

'See, this is all mind games. They like to play with your head'



John Page/News & Record

Ian recorded conversations with Fritz at O'Henry Shopping Center in Greensboro

(From A6)

"What if they ask me about that?"
"Say nothing."
"Name, rank and serial number deal. I think I can remember that. I'm sorry. This has been eating me up. I didn't sleep at all last night."
"Never say I'm associated with anybody," Fritz said as a train screamed past, blocking out some of what was being said. "Just say ... that you ... you can always say that ..."

"Like Gordon Liddy and the Watergate thing," Fritz was saying.

Gentry heard that and knew this was going to be a hard guy to crack.

"That you don't belong to any organization," Fritz went on. "Just say that you have been advised that taking a polygraph, that, just say flat that you are not to take one under any circumstances because of information that could be divulged indirectly in questioning."

"See, this is all mind games. They like to play with your head."

"Yeah."

Fritz reached for his medicine bag.
"I'll give you a phenobarb tablet to take so you can get a good night's sleep tonight. Take it about 30 minutes before bedtime."

He brought out some capsules. "That's papaverine. Take one of these about every 12 hours."

"I feel better just talking to you," Ian said.

"OK, now what you've got to do the next 48 hours, you have to develop a mindset. You have to tell yourself you were in Peaks of Otter."

"It has to be the truth," Ian said.

"That's right. You were not in Winston-Salem, so you can't say that you were in Winston-Salem."

"I'll lend you something that Dad gave me the first time I ever went on any type of covert operation," Fritz said as he handed Ian some small prayer cloths on string. "These are scapulars that come from, it would be in East Germany today. This one was his mother's sacred heart, and this one was his father's. They got those as children at the Shrine of Mary of the Hills on a pilgrimage the night before their family came to this country."

His voice became heavy with emotion, almost tearful.

"I've always found great comfort in these."

Suddenly he began talking again about prescription drugs and their effects. Ian said he'd heard of people taking downers before taking polygraph tests.

"I think Valium's probably a very good drug for that," Fritz said. "I've got some."

"I better be getting on back," Ian said.

On the way, Ian said, "I don't think I'll ever be as scared as I was yesterday."

"Ian, if anybody ever asks you anything about being nervous, you know, just out of the blue, well just out of the blue people like this descend on you, anybody in their right mind's going to be nervous. Gracious."

Gentry and Sturgill couldn't help but smile over that. When they'd descended on Fritz from out of the blue, he hadn't been nervous at all.

"Did you ever think, Ian, you don't have to prove anything?" Fritz asked. "What they are doing — they have nothing. See, they're fishing."

"When they told me it was late Saturday night that this happened," Ian said, "I almost — it took sheer force of will to keep from falling apart right there."

"I still haven't heard any actual confirmation of when it occurred," Fritz said. "There's been nothing official, and the papers have had everything from Friday night to Sunday morning."

Fritz pulled into a parking spot beside a car in which a small dog was barking squeakily.

"Now I do want to see you sometime tomorrow before you take off because I want to see how this medicine's working."

"What really scared me was when they said a .45 was used," Ian said. "That's probably the biggest coincidence I've heard about."

"They said, uh, they said," Fritz paused. "They haven't given a caliber that's been released in the paper that I'm aware of. There was an article yesterday in which they were saying it was not the same type gun as what was used out in Kentucky. What I suspect was that it probably was a fairly professional thing, that Tom had his sister and mother killed, and I would not be surprised if he were not behind this."

"Even if it was a .45, Ian, for a professional, that's not much of a coincidence at all. I mean .45 and .22 are the most commonly used weapons because they are subsonic."

"I don't think they picked up on anything," Ian said.

"Don't worry about it. See, people read body language, but it means nothing."

"It's the first time I've ever been really confronted, you know, asked questions by a policeman."

"Like I said, that third person might very well have been a Company person judging the type of reaction you would have, how well you kept your cool."

"I'm going to go on and get Chris," Ian said.

"What do you want to do?" Fritz asked.

"I'll call you," Ian said, trying to open the door. His hands were sweating and he couldn't get the lock up. Fritz reached behind him to pull it up for him, and for a moment Ian feared that he might detect the recorder.

"If I don't get you at the house, I'll get you at Susie's," Ian said with relief as the door opened. "Well, I'll be talking to you."

The officers had confirmed Ian's incredible story, but they wanted more. They asked Ian to tape another meeting on Sunday, and they began to coach him on what to say. Whatever he did, though, they told him, don't take any more pills.

'I'll see you Tuesday'

Taki Mundel, Florence Newsom's close friend from Maryland, was on a business trip to California with her husband when the Newsom murders happened. She wasn't able to come to the funeral. Susie asked Taki to come whenever she could. Taki arrived Friday afternoon, May 31. That night she took Susie and the boys to a Chinese restaurant for dinner, then returned to the Newsom house to spend the night.

Early Saturday, Susie picked her up to go shopping. Susie wanted to buy a new blouse and shoes in anticipation of job interviews she was planning. After the summer school session, she needed to complete only one more course to get her master's degree in business. Taki helped her pick out a silver-gray blouse and a pair of low, dressy black shoes. Susie seemed very pleased with them.

To Taki, Susie seemed to be the same as always. Taki was of Japanese origin, and they talked about Japanese culture as they always did. Susie talked about the boys and mentioned her fear that they might be kidnapped. Taki spent the afternoon helping Susie straighten the apartment. They devoted most of their effort to the kitchen, because Taki was going to cook one of Susie's favorite meals for dinner.

Fritz brought his mother for the meal. Taki made an asparagus salad with sesame oil, steamed broccoli and a spicy dish of ground beef, onions, tofu and bean paste over rice. She had fresh strawberries for dessert.

Taki had not mentioned the murders to Susie, but during dinner she began to talk about Florence, Bob and Nana.

"Who in the world could kill such nice people?" she asked.

Nobody said anything.

After dinner, John and Jim came under Taki's arms and hugged her. "We're so glad you're here," Jim said. "Yeah," John said. "Thank you for a yummy dinner."

Fritz and his mother left, and Susie and the boys took Taki back to Rob Newsom's house.

Taki planned to stay several more days. Susie said that she had to study all day Sunday for a test on Monday, June 3, but she wanted Taki's help in sorting some of her mother's things later.

"I'll see you Tuesday," Susie said.

What color was the car?

Ian took deep, nervous breaths, trying to calm himself. The recorder strapped to his back took note.

This was Sunday, June 2, a little after noon, and Ian was about to try once again to trap his friend Fritz Klenner into admitting three murders. This time he'd been well coached in the questions to ask.

He waited with Deputy Stephen Carden, again posing as his friend Chris, at the Zayre's in the O'Henry Shopping Center on Cone Boulevard in Greensboro. Shortly, Fritz's black Blazer pulled into the parking lot. Ian got out, took several more deep breaths to brace himself and approached the Blazer.

"Really scared the s--- out of me last night," Ian said after he crawled inside. "Tell you what."

Earlier that morning, Ian had called Fritz with a new development. Gentry and Sturgill had come to his grandmother's house in Reidsville the night before, he said, picked him up and took him to Winston-Salem to see the house where the murders had taken place.

"Showed me the house," Ian told Fritz now. "I saw the gold car and went in the house. It was a mess. It was right down the road from where I dropped you off."

"I believe we were on a government mission, but I think there's something that just ain't kosher here. I'd just like to know what's going on. I'm going to stick with the story."

"Gold car," Fritz said deliberately. "What gold car did they show you?"

"The one you had."

Fritz had stolen a car at the scene of the "touch," as he called the killing. But he had returned it to the house after being stopped by a police officer for driving too slowly.

"The car I had was brown," he said.

"I thought it was gold."

"The car I had was brown," he said with a subtle sternness.

"They showed me a car. It was right down the road from where I let you off. That scared me. I didn't know what was going on then. I didn't know what to think. I don't think you're lying to me or withholding anything."

"How many cars did they show you?"

"Just the one."

Fritz reached behind the seat, brought out a file folder and handed it to Ian.

"I want you to look at that. Names have been deleted from that that you didn't need to see."

Inside the file were official-looking documents marked secret. They purportedly pertained to the mission Fritz had completed that night. Parts of them were blacked out.

"There's some pictures in there," Fritz said.

"But what exactly happened?" Ian asked. "I don't understand. We were so close."

"Ian, I have never been to Nana's house. I do not know where it is. It could have been in the same area. I couldn't take you there if my life depended on it."

"I'm not trying to doubt you or anything, but, you know, it was so scary. I just didn't really know what to do. Course, I'll stick to the story. I won't tell them anything other than that we were camping."

Fritz wanted him to go over everything they'd asked and what he'd told them. Ian did.

"They asked me if I wanted to change my story," Ian said. "I said no. They seemed a little hesitant just to leave it at that, but they didn't ask me anything else."

"They're just fishing."

"I remember you telling me I better get a little better control of my nerves, but I was just — I'm not good at this. The only reason I got any sleep last night was because of that pill you gave me. I did sleep very well."

"How have those capsules been doing for you?" Fritz asked in his concerned doctor voice.

"They've been working pretty good. I'm not shaking."

"I've got some Valium tablets for you, too," Fritz said, taking the file Ian was holding. "I wish that had not had some stuff deleted, but you understand. At this point, you just do not need to know."

Fritz withdrew some photographs and gave the file back.

"These are the people who were in the house. They're the ones who went down the other night. That's the one I had to hit five times."

"God," said Ian, his voice filled with awe.

"The one with the hat is one of the big —"

"One of the big guys," Ian said.

"Yeah."

"I told Chris I just wanted to see you for a minute before we go back to tell you how the medication was doing," Ian said.

Fritz was still showing pictures. "He was on the patio."

"Which one did you use the knife on?"

"I used the knife on this guy, and I used the knife on, on this one because he was still showing some signs."

"I'm sorry to keep bothering you with all of this," Ian said. "I hate to seem like a big chicken, but I just didn't know how to deal with all of this."

"Where was the house?" Fritz asked.

Ian explained, and Fritz drew a diagram showing that he had gone off on another street near the house.

"How many cars were there?" Fritz asked.

"Just a couple."

"There should have been, unless Rob has picked the car up, there should have been three cars."

Ian said he was so nervous that he'd thrown up the night before, and Fritz gave him some Valium.

"Are you still going to see them tomorrow?" Fritz asked.

Ian was scheduled for a polygraph test the next day.

"I told them to delay it, postpone it indefinitely," Ian said. "They didn't seem too pleased, but they didn't push it."

"See, what they are figuring, that they can play mind games with you. They found very little physical evidence. In fact, nothing to connect anything to anything. See, they figured you're the youngest — actually, it should make you mad — they figured if I was a pro, if I'd done something they weren't going to get a s--- with me. They figured you're the youngest, that you were the weak link, you were the one if there was anything to pick."

"Well, I feel like I'm sort of letting Uncle Gerry down by getting so over worried about all this."

"Well, Ian, if I'd had any notion that anybody was going to, I mean, you talk about the luck of the draw. I almost s--- in my pants about that."

"I want to do the right thing," Ian said. "I won't crack. I don't know if they'll leave me alone after this, but I don't think I'll have any problems. You know, they tried to tell me you weren't a doctor. Course, I didn't believe that. I know you've been in medical school. I know you were doing your residency when Doctor died. Tried to tell me Annie Hill told them that."

"Ian, the reason I have not started practice — I went to Duke — I told you, I've been doing stuff. I first got contacted when I was at Woodward and off and on over the years, when they check anything, when I went to Duke I was enrolled there, which is in the process of being straightened out now. When Dad died was an inopportune time."

"They gave you your provisional license?"

"Oh, yeah. When I was traveling, see, I went to several meetings and places you don't need to know about right now."

"I don't think I want to."

"But when I was in school, it was better for all concerned that I wasn't traceable back to Reidsville."

"Let me ask you about this thing in Texas. I'm not going to have to do anything with that in the near future, are we?"

"No."

"Good. Because I think it's going to take a while to steel myself down to even think about this again — I feel a lot better now. I tell you what."

"The car that I had was a gold car," Fritz said.

"What type of car —"

"It looked like a Granada or a Monarch to me. I didn't get that close to it."

"The car I had was gold but it wasn't a Maverick. Something similar to a Maverick."

'I'd be a pile of mush'

Fritz gave Ian some capsules of papaverine, a drug used for calming muscle spasms. "Take one of these."

"I'll take 'em if I feel like I need to," Ian said, "but I don't think I have anything to be nervous about."

"Any time they want to talk to you or anything like that, you take one of these. Give an hour for it to work."

"How's Susie and everybody taking the whole mess?" Ian asked.

"They're numb. Susie's just really — numb. Ian, what they're trying to do is to get you to panic and say something. If I had been involved and they had something concrete to go on, they would already have done something about it."

"I'm trying to imagine what kind of state I'd be in if I'd been there actually with you," Ian said. "You know, had to help you. I'd probably be a pile of mush."

"See, what they're going on, supposedly a little while after dark, one of the neighbors at Nana's house heard the dogs barking and looked out and said there were two men standing on the lawn. They thought with all the workmen that it was just two workmen, so they brought the dogs inside and that was it. There may have been two men on the lawn."

"Sergeant Gentry said that, uh — Florence is it?"

"Florence."

"— That they had company that night, but I don't remember what time he said they left."

"I think it was before dark."

Fritz mentioned that it wouldn't be hard to arrange to find somebody who saw them on the mountain trail if they needed a stronger alibi. They had told officers they were hiking in Virginia when the murders took place.

"That's cool," Ian said.

"I wanted you to see this," Fritz said, taking back the report, "so you'd have something to sink your teeth in. I know you trust me."

"I've got no reason not to. I've known you for years."

Fritz handed him a spray can. "Take that with you."

"Will that keep your odor down?" Ian asked.

"That has aluminum chlorohydrate in it, which is a prescription thing they use for people who have overperspiration."

"You must've noticed that my T-shirt smells a little."

"Anytime you have to talk with anybody, spray the palms of your hands, your feet real good. Saturate a cotton ball, wipe your face. That'll keep you from perspiring."

"Yeah. That reminds me of a deodorant commercial I saw. It's like, it's OK to be nervous, it's just not OK to let 'em know."

If the police wanted particulars about what they were doing on the hike, Fritz told Ian to say they were running checks with compasses and a barometer.

"Okay, thanks. Preciate it. Oh, I feel so much better."

"Here take this regularly," Fritz said, offering more pills, vitamins this time. "That's B-complex. That's nature's tranquilizer. You can take like three of those three times a day. That stuff's amazing."

Ian said he'd call if he had problems.

"I'll be at one house or the other," Fritz said. "Oh, another thing, I've checked the lines. I don't think any of the lines anywhere are tapped."

"If I get any nervous anxiety attacks or they come call me again, I'll call you for sure," Ian said.

His breaths came more easily as he walked back to the Mustang where the plainclothes detective posing as his friend waited.

Allen Gentry, the Forsyth County Sheriff's Department detective who was in charge of this case, was more pleased with this tape than with the first one. Fritz had admitted killing people, though not Bob, Florence and Hattie Newsom, whose murders Gentry was investigating. He had admitted being in a car similar to the one that was taken from the scene of the murders. He even tripped himself up, first saying the car was brown, then gold.

But Gentry and Tom Sturgill, the SBI agent working on the case, wanted to try one more time to get Fritz to admit what he'd done. Ian agreed, and Forsyth County District Attorney Don Tisdale gave the go-ahead.

To this point, Fritz was unaware that the detectives knew that a police officer had stopped him on a traffic check in Winston-Salem the night of the murders. Gentry and Sturgill decided the time had come to let him know.

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