex and said, "Rex you can't be doing that." He asked me if I was "aware of all the bombings in the area" to which I replied, "Yes" and then said, "I've always wondered what a kind of explosion a couple sticks of dynamite would make under a large propane tank." I told him, "Rex, you take all the time you need to pay me my money and if you get low on propane let me know " I hung up the phone.

I think he was driven sort of mad, insane, because of how much John Russell, who knew Brinlee from Chelsea, harassed him. They just wouldn't leave him alone. They would beat him

something bad. Rex was the type of guy that when he got back at you he would just go over the top.<sup>31</sup>

Bliss's wife described Brinlee as "a snake! An awful man! He would call to ask to come up to the house        bragged about giving the woman in Bristow flying lessons." She surmised, "Bill was raiding and closing up the clubs they were running illegally and that made him a target." After the Bristow bombing, she added, "Bill got him to tell the agents that he did it." She explained this admission was made during conversations between her husband and Brinlee. Mrs. Bliss could not specifically recall where these confessions took place, but she stated that this information was relayed to her by her husband.<sup>32</sup>

On June 4, 1971, Brinlee was driving on State Highway 82 just south of Tahlequah, free on bond awaiting appeal on his auto theft conviction, when he was pulled over by Oklahoma Highway Patrol (OHP) and crime bureau agents—four hours after a charge of murder had been filed in Bristow for the death of Fern Bolding. Brinlee did not resist arrest, although officers found a .38-caliber handgun under the driver's seat. Brinlee told the arresting officers, "I don't see how you can charge me with murder when I wasn't there." He was taken to the Cherokee County jail in Tahlequah to await transport to the jail in Bristow.<sup>33</sup> On June 15, at the preliminary hearing, Special District Judge Clyde Patrick set Brinlee's formal arraignment for June 21 and ordered him to be held without bond for murder.<sup>34</sup>

Brinlee's murder trial began in Okmulgee on Monday, November 15, 1971. To officials Brinlee gave an account to the murder charge:

I got a political battle. I was a contractor during the Govenor [*sic*] Hall term. We proved that they were stealing during the building of some apartment complexes in Tahlequah. Hall was indicted shortly after that. I'm the reason Hall went to prison. I did not do the bombing of the car where Fern Bolding was killed. I can prove I was in Tahlequah when the bombing occurred in Bristow        I was not there and did not do the crime. I was set up to get me out of the way.<sup>35</sup>

During the course of the trial drama began to unfold inside and outside the court room. On the first day of testimony a bench warrant was issued for Ralph Hinkle, a former employee of Brinlee, for failing to answer a subpoena. Hinkle was to appear as a key witness for the prosecution. The trial continued as scheduled with a massive search for Hinkle ensuing. The state prosecutors were "highly disturbed"

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over his disappearance and failure to appear. The deaths of the grand jury witnesses weighed heavily on the minds of each person connected to the case. Officials did not comment openly on Hinkle's failure to appear, but one source said, "It would be premature to speculate that he could have met with foul play."<sup>36</sup> Hinkle did not testify in the murder trial of Brinlee. In May, a Tulsa County federal grand jury indicted Hinkle in the Bolding bombing.<sup>37</sup>

A death threat was phoned to the wife of one of the jurors in Brinlee's murder trial, and the threat was taken seriously by the court. After the court had gone into recess for the day District Judge Jess I. Miracle called the state and defense attorneys for a private conference warning them to not take the threat "too lightly." The all-male jury was sequestered in an Okmulgee hotel with court bailiffs assigned guard duty.<sup>38</sup> There is no account as to whether the wife of the threatened juror received any protection from local or state officials.<sup>39</sup> Officers who testified at the trial said the bomb was meant for Don Bolding, the brother of Tahlequah Chief of Police Gene Bolding; the officers believed Gene and Brinlee were engaged in a feud.

Early testimony in the trial focused on how Brinlee bragged about calling "up north" to have the bombing done. Assistant Attorney General Paul Ferguson was trying to build a case that would show how Brinlee meant to blow up Don Bolding to prevent him from testifying in the car theft case. Bill Bliss, now an associate district judge, was called and presented testimony that Brinlee had told him he "had not done mine. They messed up yours and all the others but when I do it, I have it done right."<sup>40</sup> The state's final witness, James Johnson, a reporter for the *Daily Oklahoman*, gave testimony that Brinlee had told him he had the bomb placed in Bolding's truck.<sup>41</sup> Johnson testified that Brinlee said, "I tell you, if you put this in the newspaper, I'll do everything I can to kill you."<sup>42</sup> The reporter also testified that Brinlee felt he was being harassed by law enforcement and stated, "Ten others are going to fly over the roof like the woman in Bristow." Johnson said Brinlee was referring to one person in Muskogee, two in Tulsa, and seven in Tahlequah.<sup>43</sup> Judith Brazinsky, a newswoman for a Tulsa television station, told the court that during a phone conversation Brinlee stated he had called the "main man" with ties to the Mafia to provide a hired gun. After four days of testimony by thirty-nine witnesses, mostly federal and state law officers, Oklahoma Assistant Attorney General Paul Ferguson rested the state's case.<sup>44</sup>

Mike Miller, the first witness for the defense, testified that Brinlee had told him during an interview that he did not think Don Bolding was a key witness against him in the auto theft. Miller also testified



that Brinlee denied any knowledge about the Bolding bombing, but under cross-examination Miller said that Brinlee confessed to a role in the bombing. In lengthy testimony, Brinlee took the stand in his own defense. He was asked about the statements he had made to the various witnesses who testified that he was responsible for the death of Bolding. His response was that his discussions and comments with them had been “twisted.”<sup>45</sup> The climactic point of Brinlee’s testimony came when he confessed that he had caused the bombing to happen, when asked why, Brinlee snapped back, “To get that bunch of idiots off of me so I can get on about my business.”<sup>46</sup> At the end of a grueling fourteen-hour day Judge Miracle informed all parties involved that he would hear closing arguments Friday morning and at that time give jury instructions.<sup>47</sup>

On Friday afternoon, November 19, 1971, the jury retired to begin deliberations after a week of testimony. After fewer than three hours of deliberation the jury returned and Brinlee was found guilty of murder. In instructing the jury, Judge Miracle authorized it to consider the death penalty, but the jury chose a life sentence for Brinlee. Judge Miracle set the formal sentencing date for two in the afternoon November 29.<sup>48</sup> That afternoon Brinlee was sentenced to life imprisonment and under armed guard was driven to the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, also known as “Big Mac.”

As an inmate in the OSP Brinlee was described as a very “likeable guy, intelligent, liked to brag a lot, a hard worker and at times could be a model prisoner.”<sup>49</sup> He was considered by some employees and inmates to be part of the “Little Dixie Mafia.”<sup>50</sup> The Little Dixie Mafia was allegedly a loosely organized group of criminals who controlled crime in several southern states, including northeastern Oklahoma.<sup>51</sup> Although Brinlee was likeable to some of the employees and guards one OSP employee stated.

When Brinlee first came entered the prison he established himself as someone who had to be dealt with; someone you had to respect. The connections he had on the outside, at least the connections he said he had, bought him some power and influence inside the prison. As he grew older this power diminished as established inmates or lifers do not have to not prove themselves to anyone except to the young ones that come into the institution. New inmates if they have problems acclimating they can get hurt or worse.<sup>52</sup>

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*Above: The front entrance to the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester (21412.M112.4, Barney Hillerman Collection, OHS Research Division).*

*Below: Close-up view of the front entrance of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester looking southeast (21412.M112.2, Barney Hillerman Collection, OHS Research Division).*



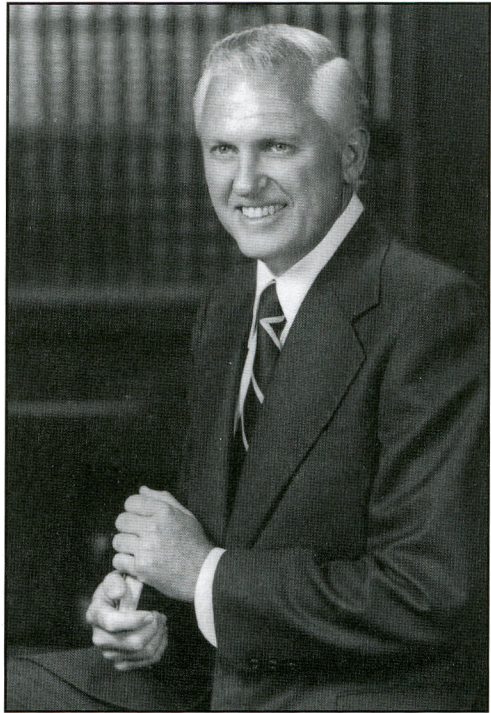
For the first few years of his imprisonment Brinlee was not a role model for prisoners. He received several disciplinary citations for various offenses. He threatened a medical staff member and confessed to striking another inmate. He was caught in possession of a knife and a .25-caliber handgun concealed in his television cabinet, and fought with an inmate in the yard. He also was disciplined for unauthorized entry into an industrial area by traveling through a plumbing vent, cutting the bars of four doors in the area of the electric chair with a torch, and possessing homemade handcuff keys hidden inside a cell wall in a deodorant can. In a written letter to the warden, he threatened to burn down the law library.<sup>53</sup> The OSP employee said Brinlee did as he was told and a person could get along with him, but that was in a controlled environment.”<sup>54</sup>

In summer 1973 Department of Corrections officials lost control of the environment at Big Mac. On July 27, 1973, a devastating riot occurred at the prison. Several factors contributed to the riot. The OSP had been designed for approximately 1,100 inmates, but in the summer of 1973 it housed about 2,200 prisoners. Governor David Hall’s unwillingness to sign parole recommendations contributed to its overcrowding. Poorly paid, untrained, and inadequately educated workers and corrections officers made conditions within the prison even worse. From 1970 to the beginning of the riot, records show there were nineteen violent deaths, forty stabbing attacks, and forty-four severe beatings of inmates.<sup>55</sup> Most of the Oklahoma prison system had been built decades earlier and suffered from extreme neglect. Toilets often did not work properly, backing raw sewage into cells. Discipline was brutally administered by some guards. Official policy permitted segregation of white and black inmates.<sup>56</sup> A lawsuit filed by inmate Bobby Battles with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union on April 24, 1972, increased pressure on the Oklahoma Department of Corrections to correct violations of basic human and civil rights. Federal Judge Luther Bohanon ruled in favor of Battles and on March 15, 1974, called the prison system “shameful and disgraceful.”<sup>57</sup>

Prison officials realized that conditions at Big Mac could produce a riot, which finally occurred on Friday, July 27, 1973. Officials believe about fifteen prisoners who had knives were in the prison yard trying to recruit others to join in an uprising. It is unclear how many, if any, other prisoners joined them at this point. The members of this group made their way to the mess hall and stabbed Lieutenant Thomas Payne and Captain C. C. Smith.<sup>58</sup> Coming to the aid of Payne and Smith, prison official Jack Hall and Deputy Warden Sam Johnston were attacked by several prisoners and taken hostage.<sup>59</sup> A full-scale riot was underway

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*Governor David Hall (18133,  
Oklahoma Historical Society  
Photograph Collection, OHS  
Research Division).*



within fifteen minutes. By the time order was restored three inmates had died from stab wounds and thirty-four were injured.<sup>60</sup>

One of the first units to enter the prison the evening of the riot was the OHP Riot Squad headed by Howard “Tink” Jones. On entering the prison grounds Jones said he and his unit noticed there were, “needles everywhere. They stole the medication, stole the dope and stuff from the hospital, they were higher than a kite.”<sup>61</sup>

One of the men encountered was Rex Brinlee, identified as one of the instigators of the OSP riot. As OHP troopers and National Guardsmen stood watch over the prisoners who were caged up in the southeast section of the prison yard, Rex Brinlee was urging inmates to rebel and taunted law officers to “come on in.”<sup>62</sup> An officer on tower duty observed, “He resembled the same cocky, banty rooster sort of guy that he always has been.” Six days after the riot started tear gas was used in the section where Brinlee was one of about 630 inmates to force back prisoners who had managed to chisel their way through a cell block wall made of stone. Workers quickly erected a barrier to keep the convicts from going through.<sup>63</sup>



Seven days after the riot broke out, Ed Hardy, press secretary to Governor David Hall, acknowledged that prison officials could not account for ten to thirty prisoners. Later the same day, Hardy reported the prison had more inmates than it did at the start of the riot. These statements illustrated how fluid the situation was in the days after the riot. Hardy, in trying to reassure the public concerning the containment of prisoners, announced, "The perimeter of the prison was never threatened and was well secured from the moment that the riot broke out." Hardy concluded that he considered it impossible for anyone to have escaped.<sup>64</sup>

Five days after Hardy's remark, Governor Hall asked all law enforcement officers in Oklahoma to aid in the capture of convicted murderer Rex Brinlee, who had escaped from the heavily guarded, maximum security OSP in the aftermath of the worst prison riot in Oklahoma state history.<sup>65</sup> His escape made prison officials and the prison system appear inept and gave credence to Battles's lawsuit. The exact time of Brinlee's escape is not known, but on or about August 5, 1973, he escaped from the maximum security facility, resulting in a massive multistate manhunt. Authorities began looking for Brinlee early Sunday and continued through the day Monday with a cell-by-cell search. On Tuesday OSP Warden Park Anderson announced, "We're convinced he's not inside the prison."<sup>66</sup> There were some early rumors that Brinlee had been killed, one prison employee stated it was known that he was "hated by most of the inmates."<sup>67</sup> In a press conference Anderson tried to dispel that rumor and provide details of how he might have escaped. Guards found a six-foot-deep hole in the north industrial area of the prison yard. Brinlee, under the cover of darkness, crept into the hole and waited for the right moment to make his break. Boards were laid over the hole with pieces of tin placed over the boards and then covered with dirt and ash to blend in with the burned out area. Anderson speculated Brinlee might have had aid in getting the hole properly covered so it would go unnoticed. Wire cutters were found along the east fence of the industrial area with two holes cut in the fencing network. Anderson recapped, "At the moment at least, we have to surmise this is how Brinlee escaped."<sup>68</sup> Immediately after he was confirmed missing, Pittsburg County District Attorney Don Roberts filed charges against him for escape.

Brinlee called his defense lawyer in the Bolding murder trial, Thomas Dee Frasier, the day after his escape was made public. Frasier's secretary answered the phone, "Tell him that Rex Brinlee called."<sup>69</sup> She went to get Frasier, but Brinlee hung up before he got on the line. About six months before his escape, Brinlee had threatened to kill



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Entered NCIC I. O. 4574 9-7-73		<b>ESCAPED FEDERAL PRISONER; INTERSTATE FLIGHT - MURDER</b>			
		<b>WANTED BY FBI</b>			
		<b>GARLAND REX BRINLEE, JR.</b>		FBI No. 547,093 H	
ALIASES: Garland Rexford Brinlee, Rex Garland Brinlee, Jr., John Foreman, Robert Foreman, Bearl Johnson, Burl Johnson, Bob Vale, Robert Vale, Bob Zale, Robert Zale, "Markham"				2 0 5 0 110 16 1 17 T 00	
					
Photographs taken 1973			Photograph taken 1971		
			<p><b>DESCRIPTION</b>          AGE: 40, born February 23, 1933, Tulsa, Oklahoma          HEIGHT: 5'9" to 5'6"          WEIGHT: 196 pounds          BUILD: heavy          HAIR: reddish blond          OCCUPATIONS: plumber, rancher, tavern owner          SCARS AND MARKS: scar on right forearm          SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER USED: 443-30-5194</p> <p><b>CRIMINAL RECORD</b>          Brinlee has been convicted of murder, interstate transportation of stolen motor vehicle, conspiracy, possession of unregistered firearm (bomb), making a firearm (bomb) without paying tax, possession of non-registered shotgun.</p> <p><b>CAUTION</b>          BRINLEE ESCAPED DURING A RIOT FROM THE OKLAHOMA STATE PENITENTIARY WHERE HE WAS SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE FOR MURDER COMMITTED BY USE OF A BOMB. HE REPORTEDLY IS KNOWLEDGEABLE IN MAKING AND USING EXPLOSIVE DEVICES AND HAS HAD FIREARMS IN HIS POSSESSION IN THE PAST HE ALLEGEDLY HAS THREATENED THE LIVES OF OTHERS. CONSIDER ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.</p> <p><i>Ch. Kelley</i>          Director          Federal Bureau of Investigation          Washington, D. C. 20535</p>		
<p>A Federal warrant was issued on August 8, 1973, at Muskogee, Oklahoma, charging Brinlee with unlawful interstate flight to avoid confinement after conviction for murder (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 1073). Brinlee was under Federal detainer at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, McAlester, Oklahoma, for conspiracy (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 351); possession of an unregistered firearm (bomb), making a firearm (bomb) without paying tax, possession of shotgun, not registered (Title 26, U. S. Code, Sections 5851 d, 1, 4, respectively).</p> <p><b>IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION CONCERNING THIS PERSON, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FBI OFFICE.</b>  <b>TELEPHONE NUMBERS AND ADDRESSES OF ALL FBI OFFICES LISTED ON BACK.</b>          Identification Order 4574          September 7, 1973</p>					

*FBI wanted poster for Brinlee after his escape, 1973 (OPUBCO Collection, OHS Research Division).*

Frasier and others on a "get-even list." Confined to a wheelchair, Frasier said that since the threat he had been "scared every night," but would see to it that Brinlee would not make good on the threat. One possible reason for the threat against Frasier was the way the attorney collected his fee. During the murder trial Brinlee mortgaged the forty-unit apartment complex he owned in Tahlequah for \$50,000 as security for his defense. Frasier consequently had the building sold because Brinlee defaulted on the note.<sup>70</sup>

During the escape several people in the Tahlequah area made themselves scarce because of previous threats from the escapee. Joyce Bliss mentioned that Gene Bolding could not be found just after the escape.<sup>71</sup> Jim McSpadden said, "Gene was scared to death and had road blocks up everywhere on the highways stopping and checking

everyone's cars, looking in the trunks."<sup>72</sup> Robert "Bob" Medearis, a former Oklahoma state senator and businessmen from Tahlequah, knew Brinlee on a business level. Medearis had arranged the loan for Brinlee to build the apartment complex just north of what is now Northeastern State University. He had been singled out as the "Tahlequah banker" on Brinlee's revenge list. When Brinlee broke out, Medearis was no longer a banker, but an Oklahoma state senator, and the state assigned to him twenty-four-hour protection from the OHP. Trooper Harold Scott was assigned the night duty. "He would [sit] on the patio, and walk around the house, the OHP did this until they caught him. I appreciated the protection," Medearis stated.<sup>73</sup> From a business stand point Medearis said, "You could set your clock by him. What he said he would do, he made good, he tried to honor his word."<sup>74</sup> Medearis commented on how Brinlee supposedly went up in his airplane "scoping out cattle to steal" and sell at his "Stolen Steak House."<sup>75</sup>

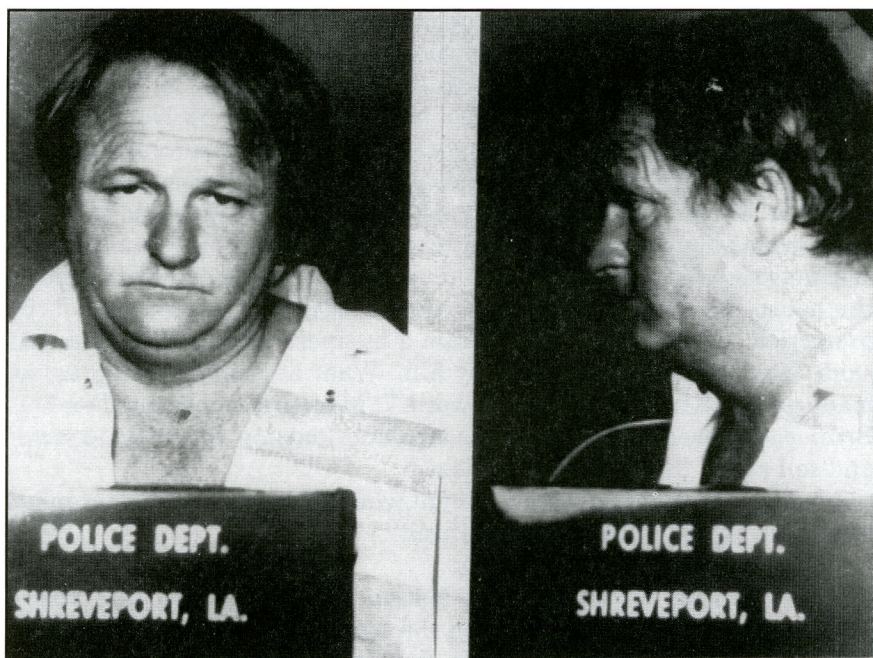
Medearis remembered one incident when Brinlee escaped that made him more aware of the potential threat:

I was coming out of the First National Bank one day and Rex pulls up and says get in. I get in the truck with him and we begin to drive slowly around the block. Rex begins to accuse me of being critical of Larry (Larry Reasor, deceased, owner of Reasor's Food Stores) who had made a bond or something like that for Rex. Anyway Rex didn't like me talking about Larry for doing that for him and he was just letting me know. He didn't threaten me but he just let me know that he certainly didn't like it. I think he just wanted to give me a warning. I think Clyde Cain told him who was a local builder.<sup>76</sup>

Brinlee was detained in Shreveport, Louisiana, on Monday, August 6, 1973, as a suspect in an auto theft. The man he was riding with was identified as James Arthur. He was actually Patrick A. Fleming, an OSP inmate who had walked away from the hospital infirmary after the riot. Fleming told the Shreveport police that he had picked up Brinlee, who gave his name as Burrell Johnson, and that Brinlee was just along for the ride. Fleming had stolen the car in Marshall, Texas, and when Marshall authorities said they only had business with Fleming, Shreveport police had no cause to hold Brinlee and let him go. Just hours after they let Brinlee go, they learned his true identity.<sup>77</sup>

Sightings of Brinlee in the Tulsa and Tahlequah areas circulated, but police officials said the investigation was focused in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Mug shots of Brinlee sent from the Oklahoma State Crime Bureau began to appear in the police precincts.<sup>78</sup>

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*Brinlee after his escape from the Oklahoma State Penitentiary. Shreveport police and a Texas deputy let him go unaware he was an escaped convict (OPUBCO Collection, OHS Research Division).*

The direction of the hunt began to shift toward the gulf coast, particularly in the Port Arthur, Texas, area. One rumor placed him on an ocean-going vessel en route to South America. Authorities tried to dismiss the rumor, but did not rule out the possibility that Brinlee had made it onto a shrimp boat or freighter and was somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico. Oklahoma officials alerted Texas authorities that Brinlee was a pilot, and Texas airports were put on alert for any strangers lurking around them.<sup>79</sup> Authorities theorized that if Brinlee were on a shrimper, he was using a false name. After the Shreveport incident, it was conceivable a boat captain, who was not in touch with events on the shore, could not have been aware of the manhunt and would not recognize Brinlee.<sup>80</sup> United States officials did alert countries in Central and South America, Mexico, and Chile that Brinlee could be headed their way.<sup>81</sup>

Factors that aided Brinlee in eluding capture were the poor quality of pictures that were sent out over the police wire network and, in some cases the time required to send photographs. The television stations had higher quality pictures of Brinlee than law enforcement officials





*Guilford E. Young (right) of Alabama was stopped in Nowata because he resembled Brinlee, September 16, 1973 (OPUBCO Collection, OHS Research Division).*

did. An official from the Orange County, Texas, sheriff's office reported that Brinlee was stopped while riding a motorbike; he gave the officer a fake name, was given a ticket for not having a driver's license and sent on his way. The official for the sheriff's office said, "If the bulletin and pictures of Brinlee had come in earlier, we'd have had him by now."<sup>82</sup>

On Friday, August 24, 1971, Ed Hardy revealed a letter Brinlee had written to his ex-wife while he was in North Dakota for a federal trial for violation of federal weapons laws.<sup>83</sup> In the letter he threatened his ex-wife Margaret, Governor Hall, his longtime attorney Thomas D. Frasier, his ex-wife's attorney Pat Williams, and his ranch foreman, who was not mentioned by name. Brinlee wrote, "I owe Williams and David Hall a favor, about four sticks and I plan to deliver." Because of Brinlee's escape Hardy said, "We consider it [the letter] with a higher degree of seriousness than we do the normal threat we get just because of who Brinlee is. He does have a track record and was serving a life term for murder."<sup>84</sup> The people mentioned in Brinlee's letter all knew he was capable of making good on his threats.

Mrs. Norman Bleuler of Biloxi, Mississippi, unknowingly supplied room and board to the convict while he was on his four-week stay in the city, as Oklahoma carried on one of the most intense searches for

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*His chains attached to handcuffs and grasped by an officer Oklahoma prison escapee Brinlee is led away to jail after his identification hearing in Mississippi (OPUBCO Collection, OHS Research Division).*

a fugitive in the state's history She told reporters, "He said he didn't have any papers because his station wagon had been stolen in Houston and that he had lost his gun and his pilot's license and everything he had. He showed me the bill of sale from Port Arthur, Texas, on his Honda to impress me that he hadn't stolen it."<sup>85</sup>

Brinlee assumed the name of Robert Foreman and began to work his way into the routine and lifestyle of the gulf coast community At first he did small maintenance jobs around the property to barter for his room and board. Within walking distance of the rooming house was the Lank Patterson Plumbing and Heating Contracting Company where he was hired. He quickly established himself as a dependable and knowledgeable worker Brinlee saved his money and walked on the beach at night. Bleuler said Brinlee talked of building a boathouse that "would go across that little pond."<sup>86</sup> Brinlee told Bleuler that he was hiding from his wife who was trying to take all his property in a



divorce. In time he began to talk about getting even with certain people. "One time he was talking about his lawyer and he said he was going to have a different trial. 'He knows I'll get him'," Bleuler recounted and added, "His wife had a lover and that he didn't know whether to hit him with a hatchet or put him in a barrel."<sup>87</sup> In a few weeks Brinlee began to make remarks about returning home. "He asked my husband to buy him a rifle to carry on his motorcycle," Bleuler said, and added, "He said he was going to leave here the end of the month and go back to his ranch and hide in one of the barns and see what was going on. He said it would be a quick trip and 'get my business attended to and then I'll be back.'"<sup>88</sup> Mrs. Bleuler stated, "I got afraid of him the last few days. I wouldn't leave the house and I told my husband when he leaves at the end of the month, I don't want him back."<sup>89</sup> Mrs. Bleuler did not have to wait long for Brinlee's departure.

Early Tuesday morning, September 18, 1973, twenty-one-year-old Ronald Herbert had just picked up Bob (Brinlee) for work. Herbert noticed a detective car, but did not say anything. After Brinlee entered the pickup and they began moving, Herbert said, "Bob them detectives are coming up real fast behind us."<sup>90</sup> Brinlee said nothing. Agents from the FBI, using a taxicab for a disguise car, and local Biloxi police officers quickly surrounded his truck. Herbert said of Brinlee's capture, "Then those two FBI agents in the taxicab got in front of us and the truck was surrounded all at once. It looked like an army Bob said, 'That's okay They want me.'" The Biloxi chief of police, who knew Herbert, came over to his truck and instructed him to turn off the engine and "slide out of the truck."<sup>91</sup> Brinlee was taken back into custody without incident after forty-five days of freedom.

The apprehension of Brinlee was the result of a five-thousand-dollar reward offered for information leading to his capture. The reward money was provided by the Secret Witness reward program. To date the party responsible for the information leading to the capture of Brinlee remains a secret.<sup>92</sup> After extradition was arranged and it was established that Robert Foreman was Rex Brinlee, he was driven back to Big Mac and confined to "the Rock," the maximum security lockup.<sup>93</sup> Despite his escape, on the way to McAlester Brinlee persuaded his guards to release him from his handcuffs so he could eat and drink freely.<sup>94</sup>

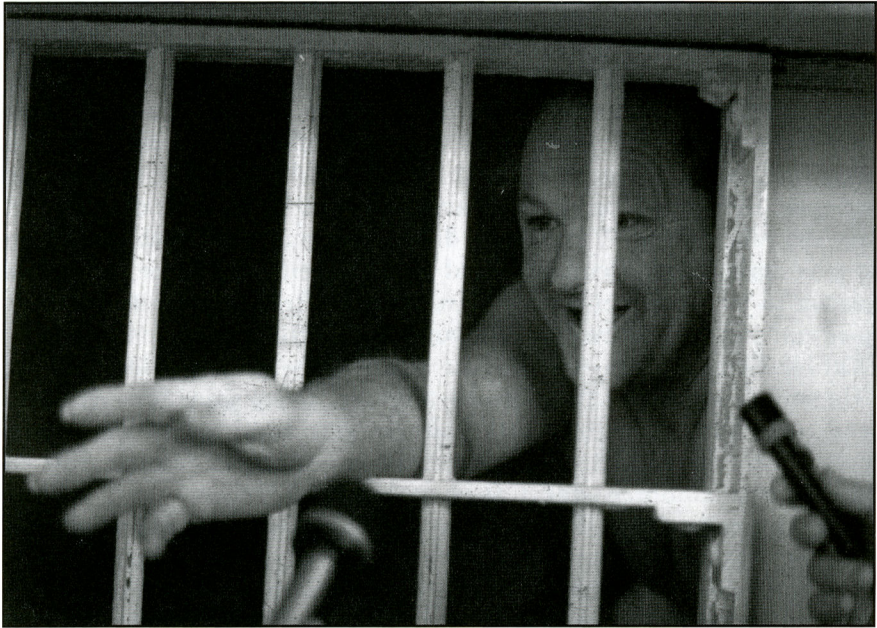
In July 1974 Brinlee was one-sixteenth of an inch from freedom again. He had managed to cut a 14-inch square hole through the back of his cell that was made of steel. The steel plate being cut from the wall was left just barely hanging with soap smeared into the crevices and touched up with paint to match the wall. A guard searching Brinlee's solitary cell while he was out in the yard exercising caught a glimpse

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of the hacksaw blade that was stuck in the crevice. If Brinlee had finished the small cut he could have entered a hallway that was used for servicing utility lines and made his way to the roof to escape. The search of Brinlee's cell also turned up two keys made from ballpoint pen fillers that when tested opened handcuffs.<sup>95</sup>

In early January 1975 an inmate had to be moved from OSP to another facility because he had told authorities about an escape being planned by six inmates. Warden Richard Crisp utilized Brinlee's plumbing skills to remodel the execution cell, where the electric chair is housed. The informant had somehow crossed paths with Brinlee's group, and some bad blood developed. Brinlee's group told the inmate that before they escaped they would strap him into the electric chair and stab him to death with a screw driver. The inmate feared this group enough to reveal their plan. When guards searched the work area, they found that bars in a window had been cut with a torch. Another Brinlee escape plot was foiled.<sup>96</sup>

Between 1975 and 1976 Brinlee had talked his way back into plumbing. Jay Riggs, the head civilian plumber at the OSP, said, "Brinlee had the run of the prison with virtually no supervision put on him. Brinlee was given the freedom on the orders of Warden Crisp. Brinlee did what he does best with the warden. He conned him. It's as simple as that."<sup>97</sup> On Sunday, June 20, 1976, Governor David Boren ordered a statewide search for seven prisoners who had escaped from the OSP. One of the fugitives was Rex Brinlee. The discovery of the absence of the inmates was made at approximately ten o'clock Saturday evening. Deputy Warden Gary Maynard explained, "No general alarm was sounded. It is not unusual for inmates to be absent from their cells if they are assigned to certain work details or have a homosexual lover in another cell."<sup>98</sup> After a search of the cell blocks and prison grounds failed to locate the seven prisoners, teams trained to handle prison escapes were mobilized.<sup>99</sup> The escapees made their way through a 170-yard underground tunnel, came up through a manhole outside the prison walls, and cut through a wire fence to freedom.<sup>100</sup> Officials from the OSP said the escaped convicts, who were on the same plumbing crew, made good use of the hack-saws and blow torches to cut their way through six steel tunnel doors. The fence the fugitives cut through on their way to freedom was part of the same fence that Brinlee breached during his escape in the aftermath of the 1973 riot.<sup>101</sup> Two months earlier Brinlee had bragged about how good his plumbing skills were and claimed that the prison would have "the best plumbing in the world before I leave here."<sup>102</sup>



*Brinlee during an interview at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, February 8, 1974 (OPUBCO Collection, OHS Research Division).*

One state official commented on Brinlee after the escape: "He's proven he can get out of the Oklahoma penitentiary just as he bragged he could, and I'm betting he can do it again."<sup>103</sup> The well-planned escape coincided with prison visitation on Sunday, a youth choir that was performing, and the monthly meeting of the State Pardon and Parole Board.<sup>104</sup> Before the escape Brinlee quipped, "They don't have to worry any more. After the way I'm working, I'm too dead tired to run."<sup>105</sup>

The search for Brinlee centered around the massive forty-five-thousand-acre United States Ammunition Depot near McAlester after a report from an employee said he saw a man resembling Brinlee.<sup>106</sup> The entire state was on alert for Brinlee "perhaps the best-known member of Oklahoma's crime community"<sup>107</sup> "People all around Tahlequah were scared," Joyce Bliss recalled.<sup>108</sup> Jim McSpadden said, "Gene Bolding was just scared shitless. Some people said he went up north somewhere and just hid."<sup>109</sup> After a week with no leads, and the likelihood that Brinlee was already out of state based on his previous escape, the hope of a quick capture dwindled. Even Department of Public Safety Commissioner Roger Webb said there was only a "remote chance that Brinlee was still in the state."<sup>110</sup>

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Stopping at the Jones Grocery in Canadian, Oklahoma, a small Lake Eufaula community, C. A. Pearce was enjoying his day off as a hospital worker at the OSP infirmary. Brinlee was in the store drinking a soda pop and eating chips when he recognized Pearce. He and Pearce had some report with each other from the infirmary because Brinlee frequently went there for medical treatment. After Pearce spotted the escapee, Brinlee walked up to Pearce and said, "Let's walk outside and discuss this matter."<sup>111</sup> Both men did. In the course of the conversation it was agreed that Brinlee should give himself up. Pearce called the prison to let them know they were coming; Brinlee got into Pearce's pick-up, and they drove down the road about fifteen miles to the prison. Warden Crisp met them. Pearce said as Brinlee got out of the pick-up, "He smiled at me."<sup>112</sup> After Brinlee's return, Crisp said, "The chiggers and ticks have got him pretty bad. He was admitted to the prison hospital for treatment of the insect bites and, upon release, will be placed in maximum custody," back at "the Rock."<sup>113</sup>

In December 1976 Prison Chaplain Bill Donovan reported that Brinlee was working on a cross-reference of the New Testament. The chaplain said, "Rex shared what he is doing with me and it is a pretty big project."<sup>114</sup> When asked about Brinlee's new found activity, Warden Crisp remarked, "It sounds like something he might be doing. He has plenty of time."<sup>115</sup>

In 1979 Brinlee still had connections on the outside and still harbored a grudge. The lawyer for his ex-wife, Patrick Williams, was driving on a Tulsa street when a dynamite blasting cap attached to the car's fuel tank detonated. The tank did not explode because it was full. Had the tank not been full, the fumes would have ignited, causing the tank to explode. Williams, who had been threatened by Brinlee before, said he had "few ideas" who might be responsible.<sup>116</sup>

In May 1984 the prison received a tip that Brinlee and another inmate had weapons and planned to escape "and kill some people."<sup>117</sup> Because of the phone tip, on the day of the reported escape prison officials, searched Brinlee's cell where they found a factory-produced knife, a .25-caliber handgun, and twelve rounds of ammunition. Brinlee and his accomplice planned to take over the Jack E. Brannon unit and then move on to the eating area, taking the food supervisor hostage. They would use the food staff uniforms as disguises, wait for the food truck, and then hijack it and pass through the prison gates. They were prepared to take the gate by force and exchange gunfire with guards if something went wrong with their plan. It was learned the handgun was smuggled into the prison by a disgruntled prison guard. He had planned to be taken hostage to protest the poor working conditions

in the prison. The guard was dismissed, and Brinlee went back to maximum security <sup>118</sup>

Brinlee spent half his life in prison. His criminal life, starting from the time he dropped out of high school in the mid 1950s, was a progression from less serious crimes culminating twenty-five years later with murder. He escaped twice from a maximum security facility and had at least two known attempts thwarted. In Oklahoma criminal folklore, he is romanticized by some for his antics—flying his plane, serving stolen cattle to his customers, his cocky behavior, and his brashness in flaunting the law. The victims of the crimes and those he intimidated found no romance in his behavior.

Rex Brinlee died on December 18, 2009, from complications of congestive heart failure and was interred at Memorial Park Cemetery in Tulsa. He was seventy-six.<sup>119</sup> When he was taken to Saint Francis Hospital for treatment, he remained a maximum-security prisoner after thirty-eight years in the OSP. He died with one unarmed guard in the hospital room with him and an armed guard in the hallway right outside his door.<sup>120</sup> Brinlee's poor health prevented any escape attempt.

Joyce Bliss described Brinlee as having “no conscience at all.” Minnie Bolding, the wife of Gene Bolding, called her in late December to ask her if she knew “he” had died. Bliss said they talked some, and then Minnie confided in closing their conversation, “I don’t think any of us will shed a whole lot of tears.”<sup>121</sup>

## Endnotes

Jack Anthony Reavis received his MA in American studies at Northeastern State University. He is the curriculum coordinator for Muskogee High School, and also instructs the AP US History and AP Government and Politics courses. His most meaningful ongoing project is being there for his family.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Miller, e-mail message to the author, April 17, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> James Johnson, “Bombing? Brinlee Says Emphatic No,” *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), February 13, 1971, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Rodriques, Plaintiff in Error v. The State of Oklahoma, Defendant in Error, Appeal from the District Court of Mayes County, Clyde M. Followell, Judge: 1965 OK CR 114, 406P.2d 506, Case Number: A-13578, decided October 6, 1965.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, “Bombing? Brinlee Says Emphatic No,” 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Brinlee v. State, Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals: 1965 OK CR 8, 403P.2d 253, Case Number: A-13526, decided January 11, 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, “Bombing? Brinlee Says Emphatic No,” 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> James Johnson, “Threats Made At Tahlequah,” *Daily Oklahoman*, February 6, 1971, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Lillian Newby, “Tahlequah Bomb Hurts Prosecutor: Blast Occurs In Bill Bliss’ Pickup Truck,” *Daily Oklahoman*, June 15, 1969, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Angela Bliss, phone interview by the author, January 24, 2010, Tahlequah, OK.

<sup>10</sup> Ivy Coffey, “Bomb Believed Meant for Victim’s Mate,” *Daily Oklahoman*, February 3, 1971, 1-2.



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<sup>11</sup> Robert B. Allen and Ron Grenko, "Violent Death Third Linked To Bomb Quiz," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 9, 1971, 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Joyce Bliss, phone interview by the author, March 15, 2010, Tahlequah, OK. Bill Bliss consented for interview but ill health prevented him from doing so.

<sup>13</sup> Ivy Coffey "Brinlee Bomb Trial Ordered," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 16, 1971, 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> *Brinlee v State*, Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals: 1972 OK CR 182,499 P.2d 1397 Case Number A-16977 decided July 19, 1972.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> "Brinlee Held in Tahlequah For Car Theft," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 10, 1971, 47

<sup>17</sup> Coffey, "Bomb Believed Meant for Victim's Mate," 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Inmate Profile Screening Form, Oklahoma State Penitentiary, District Attorney's Version, CRF 71-115, Oklahoma State Department of Corrections, April 4, 2003, 1, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Robert B. Allen, "Jury Hears Brinlee State, Defense Rest," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 19, 1971, 5.

<sup>21</sup> James Johnson, "Jurors Find Brinlee Guilty Of Truck Theft," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 23, 1971, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Robert B. Allen and Ivy Coffey, "Charges Filed In Bombing Of Judge, Three Slaying," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 25, 1971, 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Allen and Grenko, "Violent Death Third Linked To Bomb Quiz," 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Allen and Coffey, "Charges Filed In Bombing Of Judge, Three Slaying," 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Mike Miller, *How High Can A Guy Stoop?* (Bloomington, IL: AuthorHouse, 2006), 105.

<sup>26</sup> Allen and Grenko, "Violent Death Third Linked To Bomb Quiz," 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Initial Social Statement, Garland Rex Brinlee Jr., Oklahoma State Penitentiary, Oklahoma State Department of Corrections, Reg. No. 83546, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Brooks Garner, "Brinlee Familiar Figure In Bombing Probes," *Sunday Oklahoman*, June 6, 1971, 13A.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, "Threats Made At Tahlequah," 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> Jim McSpadden, interview by the author, April 13, 2010, Tahlequah, OK. John Russell was the Cherokee County district attorney

<sup>32</sup> Joyce Bliss interview

<sup>33</sup> Jack Taylor, "Brinlee Charged In Teacher's Bomb Death," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 5, 1971, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Robert B. Allen, "Jury Hears Brinlee: State, Defense Rest," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 19, 1974, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Inmate Profile Screening Form, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Robert B. Allen, "Brinlee Case Key Witness Missing; Warrant's Issued," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 16, 1971, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Jack Taylor, "Jury Probing Bristow Bombing Indicts Three," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 4, 1972, 57 The indictment led to the indictment of Rex Brinlee, Ralph Hinkle, and Archie Dale Miller. It gave a detailed account of how Rex Brinlee, Ralph Hinkle, and Archie Miller started planning to place the bomb in Bolding's truck in early January 1971, gave an account of how Brinlee bought four blocks of C4 military plastic explosive, two boxes of blasting caps with lead wires, and military booby traps for use as triggering devices; documented how Brinlee told Hinkle to borrow a truck similar to the one Bolding owned so they could determine the best method of wiring the bomb to the truck ignition without blowing themselves up; and detailed the night of February 2, 1971, when at approximately one o'clock in the morning Brinlee and Hinkle drove to the Bolding home in Bristow from Tahlequah, parked several blocks away from the Bolding home and walked to the Bolding truck parked in front of their residence. Hinkle stood guard with

a 20-gauge shotgun while Brinlee wired the triggering device to the ignition system, ran the bomb's trigger wires to the two blasting caps stuck into four blocks of military grade C4 plastic explosive. The indictment states the two then drove back to Tahlequah where they told Miller of their actions.

<sup>38</sup> Robert B. Allen, "Brinlee Juror's Wife Reported Threatened," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 17 1971, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Coffey, "Brinlee Bomb Trial Ordered," 37-38.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Allen, "Jury Hears Brinlee: State, Defense Rest," 5.

<sup>42</sup> Coffey, "Brinlee Bomb Trial Ordered," 37-38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Allen, "Jury Hears Brinlee: State, Defense Rest," 5.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Robert B. Allen, "Brinlee Guilty In Bomb Death," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 20, 1971, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Oklahoma State Penitentiary employee, interview by the author, March 18, 2010, Tahlequah, OK. This interview is confidential; the name of the interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Miller, *How High*, 107

<sup>52</sup> Oklahoma State Penitentiary employee interview

<sup>53</sup> Inmate Profile Screening Form, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Oklahoma State Penitentiary employee interview

<sup>55</sup> "The McAlester Prison Riot and Fire, McAlester Riot," OKTrooper, 1, accessed February 26, 2010, <http://www.oktrooper.com/bigmac.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy D. Kline, "Biographical of Judge Luther Bohanon," 15, accessed February 26, 2010 [http://10thcircuithistory.org/pdfs/Bohanon\\_Bio.pdf](http://10thcircuithistory.org/pdfs/Bohanon_Bio.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>58</sup> "Chapter VI. Disturbances, The 20th Century History," Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 59, accessed February 26, 2010, <http://www.doc.state.ok.us/newsroom/publications/DOC%20History.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> *Oklahoma Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, s.v. "McAlester Prison Riot," by Les Brooks, accessed February 26, 2010, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/m/mc002.html>.

<sup>60</sup> "Chapter VI. Disturbances," 59.

<sup>61</sup> Howard "Tink" Jones, phone interview by the author, March 14, 2010, Tahlequah, OK.

<sup>62</sup> Staff writer, "Slayer Rex Brinlee Among Rebel Leaders," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 2, 1973, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Robert B. Allen and James Johnson, "Alleged Leaders In Rioting Seized," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 3, 1973, 1-2.

<sup>65</sup> Robert B. Allen, "Hall Orders Manhunt For Fugitive Brinlee," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 7 1973, 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Robert B. Allen, "Hole In Yard His Possible Hiding Place," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 7 1973, 1-2.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Jon Ellis, "Lawyer Thinks Brinlee Called," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 8, 1973, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>71</sup> Joyce Bliss interview

<sup>72</sup> Jim McSpadden interview

<sup>73</sup> Robert "Bob" Medearis, interview by the author, February 28, 2010, Tahlequah, OK.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. The reference to the "Stolen Steak House" was made satirically. Brinlee owned a restaurant north of Tahlequah called the Hereford Steak House. An item on the menu was the "Rustler Steak Special" in reference to his history with cattle theft.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Robert B. Allen and Ray Parr, "Fugitive Held For One Day In Shreveport," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 9, 2010, 1-2.

<sup>78</sup> "Rex Brinlee Hunted In Texas," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 10, 1973, 64.

<sup>79</sup> Bryce Patterson, "Brinlee Found Guilty of Fraud In FAA Case," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 8, 1971, 1-2. Brinlee's trial for fraud in applying for an airman medical certificate was moved from Tulsa to Albuquerque, NM. He was found guilty of lying to the Federal Aviation Administration in saying he had never been convicted of a crime.

<sup>80</sup> Robert B. Allen, "Gulf Ship Believed Hideout Of Brinlee," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 18, 1973, 1-2.

<sup>81</sup> Jon Ellis and Robert B. Allen, "Coast Guard Ships, Planes Lead Search," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 8, 1971, 1-2.

<sup>82</sup> Bill May, "Not All Brinlee Photos Circulated," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 26, 1973, 1-2.

<sup>83</sup> "Jury Convicts Rex Brinlee," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 28, 1973, 11. Brinlee was found guilty on four counts of federal firearms violations: possession of a sawed-off shotgun, possession of explosives, making a bomb, and explosives conspiracy. These charges stemmed from the bombing that killed Fern Bolding.

<sup>84</sup> "Threat Letter Regarded Seriously," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 24, 1973, 53.

<sup>85</sup> James Johnson, "Landlady Talks About Brinlee," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 19, 1973, 1-2.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>120</sup> Oklahoma State Penitentiary employee interview

<sup>121</sup> Joyce Bliss interview