

York region officers cleared at hearing

By JULIE CASPERSEN
Staff Reporter

Evidence does not support charges against two officers accused of writing a racial slur while at a training course, says the trials officer at their hearing.

Constables Randy Porter and Brent Stitt were charged eight months ago with disobeying an order after two race relations trainers complained the officers wrote "niggers" on a flip chart.

The men left a disciplinary hearing yesterday afternoon after sitting through four days of testimony from fellow officers. Witnesses said the word made them uncomfortable and embarrassed.

Const. Keith Merith testified yesterday morning that during a race relations workshop he conducted last Jan. 31 Porter was the author of an acronym that spelled niggers.

Merith said he was "flabbergasted" by the acronym. "I looked at the acronym and the class laughing and it hit me like a ton of bricks," he said. "As a black officer and an instructor in the class I felt the acronym was a slam at me."

Merith said Porter was asked to explain his acronym by Sgt. Denyse Ross, who is also named as a complainant. But Merith said Porter's explanation was not good enough. "He spoke but he made no sense."

Trials officer Insp. James Adams

dismissed the charges before the defence started its case. He said there was no basis for the charge against Stitt. Adams ruled that although Porter breached the Police Services Act, there was no misconduct "due to the circumstances."

Defence counsel Charles Bourgeois had argued throughout the hearing that a race relations training course is a place where officers can vent their feelings and opinions without repercussion or penalty.

Porter and Stitt have taken time off from policing due to stress.

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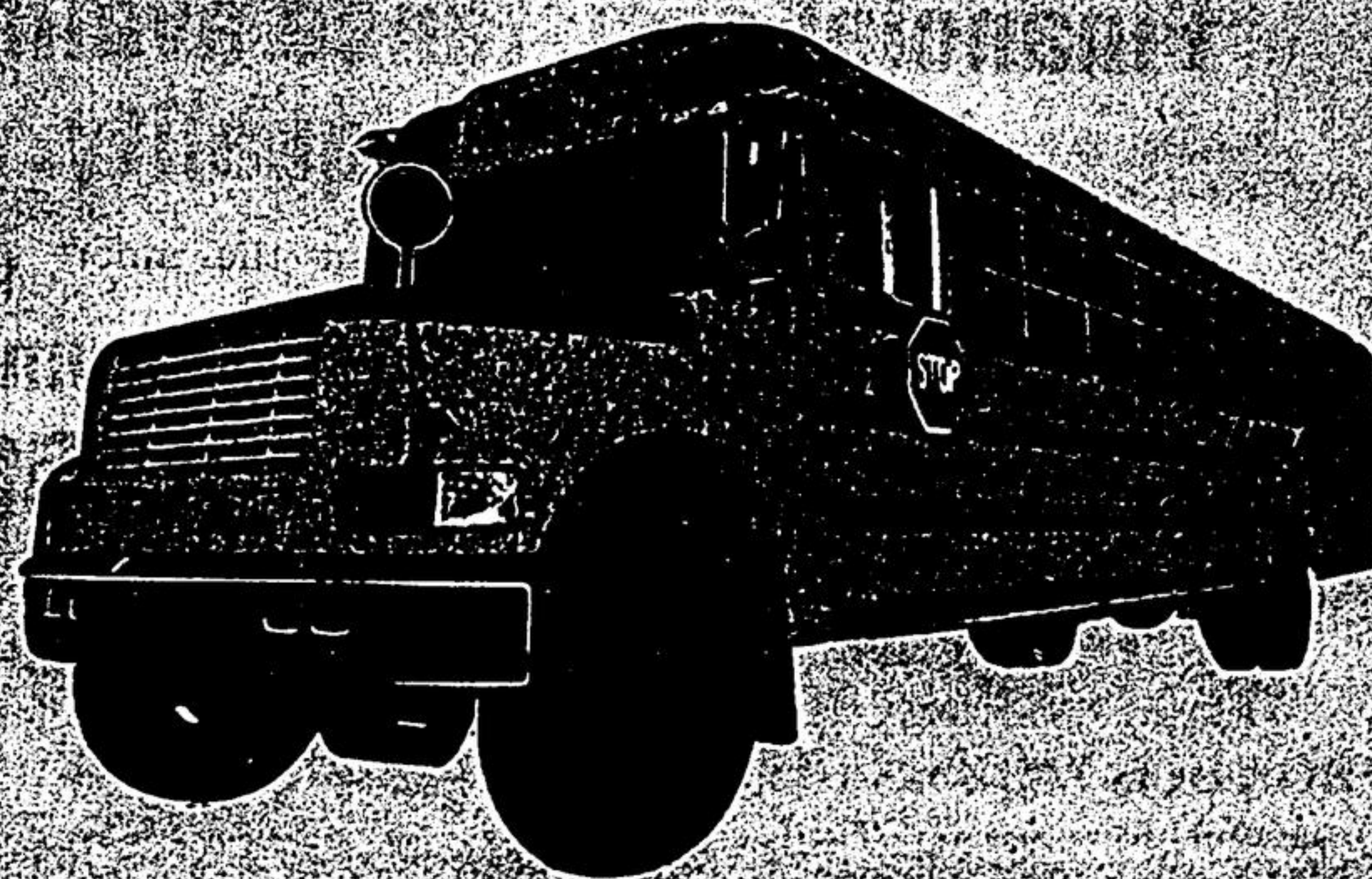
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