

THE SATURDAY EXPRESS-NEWS

San Antonio, Texas
South Texas' largest-selling Saturday newspaper*

*Express-News calculation based on Audit Bureau of Circulation audit for 12 months ending Sept. 30, 1977.
Audit released by A.B.C. February, 1978.

Raiders of jail in Mexico free

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A federal appeals court Friday threw out the convictions of two men in connection with a commando-style raid on a Mexican jail that freed 14 American prisoners in 1976.

The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that, among other things, the trial judge did not question the jury closely enough to see if anyone was influenced by the extensive news coverage of the event.

The case involved the convictions of William McCoy Hill, 32, and Sterling Lake Davis Sr., both of Dallas.

During their trial, Donald Fielden, 29, a burly ex-Marine, testified that Davis financed the raid to get his son out of the Piedras Negras jail, across the border from Eagle Pass.

He and Hill were found guilty only of a law which forbids someone who knows he is doing it to carry a sawed-off shotgun across the U.S.-Mexico border.

"There was ample evidence that Davis knew that Hill intended to use a sawed-off shotgun," the court ruled. "But only a sawed-off shotgun with a barrel less than 18 inches long is proscribed by the Munitions List, and it is much less clear that Davis ever knew that Fielden had shortened the barrel to under 18 inches.

"The undisputed evidence was that Davis never saw the gun."

The ruling also said, "The District Court erred in not undertaking a more thorough examination of those panel members exposed to publicity."

"Under the circumstances of this case, where the nature of the publicity as a whole raised a significant possibility of prejudice, the cursory questioning by the court was not enough."

Request

Giving the case added significance is a standing request by the Mexican government for the extradition of the men in the raid.

Fielden, who said he masterminded the raid, testified he was paid \$5,000 by Davis and several thousand dollars by other prisoners. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to four years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

The main object of the raid was to free Davis' son, who was being held on a drug charge. Fielden said he, Hill and Billy Jack Blackwell, 19, held Mexican guards at gunpoint and released the prisoners. They then crossed the Rio Grande into Eagle Pass and turned themselves in to U.S. authorities.

San Antonio attorney Gerald Goldstein, who represented Hill, said, "We are very excited about the ruling."

Goldstein, who said he had not yet seen the opinion, stated:

"I hope they (the U.S. government) take a good hard look at this so as not to further what has been done to these people's lives. These people did what they had to do to release those in jail who didn't deserve to be there."

The Express-News unsuccessfully attempted to contact members of the U.S. attorney's office.