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Managing Editors

**Robert Nieman** 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

**Byron A. Johnson** 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

**Byron A. Johnson** 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

**Pam S. Baird**



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## The Meridian Hostage Crisis

Capt. Bob Prince, Ret.

Whoever said “you can’t tell a book by looking at the cover” must have had criminals in mind. I’ve seen criminals that looked like they just stepped out of a fashion show, others that seem to have crawled out of a septic tank, and the others were everything in between.

No one would ever confuse thirty-nine-year-old Jimmie Cooper for a fashion model. His appearance was what most people think of in a crook: he had long hair, a beard, and was unkempt. He looked like what he was—a loser.

Cooper had drifted from state to state, or more correctly, from one prison to another. His life of crime started in 1966 when he was nineteen years old and was arrested for theft in Woodriver, Illinois.

During his years in prison, Cooper had learned a new skill—escaping jail cells. In 1977, he put that art to work when he disappeared from the Madison County, Illinois, courthouse the day he was to go on trial for rape and forgery. He was captured in 1978 and was sent to a Missouri prison, where he served two counts for a kidnapping in Cape Girardeau. He was paroled in 1983, but his freedom was short-lived, to say the least. As he walked out of the Missouri prison, he was arrested by federal authorities for a firearms violation.

Cooper did his time and made parole but, once again, it didn’t last long. He soon found himself back in a federal prison at Oxford, Wisconsin, for violating parole.

At some point between prison times, Cooper had found time to get married. Like everything else in his life, it hadn’t lasted. He was soon divorced and his wife remarried. While in the Wisconsin prison, Cooper sent letters containing death threats to his former wife and her new husband. His threats were deadly, but they could be tempered—for the right price.

Cooper's ex knew her first husband too well to be intimidated, and she reported the threats to the police. Cooper was charged with extortion in six federal counts (he had used the United States Post Office). His former wife lived in Illinois, and that is where Cooper faced federal charges. He was indicted and apparently headed for another prison cell. Before he could be tried, however, he escaped from the East Alton, Illinois, jail where he was being held.

On the run, Cooper headed for Meridian, Texas, which is located about sixty miles northwest of Waco. He arrived on Wednesday, August 28, 1985. The last he had heard, he had a brother and nephew living there.

It didn't take Cooper long to learn that, actually, he had no relatives living in the small town of about 3,500. He was also unable to find out where they had gone. (They had left Meridian several months earlier and were living in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.)

With nowhere to hide, Cooper knew he had to move on. That took money, however, and he didn't have any. That wasn't going to stop him, though. He knew how to raise money in a hurry—steal it. The only problem was that he had to wait a while. It was about 11:30 in the morning and there was still a lot of daylight left. He needed a place to lay low until dark.

Cooper decided that if he was going to have to wait eight or nine hours, he would do it in an air-conditioned house. No one who has been in Texas in August would blame him for that: Texas in the summer is like an oven. He started looking for an empty place that had an air conditioner in the window.

When Cooper entered the back door of a house on North Main Street, he thought it was unoccupied. Instead, he was confronted by thirteen-year-old Karen Howard, who was babysitting Roger Parsons' five-year-old son Christopher. Cooper pulled what was originally thought to be a .22-caliber pistol and told the frightened young lady that he wouldn't hurt her if she did as she was told. He said that all he wanted was a cool place to stay until dark.

About a half an hour later, Cooper asked for the keys to the van that was sitting in the rear of the house. The teenager said she didn't know where they were.

She may have only been thirteen, but Karen Howard maintained her calm. When Cooper left the room searching for the keys, she grabbed Christopher and ran out the door. She didn't stop running until she reached the home of her friend Amye Russell, two blocks away. As soon as Amye's father Ron heard Karen's story, he called the police. The Meridian Police Department was very small, and they contacted the sheriff's office assistance.

About 1:00, Bosque County Chief Deputy Rex Fleming spotted Cooper on foot near the intersection of Highway 22 and Lumpkin Street. He radioed for backup and was soon joined by Sheriff Denny Proffitt and Reserve Deputy Edwin Olsen. Cooper spotted the officers and started running. The officers pursued the fugitive across several yards and into the house at 719 Live Oak Street. When Cooper went through the back door, he didn't know if anyone was home or not, nor did he care. He was just running.

Inside the house, Cooper found Mary Lou York, age twenty-five; her five-year-old son, Christopher Michael; and the young boy's aunt, Jennie Renee Davenport, age seventeen. The house was a small, two-bedroom structure

with only a front and back door. It took the police but a few minutes to completely seal off the premises.

Meridian Chief of Police Curtis McGlothlin approached the front of the house and yelled to Cooper, "Hey, buddy, we got a problem here!"

Cooper appeared at the front door. He pointed his finger at the chief and answered, "You're the one that's got the problem. I have two women and a kid in here. Don't mess it up." Cooper then demanded that all the police get away from the house, which they did.

I was Company F's hostage negotiator. It was about 1:00 p.m. when I was contacted by the Waco Police Department's dispatcher. I was advised that there was a hostage situation in Meridian, and local officials had requested the assistance of the Rangers. I contacted the Department of Public Safety and requested a helicopter for immediate transportation to the hostage site. Shortly before 2:00, I landed in Meridian.

Fellow Ranger Joe Wilie was already at the scene, and he and Chief McGlothlin advised me of the situation. They said that Cooper had warned that if anyone made a move toward him, he would "pile up some bodies in front of the house."

In addition to the Rangers, the Meridian Police Department had been joined by about thirty officers from the Bosque County Sheriff's Department, the Highway Patrol, and officers from the nearby towns of Clifton and Walnut Springs. Clearly, the kidnapper wasn't going anywhere . . . but he did have those three hostages.

Speaking of hostages, let me clear up something before I go any further. Someone once said to me that they had seen a TV movie in which the hostage negotiator stated that he had to consider the hostages dead before he ever started talking. Nothing could be further from the truth. The absolute and only priority that the negotiator has is the safe return of the hostages.

At the time, we did not know who the kidnapper was. When I arrived in Meridian, dialogue between the kidnapper and local officers had already started. All the kidnapper would say was that his name was Bob. It would be about 8:00 that evening before Bob told us his real name.

The Yorks did not have telephone service, so Cooper allowed Jim Bryant of the local Southwestern Bell Telephone Company to run a phone line into the house. Once he had the phone working, Bryant stayed at the scene until the situation was resolved in case we needed any other communication needs.

As soon as I arrived and was briefed, Chief McGlothlin told Cooper that from that point forward, I would be handling the negotiations. When I got on the phone with him, Cooper was very tense because there were so many police around the house. I knew I had to try to diffuse his agitation. One of the first things that a negotiator learns is to keep everyone on a calm course.

I kept assuring Cooper that no one was going to hurt him. We kept talking and, during the conversation, Cooper said that when it got dark, he would release the hostages and make a run for it. I believed he was just talking, but everything that is said has to be considered. Cooper also said that if we tried to rush the house, he would kill the hostages. This is a fairly routine statement that most kidnappers make but, routine or not, it was something

that I took very seriously.

In hostage negotiations, time is normally your ally. It certainly was this time. This situation lasted almost eighteen hours and, as the hours drug by, it was very difficult on everyone: hostages, kidnapper, officers, and me. But I believed, then and now, that if we had rushed the house or done anything prematurely during those long hours, it would very likely have turned out disastrously for everyone involved.

All during the negotiations, I truthfully assured Cooper that no one wanted to hurt him. The last thing in the world I wanted was for him to spook and start shooting. My objective was to get all three of the hostages away from Cooper unharmed.

When it became obvious that he wasn't going to turn all three loose, I began concentrating on getting five-year-old Christopher released. I appealed to Cooper's conscience. I told him that the child's grandfather was on the scene and was very anxious to see his grandson. I asked him to let the boy go to his grandpa. Cooper just replied, "Maybe a little later."

I then pointed out to Cooper what all this must be doing to the youngster emotionally. I said that I knew he didn't want that on his conscience. All Cooper said to that was, "I'll send him out after awhile."

Then Cooper asked, "When are you going to feed him?"

I answered, "As soon as we get him out here."

Without a pause, Cooper said, "You've got two of these gals wanting to smoke, too."

This was the opening I had been hoping for. In any hostage negotiation, there are two rules that you always abide by:

(1) Never let the kidnapper have anything without getting something in return. Cooper wanted cigarettes, supposedly for the women. Maybe they did want them; maybe he did. Regardless, he wanted cigarettes and I wanted the little boy.

(2) Even if you are the final word on the scene, never let the kidnapper know it. Always leave yourself an out: "I don't know, I'll have to check with my superiors." This way, you buy more time and, if the answer is no, you can blame the negative response on someone else. It is critically important to keep the kidnapper talking to you. As far as possible, you need to keep him believing that he has a sympathetic voice out there.

I continued communicating with Cooper. "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll send some smokes in there for them if you will let that little boy come out."

"I'll let him go after while. You just have the stuff ready."

Cooper just kept delaying. I drew from the fact that he was a parent. "This granddaddy is up here and is awfully anxious. Are you a granddaddy?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, you're a daddy. . . ."

“Yeah.”

I could tell this had an effect on him, so I kept on. “You know what anxiety you would have if one of your children were down here. Just multiply it when you are a granddaddy.”

Cooper replied, “Yeah. You tell him he [the boy] will be coming out before long, and you send something in here for these two girls to smoke now. There is no need for them to do without just because we’ve got this mess going on.”

I agreed, but only if he would let the child loose.

Finally, at about 5:30, Cooper agreed to make the trade. He was to put the boy on the front porch and, in return, I would hand him a pack of cigarettes through the window of one of the rear bedrooms.

A lot of things went through my mind as I prepared to walk to the window. When Cooper had entered the Parsons’ home earlier in the day, he had waved a gun in the face of Karen Howard, the babysitter. After she escaped from his clutches, officers questioned her. From the description that she gave, we were fairly certain that Cooper was armed with a .22-caliber pistol.

Just because a .22 is a small-caliber weapon, don’t think for an instant that it isn’t fatal. I’m not much of a gambling man, but if I were, I would wager that more people are killed every year with a .22 than any other handgun. In spite of this, I decided not to wear a bulletproof vest.

Let me assure you that I am no braver than the next man, but there were reasons for my decision. I am a large man and in fairly good physical condition—at least I was twenty years ago. A .22 bullet into my torso would have to be an almost exact shot to be fatal. Also, a vest is large and bulky, and it would have been impossible for Cooper not to know I had it on. Clearly, Cooper was no fool. If he had seen the vest, he would have known that the only effective shot would be a head shot. And there was one thing I knew for sure: if I was to be shot, I much preferred it to be in the body than in the head.

When the situation was finally resolved, we discovered that Cooper was armed not with a .22, but a .357 Magnum. Trust me, if I had known it was a .357, I would have worn body armor!

Thankfully, everything went smoothly, and the swap was completed by 6:00 p. m. As soon as the youngster was out of the house, Chief Curtis McGlothlin grabbed him and rushed him to safety.

The first thing Cooper asked me when we reestablished contact was, “Is the grandpa doing okay?” I told him that all of us were deeply appreciative of the good faith he had shown with his action.

At this point, I decided to take another step. I asked Cooper to release the mother, Mary Lou York. I told him that the boy was crying and missing his mother terribly. Would he let the mother go? This was a ploy on my part because Christopher was actually happy to be out. If this could help bring an end to this situation without anyone getting hurt or shot, however, I’d say it.

Cooper became very agitated and said he was tired of our calling him every five minutes. I assured him that we only wanted to make sure that everything

was going okay. He then said that he would let me talk to one of the women.

A few moments later, Jeannie Davenport was on the phone. I asked if everything were okay. She said yes, but the phone calls were really upsetting Cooper.

I told her, "I just wanted to let you know that the boy is wanting his mama awful bad, and I thought you might talk to Cooper about that and see if he would let Mrs. York come out."

At this point, Cooper got back on the phone. I repeated to him what I had just said to Jennie. Of course, I couldn't be sure how he would react to this request, coming so soon on the heel of the release of young Christopher. I was comfortable that Cooper wouldn't go over the edge, however, and he didn't. All he said was, "I'll get back with you."

I felt we were making very good progress when suddenly the top almost blew off. We had kept everyone not directly involved in the negotiations, including the press, several hundred yards from the house and the command post. Minutes after the swap, Cooper was on the phone to me in a very frantic state. He had the television on and had heard a reporter state that we were bringing in a special team. He wanted to know if we were going to rush the house.

"No, no. You know better than that."

He demanded to know what the reporter was talking about. I told him I didn't know, but whatever it was, it wasn't coming from us.

Cooper said, "Well, there is something on the news about a special hostage team coming over here. I want to know what's happening."

I assured him, "That's wrong, I can tell you that. Anything that you want to know, you can ask me. You can take my word on that . . . and you know my word is good. . . . I can assure you no one is going to rush you. We don't have any type of team coming and never have had any type team coming."

Another thing a negotiator never does, if he can avoid it, is to lie. One of the things you try to do is secure the kidnapper's trust. Obviously, you can't do that if he believes you are not being honest with him. I was being totally truthful with Cooper when I said that, unless he absolutely forced us, no one was going to rush the house.

Rangers John Dendy, Stan Guffy (later killed in the line of duty), Johnny Waldrip, and Joe Wilie had arrived at the scene and were in position to take whatever action was necessary. My captain, Bob Mitchell, had also arrived shortly after 3:00 p.m. and had taken overall command. We were not going to leave ourselves totally unprepared. During the standoff, I approached Cooper and the house twice. Both times, some of the Rangers were in position to fire if Cooper was seen with anything looking like a gun.

Just as suddenly as Cooper's hostility started, it ended.

"Hey! It's hot down here, man, and everybody is hungry. You send something down here to eat, and I'll send this girl (Mary Lou York) out so she can be with her son."

Cooper wanted three hamburgers and three sodas. I suggested that since he was going to release Mrs. York anyway, why didn't he let her come on out? He said no. I have no idea why he wouldn't agree, but he wouldn't. He said he would let her go after they ate.

Cooper had done what he said he would when he released Christopher, and I really had no choice but to agree with his request. I asked if it would be all right if we could make the swap the same way as before. Cooper agreed to receive the food through the back bedroom window. After they finished eating, he would release Mrs. York on the front porch.

Unfortunately, Cooper's agitation returned before the food arrived. "Hey! What's wrong, man? Every time I look out the window, somebody's got a pair of binoculars on this house. What's the deal? I told you everybody is safe in here. Every time I make a move, somebody is spying in the windows."

At this point, we still didn't know what the kidnapper's real name was. I answered, "Bob, you can understand that we are very, very interested in what's going on."

Cooper said, "She [Jennie] is perfectly safe and, in a few minutes, I'm going to have the girl call you."

Cooper was true to his word: our phone soon rang. It was Jennie Davenport and she assured me everyone was okay.

Cooper and I continued talking and finally came to terms. Again, I approached the bedroom window, this time with a sack full of hamburgers and soft drinks. He took the food and disappeared back into the bedroom. A few minutes later, at 7:40 p.m., Mary Lou York appeared on the front porch. Like her son, she was unharmed, and I escorted her to Christopher, who was eagerly awaiting her.

That left only Jennie Davenport.

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In my life, I have known some incredibly tough men. At Texas Christian University, I played defensive tackle beside the legendary Bob Lilly. Since the creation of the Department of Public Safety in 1935, five Texas Rangers have been awarded Texas' award for bravery, the Medal of Valor. One of these was my Highway Patrol partner Bob Daughtery, who also became a Texas Ranger. One of the most difficult days of my life was when Bob gave his life in the line of duty. In her own way, seventeen-year-old Jennie Davenport was as tough and brave as any man I've ever known.

We had no way of knowing it at the time, but Jennie had already had her fiber tested and had passed with flying colors. That afternoon, she had been standing in the bedroom brushing her hair when she turned around and was confronted by a stranger pacing back and forth. Looking at her, he had said, "Be calm; there's somebody after me." She asked him who it was. He replied, "The cops."

Mrs. York and her son had been in the bathroom. She had just finishing taking a bath and washing her hair. Jennie called out to her aunt to please come out. "There's someone here," she said. Mrs. York came out of the bathroom, wearing a robe. Cooper ordered the women and the boy to sit on the couch and be quiet. After several minutes, he allowed Mrs. York to go into her



bedroom and put on some clothes.

A little later, Cooper had turned to Jennie and ordered her to go to the bathroom and take her shirt off. In no uncertain terms, she told him no. He then hit her twice. As he turned, Jennie saw a pistol in his back pocket, and she lunged for it. They struggled for a few moments before Cooper overpowered her. He told her to stay in the bathroom and not to come out.

A few minutes later, Cooper had returned to the bathroom and told Jennie that he was sorry that he had hit her, but he had to. He only wanted her to scream so that the police would know he meant business. We had heard the scream and, from the first, we had taken him seriously.

About two hours later, Cooper told Jennie to come out of the bathroom. She had a choice: she could either be locked in a closet or tied to a bed. She didn't want the closet, so Cooper tied her to the bed using a belt and some phone line. He told her that if anybody had to go [be killed], it had to be her cause Mrs. York had a little baby and she didn't have anybody.

Cooper had continued talking to Jennie. Finally, he said that he might spare her for a million dollars. Then he threw in the clincher: "If you can think of something to give me that's worth your life, just let me know."

Cooper left the room for a few minutes. When he returned, he looked at Jennie and said, "Sex is nothing to die over." Hearing this, Jennie started crying. Cooper added, "If you let me, I'll let you go. I promise." There was little doubt what he meant. Jennie chose to live.

It was after the rape that Cooper had requested the cigarettes. His abuse of Jennie was far from over, however.

Shortly after releasing Mrs. York, Cooper turned to Jennie and demanded that she again remove her clothes. She had no choice but to submit.

After this second rape, Cooper told Jennie that he didn't know how he could ever repay her! He said he liked to buy things for pretty girls and that if he had the money, he would buy her a new car! When Jennie later told us about that, she said, "I just thought that was stupid."

Before the ordeal was over, Cooper forced himself on Jennie once more.

One other thing. Despite his words of kindness, Jennie said Cooper had never let the pistol he was carrying out of easy reach, even when he was abusing her.

As for us, we never had any idea that all this was going on. If we had, I would have made another trip to the window so that Cooper would have been exposed. Then either one of the snipers or I would have ended this standoff right then!

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The hours drug by, and we continued with our dialogue. Throughout, Cooper kept making one request after another. Some I could agree to; others I could not. As I said earlier, never admit that you are the final say-so.

Once, Cooper said that if we would let Jennie and him drive off, he would

release her outside of town. I told him that no one was going to harm him if he gave us any choice, but there was no way we could allow him to leave with the girl. I told him everyone would be better off if he would just let Jennie Davenport go. He continued to refuse.

At one point, I said to Cooper, "You have held out long enough."

He replied, "The only recourse I have is just to run out and let you shoot me, or I'll do it myself. I'm not going back to jail."

I told him to just step out of the house with his hands up, and no one would get hurt. Cooper wasn't having any part of this, at least not now. He said, "If I come out, I will make you shoot or either I'll do it in here myself. I've done it before; it just didn't work out."

I said, "You don't have to . . ."

"I did shoot myself there in Missouri, but my aim was off."

Again, I assured Cooper that no one would harm him. I told him to walk out on the porch.

"The only place that will walk me is back in the joint."

I asked him which joint he was out of. He said about any of them you could name.

This caught me a little off guard. "I beg your pardon. I'm not understanding you."

"I said I'm out of about any of them you can name. I've been to Marion, Leavenworth, Springfield, Jeff City, Samson, Lockson. You name them; I've been there." Then he repeated, "If I walk out, I'm going to walk out with guns poppin', and you do what you've got to do."

The last thing in the world we wanted was for Cooper to commit suicide by making us kill him.

Many people do not have the nerve to kill themselves, but they want to die. They therefore put the police in a position where the lawmen have no choice but to do the deed for them. From our conversation, I didn't think Cooper really wanted to die, so I took a gamble. I said to him that we didn't have any preparation for this, and our guys might not be good shots. I also told him it was a distinct possibility that we wouldn't get a good, clean, fatal shot. If that happened, we might just wound him and leave him paralyzed the rest of his life. That would be a miserable way to spend his remaining days.

Cooper agreed that he didn't want that under any circumstances. He wanted me to guarantee that we could kill him if we shot. I couldn't and wouldn't guarantee him that. Again, I told him we might not be able to get a clean shot and then who knew what might happen? The most sensible answer was for to give up so no one would be injured.

He kept insisting that under no condition was he going back to prison.

I said, "Well, of course, prisons have changed an awful lot. They are like a

country clubs now.”

Cooper wasn't buying into that. “They haven't changed in the past couple of months, have they?”

I tried again. “Well, yeah. Of course, ole Willie Wayne Justice (very liberal U.S. District Judge in East Texas) made all the decisions, and they are all in favor of the inmates down there.”

This talk kept going back and forth hour after hour. Cooper's main concern—at least what he kept telling me—was the treatment he would receive in prison. Over and over, he repeated that he had done all the time he was ever going to do.

I told him there was no way he wasn't going back to prison. He didn't like it, but I know he realized what I said was the truth.

Again, Cooper returned to the suicide story. He said that the last time he was hemmed up, he had shot himself, but they “managed to patch me up. Surely the second time around I can do a better job.”

I told him, “We don't want that to happen. Let me tell you that you and I have talked long enough that I consider you a friend.”

To which he said, “I might as well give you my name because I might die anyway.”

“Okay. What's your name?”

“Jimmie R. Cooper.”

I asked him where he was from, and he said, “East Alton, Illinois.”

We immediately ran a check on Cooper. DPS Chief of Criminal Law Enforcement Floyd Hacker started contacting officers in states where Cooper had served time. One of the reports we got back from a sheriff in Indiana made cold chills run through me. It stated: “Lordy, if you're in a hostage situation, don't let your hostage negotiator get up close. That's what happened here. He [Cooper] had a hostage and he lured the hostage negotiator up close and shot him in the face.” Needless to say, I didn't go back to the window a third time.

Cooper and I continued to talk, and he soon said he wanted to talk to his mother. I've yet to see anyone so tough that they didn't soften when it came to their momma. He gave me her phone number, and I tried to call her but couldn't get an answer. I told him I let the phone ring fifteen times without success. He gave me another number to try but, like the first time, we got no answer.

Having done this for Cooper, I asked for something in return: I wanted to talk to Jennie Davenport. Cooper put her on the line. She said she was doing okay.

Cooper got back on the line and said he had to hang up for a while. He had some thinking to do. I tried to keep him talking and was successful for a while. Our rushing the house was still on his mind. He said that he was going to keep Jennie close so that if we charged the house, we couldn't help hitting

his hostage. Yet again, I assured him we were not going to attack the house.

I reminded Cooper that if we had wanted to attack the house, we could have already done that. In response, he said that he didn't want to hurt anyone either. If he had, he could have shot me either time I was at the window.

Cooper kept in this vein until the late hours. I don't know if he really began to care or not, but he started saying that it didn't matter what happened to him, he just didn't want anything to happen to "Jeannie."

Cooper asked how Chris York was doing. I told him that it was a fine thing he had done when he released Chris and his mother. He said he really liked the youngster. He had even given him money to put in his piggybank.

By now, one of the local television stations had sent a helicopter to cover the hostage situation. I told Cooper that the helicopter wasn't ours but the TV station's. This was a negotiating ploy because it actually was a DPS helicopter. The last thing I wanted Cooper to think was that we had sharpshooters hovering above him. I said that the copter would be shining its spotlight on us and that was to his advantage if he came out. Any lingering doubts he might still harbor as to whether we wanted to hurt him or not was resolved with that spotlight. If he would walk out on the porch, the helicopter would have the light on him the moment he stepped onto the porch. I told him that he had to know that there absolutely no way we would shoot with the world watching. He couldn't argue with that point.

I could understand Cooper's not wanting to return to prison, but he had made his bed, and he would have to lie in it. I told him, "We can't blame you for wanting to get away. I think every one of us in that situation would want to, but let's be practical and realize that we can't let you get away. The only reasonable solution that is possible is to let Jennie walk out of the house and then you walk out."

"Well," he said, "I have been giving that a lot of thought, and I will get back with you as soon as I come up with something. Whatever it is, I'm going to be square with you, okay? If I'm coming out shooting, I'll tell you, and if I'm coming out barehanded, I'll tell you."

We continued contacting officials who might be able to provide us any enlightenment on Jimmie Cooper. One of these was Cooper's former attorney, Jerry Cohen, who by this time had become a federal judge. I informed Cooper that the judge had agreed that the only solution was for him to surrender. The judge also wanted us to tell Cooper that if he gave up, he would do everything he could to help him.

This must have had some effect on Cooper because he suddenly said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you will fix it up where I can talk to my mom, I'll send the girl out to you." I reminded him that I had tried both the numbers he had given me without success. He said that his mother sometimes turned the ringer down when she went to bed, "but she gets up real early."

It was now about 11:30 p.m., and I told Cooper that he didn't need to drag this out until morning. Why didn't he go ahead and let Jennie go and then surrender himself?

He didn't agree. "I want to talk on the phone to Mom. If things go for the worst, I would just like to talk to her. She might have a solution or something."

**“Well,” I said, “for the life of me, if I knew there was another solution, I would be the first one to volunteer it.”**

**I again reminded Cooper that Judge Cohen was very firm when he said that he should give himself up and do it now.**

**Cooper went back to his condition. “I would be willing to if you could get ahold of Mom. That’s the deal. She gets up about 6:00.”**

**I kept trying to reason with Cooper that it was in everybody’s best interest to release Jennie and come on out. His only answer was, “You been negotiating pretty good on all this, so you get ahold of Mom in Illinois, and I’ll send her [Jennie] out at the break of day”**

**I gave Cooper my word that I would keep trying to reach his mother, but if I couldn’t get her on the phone, there was nothing I could do about it. I couldn’t shake him. He wasn’t coming out or releasing Jennie until he talked to his mother. He said, “Win, lose, or draw, as soon as I talk to Mom, I’m sending her [Jennie] out. I don’t know if I’m coming out, but I’m sending her out.”**

**We kept talking and Cooper finally said, “At 6:00 in the morning, she [Jennie] is going to walk out the front door.”**

**About 12:30 a.m., I called Cooper and told him we had finally contacted his mother. We had talked to the local police in Betalto, Illinois, and requested that they go to her house and ask her to call us. She quickly complied. Because we were on a makeshift telephone, I told Cooper we could neither patch the call through nor could he receive or make any calls.**

**Cooper wanted to know what his mother had said. I told him that she said that she loved and respected him, but she wanted him to give himself up immediately. She also said that she was sure that his Uncle Bob and Aunt Helen would want him to give up. I had no idea who Uncle Bob and Aunt Helen where, but he obviously thought a great deal of them.**

**All Cooper said was, “At 6:00 in the morning, I’ll send her out. I ain’t made up my mind what I’m going to do yet.”**

**I said his mother wanted to talk to him as soon as this was resolved. “She is standing by a phone to talk to you, and we’ll let you make your first phone call there.”**

**Cooper said okay. I then asked him to let me talk to Jennie. He put her on the phone, and I told her that he said he was going to release her at six in the morning. I asked her if she believed him. She said that she did.**

**Cooper got back on the phone and said again that he would let Jennie go at 6:00, but he still did not know what he was going to do. Then he added, “She will come out, and she will tell you what I’m going to do. Then you’ll know how it is.”**

**All I could say was okay.**

**Cooper said he was sitting in a chair with his gun and was going to take a nap. If anyone tried to rush the house, he would wake up shooting. Yet again, I assured him that no one was going to rush the house.**

At 3:00, I called Cooper and asked him to come on out, and again he refused to do anything until 6:00.

That ended our conversations until 5:19, when Cooper called us. The first thing he said was, "She will be on the porch at 6:00."

I asked him what his plans were, and he said he didn't know yet, but he would get back to me. I asked him to let me talk to Jennie so that I could give her instructions as to what to do once she was on the porch. He put her on the phone. I told her that once she was on the porch, she should keep walking straight. There would be someone to meet her.

At 5:46, Cooper called us again. I asked him when Jennie would be coming out. He said she would be coming out in just a few minutes. I again asked to speak to her. She was soon on the phone. I instructed her, "Come out the front door and just continue right straight forward. There will be someone there to meet you just as soon as you get across the street. But don't turn either way; just go straight ahead. Do it just rapidly as you can."

Moments later, Jennie appeared on the porch and stood there for a couple of minutes—and then went back in the house!

At 5:54, Cooper was on the phone again. "I had her out on the porch. Don't you want her?"

I said we sure did. "Don't you remember the instructions? Just tell her to walk straight on across the street."

Cooper said, "I asked her, and she said that she had to wait for somebody to come down for her."

"No, no," I said, "just have her walk straight on across the street."

At 5:55, Jennie again appeared on the porch. This time, she kept walking across the yard and across the street to Rob Brennand, chief of police in nearby Clifton.

Finally, the hostage situation was at an end, but not the crisis. Jimmie Cooper was still in the house with a pistol, and we knew from his past record he would use it.

True, we could have rushed the house or simply waited for a clear shot and put an end to it, but that's not our way. I had not lied to Cooper: we did not want to hurt him, let alone shoot him. So it was back to the phone.

I told Cooper that this needed to end and right now. He wouldn't agree to that. He said he was going to give me until daylight. He claimed that if we decided to shoot him, he wanted everyone to be able to see it. I told him that if he had wanted to shoot him, we could have done that a long time ago.

He starting trying to run the show with statements like: "Here's what I want you to do" or "I want you to come in, and I will surrender to you. I don't want to surrender to anyone else." He said that he would surrender only to me because he had confidence in me and no one else.

It was time for the games to stop. I told him, "You don't have anything else we want. We'll run the show now, and you will do it on our terms." He didn't like that, but I guess he realized the truth in what I said. He still made a few efforts to dictate terms, but his power had walked out the door with Jennie Davenport. I told him to come out on the front porch and lay the pistol down.

Cooper kept insisting that he wanted to wait until daylight. He still claimed he was afraid he might get shot. Even though I had just assured him that we were in charge, I still wanted this to end peacefully. I told him that if he listened, he could still hear the television station's helicopter. All he had to do was turn on the porch light and lay the pistol on the porch. (From Mrs. York, Jennie, and Karen, we were confident that Cooper only had the one pistol.) We would have someone (Joe Wilie) close enough to the porch to verify that he had indeed surrendered his weapon. Once we knew he was unarmed, he was to walk out on the porch with his hands in the air. I promised him I would personally handcuff him, and that would be the end of it. As we walked across the yard to the car that would be waiting, the helicopter would be hovering above us with its spotlight focused on him. I reminded him for what seemed like the hundredth time what I had told him earlier: the last thing in the world he had to worry about was anybody doing him any harm with the world watching.

Cooper just couldn't turn loose of the fact that he no longer was in charge of the situation. His excuse now was that he didn't want the press even seeing him. I told him I didn't have any control over the press, so I couldn't promise that. Besides, we didn't have radio contact with the helicopter, and it was impossible for me or anyone else to contact it.

Then Cooper went back to his fear of being shot. "I don't like stepping out there with all those fools out there with them guns. You are one thing, but they are something else."

I'm a fairly patient man, but Cooper was testing it. "Jimmie, you know if we were wanting to harm you, we would have done it long ago."

"Well, no," he said, "because she (Jennie) was in the house."

"You exposed yourself many times," I reminded him yet again.

"Yeah, I know that," he admitted.

Then he said, "I'll hand the gun out to you. Bring your car down and just park it right here in front of the house. I will hand the gun out to you, and you can walk in and cuff me. We will go out to the car and beat this news media."

I remembered the Indiana officer he had shot and wasn't having any part of that. I told Cooper that my captain wouldn't accept that.

"I'll run another one past you," he said. "I will put the gun on the porch. You can pick it up, walk on in here, cuff me up, and me and you will get in your car."

I told him there was no reason for anyone to come into the house. "You walk out with your hands clear, and there will be absolutely no harm done to you in any way."

Cooper just kept dragging things out. He knew it was over, but he just couldn't bring himself to give it up. He kept insisting that he didn't want the

news media anywhere near, and I kept telling him I had no control over them. Reality finally set in, and Cooper finally agreed to turn the porch light on, lay the pistol on the porch, and walk out. I radioed to everyone to be extra sharp because Cooper was getting ready to come out, and this thing was coming to an end.

We had kept the media two blocks away from the York house, but that didn't prevent them from monitoring our radio traffic. Throughout the negotiations, I had kept all the officers apprised of what was progressing, and the media had listened in.

Joe Willie was one of the snipers, and the media was obviously listening when Joe said, "Well, Sergeant Prince, you might have the news media move because they're right in my line of fire." Before I could put the radio down, I looked around and the news media was scattering in every direction at speeds that would have made any track coach proud!

Regardless, Cooper insisted that he didn't want to have the helicopter hovering over him. "I don't want that light shining down in my face like some chump. I mean, I don't think I'm asking too much. I'm telling you, you can bring three or four with you, cuff me up on the porch, stick me in the car, and we'll drive off."

The bottom line was that Cooper wanted us in the house, but we were not going in. I told him, "I just don't have any control over that light."

Then Cooper made it sound like I had misunderstood him. He said, "You've got control over how far we've got to walk to get to your car."

I agreed, "But I want your hands clear when you walk to me."

Cooper said that his hands would be empty provided we would let him talk to his mother. I told him that would be no problem. "I will let you talk to your mother." And I did.

Then I told Cooper to go ahead and turn the porch light on, lay the gun on the porch, and then stay put until I had someone verify everything had been done.

Cooper turned the porch light on, reached through the door, and laid what appeared to be a pistol on the porch floor. Moments later, Joe Willie's voice came over the radio. He verified that the item was indeed a pistol.

I got back on the phone and told Cooper that my captain and I would soon be driving to the front of the house. I told him we would stop in front and get out of the car. He was to walk out to us.

Cooper said he didn't want to be manhandled. I told him, "You will not be. I'll put the cuffs on you myself."

Cooper said, "All right. When you get here, you get out of the car so I can hear what you say."

"Okay," I said.

And that ended our telephone negotiations.



At 6:08 a.m., Jimmie Cooper stepped onto the porch with his hands over his head. He walked to the middle of the yard, all the time keeping his hands in the air. Captain Mitchell and I were waiting by the car. I told Cooper to lay face down on the grass, and he did as instructed. The captain and I approached, and I handcuffed him. Captain Mitchell, Sheriff Danny Profitt, and I then escorted Cooper to the Bosque County Jail, where he was booked at 6:20 a.m. At 6:30, he was allowed to call his mother as I had promised.

Cooper was charged with two counts of burglary of an inhabitation for his break-in of the Parsons and York homes; five counts for the kidnappings of Karen Howard, Christopher Parsons, Mary Lou York, Christopher York, and Jennie Davenport; three counts of sexual assault against Jennie Davenport; and felony possession of a firearm. He was brought before Bosque County Justice of the Peace Alvin James, who set bail of one million dollars on the charges of kidnapping, sexual assault, and burglary. He also added another one hundred thousand dollars on the firearm possession.

In a plea bargain worked out on Monday, January 14, 1986, Cooper pled guilty to the charges of kidnapping and burglary. He was given a life sentence. He got an additional fifty years on the sexual assault charges. Federal prosecutors agreed to let him serve his federal time concurrently.

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Every hostage situation is different, and this one had its own uniqueness. Usually when a kidnapper takes a hostage, it is a part of his plan, and he is prepared to use violence to achieve his goals. This scenario certainly did not the actions of Jimmie Cooper. This was not a planned kidnapping: it happened by accident.

When Cooper went into the Parsons' home, he was looking for a cool place to lay low until dark. The presence of Karen Howard and five-year-old Christopher Parsons was purely a mishap. When Cooper went into the York house, he was simply running and looking for any place to hide. He found three hostages as his only bargaining card.

Make no mistake about it: I believe Cooper would not have hesitated to start shooting if we had rushed the house. As we have seen from his constant referral to this, it was definitely a major concern of his. Our job was to keep reassuring him that this would not happen unless he gave us no choice. Also, if he had pointed a gun at me or we had believed that the hostages' lives were in danger, we would have resolved the issue right then and there.

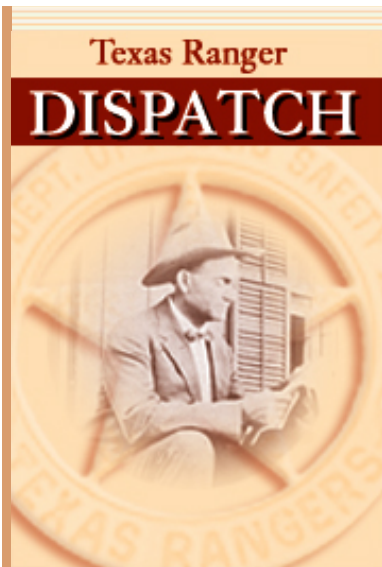
One final note before I finish. A few days after the incident, the Meridian Lions Club gave a dinner honoring Karen Howard for the incredible bravery she showed when she kept her calm and fled with young Karen Parsons. It was a fitting tribute to a very brave young lady.

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**Capt. Bob Prince and son Lt. Randy Prince**

Captain Bob Prince grew up in the Fort Worth area. As a teenager, he was Golden Gloves heavyweight champion in Fort



**Worth.** After graduating from Arlington Heights High School, he attended TCU and played football. He was the right defensive

tackle, and the left defensive tackle was the NFL Hall of Famer and Dallas Cowboy, Bob Lilly.

After a distinguished career as a Texas Highway Patrolman, Bob Prince became a Texas Ranger. He capped off his career as a Ranger captain. Today he works for a private prison firm.

One of Bob's four sons, Randy, has been promoted to the rank of Captain of Texas Rangers, following in his father's footsteps.

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