

The fugitives had guns
and were desperate to escape.
Edith Silver had savvy
and was determined to survive

Carjacked on I-75

By ANITA BARTHOLOMEW

THE STEAMY AIR hung thick over Florida's Interstate 75. But in her new green BMW convertible with the top down, Edith Silver, 59, barely noticed the heat. Care-free, the wind mussing her short, blond hair, she was about to go on vacation before starting a new career as a real-estate agent.

This afternoon of July 8, 1997, she was heading to Bonita Springs to pick up her

new business cards. A couple of miles before her exit, she passed a highway patrolman who had pulled over a sport-utility vehicle. She paid it no notice.

EVEN IN THIS HEAT, Trooper Tom Roderick of the Florida Highway Patrol wore his bulletproof vest. After 15 years on the force, he had learned that you never know what might happen out here, about 40 miles from Everglades National Park.

The brown-and-beige Chevy Blazer that Roderick had pulled over for a cracked windshield held two very jumpy young men. The driver, whose license identified him as David George of Greenville, S. C., said they had borrowed the Blazer from a friend. But when Roderick asked for the friend's name, the men could not remember.

"I need you to turn off your vehicle," the trooper said. Instead, George mashed the accelerator to the floor and took off.

Roderick ran to his car and followed the speeding Blazer. Suddenly the driver stuck his arm out the window and pointed a semi-

automatic pistol at the trooper's car.

Bullets ricocheted off the front bumper of the patrol car, and it swerved as a tire was hit. The trooper struggled for control.

Now the Blazer's passenger aimed at Roderick's windshield. *Ka-ping!* Bullets caromed off the front of the patrol car, and smoke billowed from its right front side. Reluctantly, Roderick pulled off the road, already calling headquarters.

AS EDITH SILVER SLOWED for the Bonita Springs Boulevard exit, a Blazer whipped past on the grassy shoulder and then snapped around, blocking the offramp. Worried that the brown car had spun out of control, Silver pulled over to make sure everyone inside was okay. But before she could move, two young men jumped out and ran to her convertible. "Do what we tell you," one said, aiming a semiautomatic at her heart. "If you don't, you're dead."

"Please," Edith cried, "you can have the car."

"No, lady, you're driving. Move!"

COMMERCIAL DIVER Wil Killmer, 30, was heading down I-75 on his way to his job in Key Largo when he saw the curious scene: the Blazer blocking the exit; two men jumping out and into a convertible without even stopping to open its doors. Suspicious, he

Suspicious, Killmer slowed down to let the green BMW



On the Road Again- Edith Silver's signature license plate adorns the new BMW that replaces her shot-up convertible.

watched the BMW head back onto I-75. Slowing to let it pass, he could see its occupants clearly. A blond woman was driving. Next to her was a lean young man with bleached hair; behind them sat a huskier young man with light brown hair. Killmer noted the license plate: EDY SWTY.

At the next exit the BMW pulled off I-75. As it disappeared from view, Killmer reminded himself that he still had a long drive to work and that the woman might have picked up the men by pre-arrangement.

Could he take that chance? No. He would have to be late for work. At the next exit he turned around

*pass him. He noted the license plate: **EDY SWTY.***

Don't let him get to you, she told herself. She watched

and headed back to the abandoned Blazer.

BILLY GEORGE and his brother, David, told Silver that her choice was simple. She could do exactly what they ordered and live, or she could hesitate for an instant and die. She spent no time ruminating about her choices. She wanted to see her sons and grandchildren again.

David, 27, sat in back. Billy, 30, sat in the front passenger seat, ordering Silver to weave in and out of traffic. Then, apparently realizing that they could be identified more easily driving in an open car, he made her put up the top and roll up the windows.

THE BONITA SPRINGS BOULEVARD exit swarmed with troopers who had responded to Roderick's call. Killmer approached. "Excuse me, but the guys you're looking for—they're nowhere near that car," he said.

When he told them what he'd witnessed, Highway Patrol notified all Florida law enforcement: "Be on the lookout for a green BMW convertible, tag E-D-Y-S-W-T-Y."

SMOKING ONE CIGARETTE after another, Billy seemed hyped up. But Silver realized he had intelligence. He wanted to keep her just scared enough to obey his orders but not so scared she would be unable to drive.

David wanted to listen to the radio, but Billy overruled him. "Don't you want to hear if..." David began excitedly. Billy cut him off and said, "No." Apparently Billy didn't want Silver to know too much.

"We've been accused of something we're not guilty of," he told her. "But no one believes us."

"Well, then, let me get you an attorney," Silver said, putting as much sympathy into her voice as she could muster.

Billy shook his head. "We've had one."

"I know a real good one," Silver replied.

Billy then spun a long tale about being chased by a white Jeep filled with bounty hunters who had falsely accused the brothers of destroying a hotel room. Silver didn't believe the story, but it didn't matter. She wanted to keep them talking.

From her years in sales, Silver knew how to talk to people. She had to assume these men planned to kill her; she could identify them. But if she could get them to see her as an ally, maybe they'd let her live.

WITH DAVID GEORGE's driver's license in hand, Roderick contacted the Greenville, S. C., sheriff's office. He learned that the George brothers were wanted for a long list of violent crimes, including kidnapping and bank robbery. They'd allegedly stolen the

as he caressed his gun, aimed and mock-fired.

Blazer from David's employer. And there was one more disturbing wrinkle: The previous November, their grandparents had been murdered. Police suspected David and Billy of the killings.

TURNING ON the charisma that had led her late husband, Ernie, to nickname her Edie Sweetie, Silver humored her abductors.

"So, boys," she asked with a light-heartedness she did not feel, "who do you want to play you when they make a movie of this?"

David chose Nicolas Cage; Billy wanted John Travolta. He decided Ruc McClanahan of television's "The Golden Girls" should play Silver, explaining, "I think you're like her in real life. You've got lots of energy and zest."

Silver's strategy seemed to be working. They were calming down. Billy told her she reminded him of his mom and scolded her for driving alone with the top down, telling her that's why they'd chosen her car. But, throughout, he kept his gun pointed at her.

They were now driving on Highway 41, a lonely two-lane road through Everglades National Park. Silver hoped the monotony might work in her favor. Maybe her kidnappers would relax enough to fall asleep—giving her the opportunity to flag down another driver for help.

Right then, as if reading her mind, Billy said, "Don't even think about jumping out of the car because I'll kill you. Understand?"

Don't let him get to you, she told herself. She watched as he caressed his gun, checked its ammunition, aimed and mock-fired. Satisfied, he lit another cigarette.

They had been following a tanker truck for a few miles. Billy told Silver to stay on its tail. Then a Florida Highway Patrol car drove past in the opposite direction.

Billy bolted to attention. "That cop eyeballed me!" he spat out.

IT HAS TO BE THEM, thought Sgt. Michael Roden. How many green BMW convertibles could there be around the Everglades?

He waited for a couple of cars to go by before turning to follow. If they spotted him, he knew things could get ugly very quickly.

As the BMW pulled out to follow the tanker around another vehicle, he saw the tag: EDY SWTY. Dispatch told him his backup team, troopers Andy Smith and Orlando Saavedra, was two minutes away. "Let's stop 'em right here," Roden radioed.

"WHATEVER THAT TRUCK DOES, you do," Billy repeated to Silver. But the truck was moving between lanes as it passed slower vehicles.

"There are cars coming right at

His shirt was soaked bright red. "I've taken a hit,"

me!" Silver cried as she dodged oncoming traffic.

"I said do whatever he does," Billy shrieked. "Now do it!"

Ahead, at an intersection, Silver saw a patrol car with lights flashing. There was no longer any point in trying to cajole the brothers. All she could do was obey—and pray.

"When we get to the red light, I want you in the left lane," Billy commanded. As her eyes met David's in the rearview mirror, she saw he had a gun to her neck.

Then she saw another patrol car approach from behind. *Oh, no*, Silver thought, *I'm going to get caught in the cross fire.*

Billy checked his weapon. "When this light turns, go as fast as you can," he said.

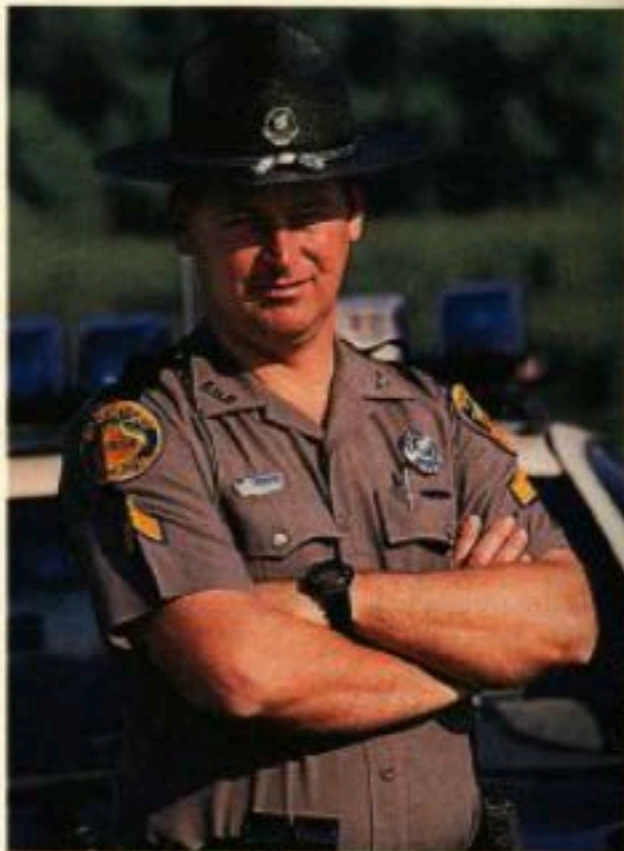
Suddenly the patrol car that had trailed them rammed the BMW from the rear, sending it into a slight skid. Troopers ran toward them from front and behind. Billy yelled, "I'll kill her!" Then he swung halfway out the window, aiming his gun at police. "Step on it!" he screamed at Silver.

She took off, bullets ricocheting off the bumper. One whizzed by her ear,

the most frightening noise she'd ever heard. Billy hung out the passenger side as David fired through the back window.

The BMW was flying now, weaving in and out of traffic at around 100 m.p.h. Then Billy leaned inward, his shirt soaked a bright red. "I've taken a hit, man," he groaned to his brother. "I ain't gonna make it."

Silver saw her last chance. "Why



Sergeant Roden—Patrolling the lonely road, he spotted the car and acted fast.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ARVIE BERNIN

be groaned to his brother. "I ain't gonna make it."

don't you guys just give yourselves up?" she called to David. "He's dying, and you're not going to get away!"

"She's right," David said, and Billy weakly agreed. Silver slammed on the brakes, and the BMW skidded sideways. The two patrol cars smashed into it, blocking it in. Silver dropped as low in the seat as she could.

Billy started to climb out the window. Saavedra, the first trooper out of his car, grabbed him. Wounded as he was, Billy kept fighting. "I'll kill you," he screamed.

The troopers heard a shot. Fearing the fugitive was shooting at Saavedra, Roden fired. Billy slumped over the window, dead.

At the edge of the woods, Trooper Smith was on the ground, struggling

with David George. Grabbing his pepper spray, Roden blasted the criminal in the face. He was handcuffing David when he looked up and saw her for the first time.

Edith Silver. Edie Sweetie.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

After two hours of trying to charm the devil for her life, all she could do was nod.

It was over—and she was still alive.

David George is in a Lee County jail awaiting trial for crimes associated with the carjacking and abduction of Edith Silver and the shootout with the Florida Highway Patrol. He also faces prosecution in South Carolina for kidnapping, home invasion, bank robbery and auto theft, and charges as an accessory after the fact in the murder of his grandparents.

THESE ARE NOT HAPPY CAMPERS



The U.S. Forest Service received these actual comments from backpackers after wilderness camping trips:

- "Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill."
- "Too many bugs and spiders. Please spray the area to get rid of these pests."
- "Chairlifts are needed so we can get to the wonderful views without having to hike to them."
- "A McDonald's would be nice at trail head."
- "Too many rocks in the mountains."
- "The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals."

—KEED GLENN, quoted by TOM FITZGERALD in *San Francisco Chronicle*