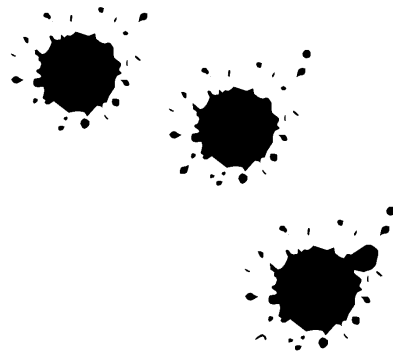


Part I

“They went to their deaths, their faces to the front, guns in their hands. In all the annals of preservation of the peace there is no story that runs more gallantly than this—the knocking upon the door of a house where they knew death might await them, their carrying on the battle till every man but one was dead or wounded.”

—*The Springfield Leader*, January 4, 1932



CHAPTER ONE

Horror Show



“Blazing guns bellowed a savage hymn of hate as manhunters ringed a killer’s lair, bent on avenging a comrades’s murder.

“But the law, battling to the death, could not stand against the murderous fire.

“Here is a gripping eye-witness account of the sensational affray, climaxed by an unforgettable coup which outrivals fiction.”

—“I Survived Missouri’s Posse Massacre” by Detective Frank Pike
Startling Detective Adventures Magazine

The sheriff thought the Youngs had probably escaped. Tony Oliver and Ollie Crosswhite were more cautious.

“Go easy,” Crosswhite advised, “This is a bad gang. They will shoot it out, if they are in there.”

The sheriff chuckled. Like most of the men of the Ozark hills, he had no idea of fear.

“Then they’re going to have some shooting to do,” he said. “Toss some gas bombs in those top windows. That should bring them out.”

The bombs were tossed. We waited. No results.

“Let’s go in boys,” the sheriff said.”

For the price of a quarter, Ma Young would show you who fell where. Sheriff Hendrix’s body was found in her kitchen. Ollie Crosswhite was behind the storm cellar. Tony Oliver managed to drag himself over to the fence line before he died. Sid Meadows and Charlie Houser were in the front yard, both with holes in their foreheads. When relief finally arrived, Wiley Mashburn was sitting up outside the house, his face shot off, but still alive—though not for long.

Two others, Virgil Johnson and Ben Bilyeu, made it to one of the cars parked in the front yard; both were wounded, but ambulatory.

Johnson scrambled behind the wheel, hell bent on getting out of the killing yard. Virgil threw the car in reverse gear, roaring backwards down the dirt lane to the east-west farm road, frantically working the gearshift into drive, pressing the accelerator to the floorboard in the direction of Springfield and reinforcements.

That left two, Frank Pike and Owen Brown, cowering behind soft maple trees, both out of ammunition. They heard a voice from the house say, "Throw down your guns and come in here. We are going to kill you if you don't." Pike and Brown threw down their guns, alright—but lit out in the opposite direction, zigzagging and dodging bullets until reaching the relative safety of Haseltine Road. There they paced anxiously, waiting for help that seemed an eternity in arriving.

Virgil Johnson, "the lone messenger on whose successful mission rested the lives of his companions," had run into problems of his own. Johnson was said to be a very intense fellow, easily startled. He had braved death just getting to the car in the first place—birdshot hitting him in the ankle, windshield glass exploding around him. Unbeknownst to Virgil, Ben Bilyeu had taken refuge behind the driver's seat on the floor. Johnson was having quite enough challenge holding himself together as it was. With some distance between them and the farm, Bilyeu rose up and said, "Boy, we sure had a close call back there, didn't we?"—whereupon Virgil ran the car off the road. That's one version.²

When reinforcements finally did come dribbling down Haseltine Road from Springfield, they found Pike and Brown on foot. Frank and Owen were quite sure the others were all dead. The farmhouse was occupied by an army of men, and anyone approaching was sure to be killed, too, which served as disincentive to approaching the farmhouse.

In town that night, *Frankenstein* was opening at the fabulous Fox-Gillioz theatre, Boris Karloff starring in the role of the monster. While Karloff didn't have many lines, it was a talking-picture, still quite the novelty. As reported in the *Springfield Press*, "Springfield apparently likes its evening's gory for after the excitement of the slaying Saturday night, long lines formed at the box office and the audience simply lapped it up."³

But nothing on the screen at the Fox-Gillioz could compare to the real life horror six miles east of Springfield, described by "Edward Eddy"⁴ in Springfield's *Sunday News & Leader*:

Deep crimson seams bordered the western horizon of the fading

gray sky. Knots of silent men clotted the lane leading through the plowed fields to the house and barn that had been the home of Mother Young and her beastly brood. No man stood nearer than a hundred yards of the buildings—the house ahead of them to their left, looming dimly in the twilight, the darker bulk of the barn ahead to their right.

None knew what had happened—but the air was thick with a sense of nameless terror. None knew what lay ahead in the shadows of the lightless buildings. Each man hesitated to venture into those shadows. There was no leader—none to shout a rallying cry for a rush into the graveyard of unburied dead.

And this was before anyone saw what was left of Mashburn.

The first rescuers at the farmhouse must have resembled the villagers in the Karloff film, huddled together at the mouth of the lane leading up to the gloaming castle. It was an ad hoc group of officers and citizens. One of the first to arrive was an auto dealer. There was, in fact, no leader. Given that four of his men were among the rumored dead, Springfield Chief of Police Ed Waddle might have been expected to lead the charge, but the chief chose to remain in town at his desk. With “none to shout a rallying cry,” even as their numbers increased into the dozens and then hundreds, the villagers could not bring themselves to go up that pathway where the monster might be waiting.

And in all fairness, if the creature had slain men such as Ollie Crosswhite, Tony Oliver, and Marcell Hendrix, what chance did these others have? Tony Oliver had once bested crazed-killer Dob Adams. Mashburn was a veteran fighter, who that very morning had defeated another set of gangsters. It was said that Crosswhite would “fight a buzz saw.”⁵ If the buzz saw up at the farmhouse had destroyed Ollie and the rest of the best of local law enforcement, this leaderless collection of merchants, reporters, non-ranking officers, and farmers could hardly be blamed for keeping its distance.

Among the exceptions was Lon Scott, who had been at police headquarters when Johnson and Bilyeu came roaring into town, “exclaiming that they wanted more ammunition and more help because several of the officers had been shot and some killed.” Officer Waite Phillips ran for his Chevrolet Sedan, Scott jumped in beside him. Other passengers included Detective Grover White, auto dealer Sam Herrick Jr. and Roscoe Gaylor. “We were nearly killed on the way out,” reported Scott, “when [Phillips] vaulted a railroad track.”

Lon Scott was well known in the Ozarks. Following his service in

the Great War and assorted newspaper gigs, Scott was hired as public relations director for the fledgling National U.S. 66 Highway Association. The challenge was formidable: Route 66 went online with “warnings about deep sand traps, soft shoulders, washouts, deep ruts.”

In an “era of flag-pole sitting, barnstorming and marathon dances,” it was Lon Scott who visioned the “Bunion Derby”—a transcontinental foot-race from one end of his highway, Los Angeles, to the other, Chicago, then on to New York—a total distance of 3,422 miles. Two hundred seventy-five entrants paid \$100 a piece to compete for a \$25,000 first prize. The race started on March 4, 1928, ending eighty-seven days and 573 hours of actual running time later.⁶

On the evening of January 2, 1932, the creator of the Bunion Derby made a much shorter but vastly more harrowing walk, from the huddled cluster of men at the farm lane to a crest some yards west and north, in the direction of the white, wood-frame fortress. From his war experience, Scott recognized a good place to reconnoiter. Having reached the swell, the journalist/public-relations man dared to stand and take a look.

In front of him was the two-story, wood-frame farmhouse, the length of which ran north to south, the front door facing east. A car was parked at the fence line separating the front yard from the vehicle turnaround area, the auto’s unlit headlights staring at the front porch. To the right and some yards north of the house was a barn, much larger than the house itself. The barn door was open and Scott could see another car inside. A few yards south and east of the barn, directly across from the farmhouse, was a smaller outbuilding that would be variously described as a tool shed or machine shed. To Scott’s left was “a long low building”—the poultry house.

From this position, Scott was viewing the rear of the farmhouse. The back door was wide open. “Between the house and myself,” he wrote, “I could make out plainly a wood pile consisting of poles and small logs.”

Scott went back to the mouth of the farm lane. The number of would-be rescuers continued to increase, ambulances were arriving from Springfield, but no one was showing any inclination to advance in the direction of the lair. Lon Scott sought out Officer Lee Jones. “I said, ‘Lee, how much guts have you got?’ He replied, ‘By G— as much as you have.’”

Earlier that afternoon, Lee Jones had assumed he would be in on the raid with Oliver, Hendrix, and the others, but the former barber was

assigned instead to the task of cutting hospitalized Officer Oscar Lowe's hair. Perhaps the deployment was Waddle's idea, or maybe Oliver's. Either way, Jones was more than a little miffed, begging Tony Oliver to wait for him. Oliver did not wait. While his friends were dying, Lee Jones had been absent with leave; here was a chance to make amends.⁷

So began the tribulations of Lon Scott and Lee Jones. The two men made a second foray to the crest. Seeing no movement and encouraged that no one was shooting at them, Scott and Jones approached "slowly through the corn stalks." This being January, it is doubtful that the "stalks" provided much if any concealment. Out of the stalks, into the wide open, Scott made a dash toward the pole pile, but tripped on his own overcoat, falling on his face in the open field.

That's when he heard the "Uhhmn!"—as if someone was clearing his throat. "Uhhmn!" Like the monster in the movie. By his own estimate, Scott lay there fifteen or twenty minutes, "Every few seconds it seemed like I could hear this 'Uhhmn!'"

Scott's first person narrative was published in the *Springfield Press*:

Finally I decided to try and locate Lee Jones or to find out who else was anywhere near but I did not dare stand up so I let out a good old fashioned war whoop.

Lee Jones hollered, "Is that you Scott?"

I hollered, "Where are you Lee?"

He yelled back, "In the cornfield, where are you?"

I answered, "Close to the pole pile."

He yelled, "Can you hear or see anybody?"

I said, "A man has me cornered at the pole pile."

He said, "What will we do?"

I said, "Let's run for the chicken house."

He said, "Is there anybody in it?"

I said, "No."

He said, "All right, let's go," and in a crouched position I made for it as fast as I could go.

When I reached [the poultry house], he was already behind it and was looking through the cracks inside. We stood erect and Lee said, "Lon, what are we going to do?"

I said, "We have to get to that pole pile before we can see anything. There is a man there but he hasn't got anything probably but a shotgun."

We peeked around the end of the chicken house but could see nothing move anywhere between the wood pile and the house. Lee said, "Do you think it's the thing to do to make a cover back of the poles?"

I said, "I'm willing to try it if you are."

He said, "By G— I'll go, how will we make the run?"

I replied, "I know more about the lay than you do. I'll go first and you follow. Let me have your shotgun."

He said, "All right, but there is only one shell and I haven't any more ammunition. Give me your rifle." He took the rifle and examined it and said, "How does this work?"

I said, "Just like any other bolt-action high-powered rifle."

He moved the bolt back to load and then to cock, held the rifle up and pulled the trigger to see that it worked. Nothing happened. He said, "That is a d— fine gun to have in a place like this."

I said, "Let me have it," and I tried to shoot it off but the trigger was broken, so we were on the spot with one shotgun shell between us.

Lee said, "Now what are we going to do?"

I said, "I don't know, we might as well have a crate of tomatoes," and he said, "Yes, or two ice cream cones."

We decided to make the dash for the pole pile with me in the lead carrying the shotgun with the trigger cocked. When we got ready we both lit out and instead of following me, Jones actually passed me on the way and slid behind the poles ahead. We got our breath on our hands and knees and soon heard this "Uhhmn." We awaited and heard it again, then quietly we crawled to the east end of the pole pile and through some openings we could see a man sitting outside the kitchen door swaying forward and back.

Lee said, "Lon, that is one of our boys."⁸

It was, in fact, Wiley Mashburn, face blown off, passing his left hand in front of sightless eyes. War veteran Scott described it as "the most ghastly wound that has ever been my experience to look upon":

It seemed like someone had taken a long heavy knife and cut Mr. Mashburn's head just below the brow deep in his skin because his eyes and his nose were hanging down over his mouth on his chin and he was running the fingers of his left hand through the open wound.

Having expended all this time and tension stalking a dying officer, Scott and Jones were no longer restrained in shouting for help. The first response from down the lane was, "Go to hell." But there was movement now. "Men leaped upon the [ambulance] running boards, their shotguns dangling dangerously. The driver meshed his gears. Then men on the sides of the car bent their heads to the charge. 'Come on now, all you home town heroes. Let's get in there.'"⁹

As Scott and Jones made their cautious approach through the fields, reporter Frank Rhodes dared the lane itself, in the company of Springfield contractor Ralph Langdon and dairyman E.L. "Bun" Barrett. Langdon carried a borrowed rifle; Bun was armed only with a flashlight. Rhodes would tell his readers that "We stopped a little way from the house. It was dark by now and the moon was coming up. I walked about 15 feet and stumbled over something. It was the body of Oliver."

Fifteen or twenty feet away, "feeble moonlight" revealed Charlie Houser. When Bun Barrett shone the flashlight on Houser, Sid Meadows was illuminated beside him.

A figure walked toward them out of the darkness. Frank Rhodes later said, "The flashlight was put upon him, and he was commanded to put up his hands. It was Lon Scott."¹⁰

More movement, someone was coming around the corner from the back of the house. Guns pointed in that direction. "Don't shoot!" Young J.T. Hulsman had located Ollie Crosswhite in the brush behind the cellar, the body "doubled up with the arms clasped around the knees." Which left only Hendrix unaccounted for. Could he somehow still be alive?

Lon Scott had seen the back door "wide open," but that was deceptive. This door opened on to a utility room. Between the utility room and kitchen was another door, barricaded shut. By now, the hometown heroes were on the scene in full force. The front door was finally breached, a gas bomb thrown inside. Some were saying they ought to just go ahead and torch the place, but cooler heads prevailed. Hendrix might be inside, and the flames would make silhouette targets of them all.

The gas cleared. "Men went into the littered house. Men's feet slipped in blood. Men's feet stumbled over a crumpled form." The form was Sheriff Marcel Hendrix, whose day had started with a daring raid on bootleggers in nearby Ash Grove, standing in the middle of main street, pouring prohibited beverage onto the pavement, and ended with his own life's blood poured out onto a neighbor's linoleum floor. "Overhead a million million stars gleamed coldly, clearly in the black dome of the shattered night."¹¹ It had been the single most disastrous episode in the history of American law enforcement and would remain so until September 11, 2001.

But where were the doers of this monstrous deed?

Mary Shelley described the Modern Prometheus of Dr. Frankenstein's creation: "Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that

countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as the wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished: he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.”¹²

In this story, the monster is a 5'6" runt of a man, prematurely bald.

The wretch had a brother—four of them, actually—each his elder. One participated in the depravity of this Saturday afternoon—he *more* than participated. The older brother was certainly the more capable of the two; a hardened criminal when the fiend was still being created. But it's as if this family had been an unwitting genetic and behavioral laboratory, producing a graduated series of male progeny, each more dangerous than the one before. It was only with the fifth and final of the line that a taste for human blood was acquired.

What was said in the *Springfield Press* review of the Karloff film is equally appropriate to this story: “If you want hysterics, here it is.”