

Officer Killed in Gun Fight with Burglar

Fort Worth Thug Dies from Wounds

Copyright The Daily Ardmoreite

Ardmore, Oklahoma

Thursday, December 22, 1960

By John Griffith, Staff Writer

A young Ardmore policeman was shot to death and a Fort Worth burglar mortally wounded in a hail of bullets early this morning at the rear of Sooner Foods Store, 1213 N. Washington St.

Bobby Rudisill, 29, of 803 6th Ave. SW, was dead on arrival at an Ardmore hospital shortly after 1 a.m. after being wounded during a burglary investigation.

A gunman was pinned down in an upstairs room containing air conditioning units at the rear of the supermarket. Police, sheriff's deputies and highway patrolmen raked the room with sub-machine gun and rifle fire and lobbed several tear gas shells into the interior.

After the shooting, the stocking-capped thug was found near the door face-down in a pool of blood, and a .45 caliber automatic piston with an empty cartridge jammed in the ejection release lay nearby.

The man, identified as Arnold K. Jernigan, 28, Ft. Worth, died from a head wound at 5:46 a.m. at an Ardmore hospital.

Arrested near the Skyview Drive in on US Highway 70 some two hours after the shooting was Jerry Milo Brown, 24, Fort Worth. He denied any connection with the burglary or shooting. City and county authorities were continuing to question him this morning.

Chief of Police Ott Welch reported this morning that the sheriff's office in Fort Worth has suspected Jernigan of leading a burglary gang, operating out of Jernigan's home with four automobiles and a pickup truck.

The Texas authorities said the cars and approximately six men closely associated with Jernigan have been gone from Ft. Worth for a week. They were suspected to be operating in Oklahoma, the report indicated.

Jernigan has served a prison sentence for a 1954 bank robbery in Oklahoma, has been convicted of burglary and "has a record a mile long," Sheriff Gerald Theo Cobb said.

The violence here began when Jim Redd, an elderly night watchman at the supermarket, heard "thumping" noises at the rear of the store. Discovering the telephone had been put out of commission, he hailed a passing motorist who located a squad car at the post office.

Patrolmen Robert Neasbitt and Rudisill reached the top of the steps leading to the motor room. Neasbitt said Rudisill crouched at the door and called out for the burglar to come out.

A shot was fired from inside, Rudisill lurched but managed to fire two shots before he crumpled against Neasbitt and fell headlong down the stairs. Neasbitt emptied his pistol into the room and jumped from the second-story stair landing.

A former deputy sheriff, Ira Wells, Ardmore, heard the shooting, and raced to the steps. He picked up the critically wounded patrolman's pistol and fired into the air-conditioning room while Neasbitt radioed for assistance.

First to arrive was Deputy Pete Fair who poured 40 rounds of fire from a carbine into the unlighted room. Fair then opened up with a .45 caliber Thompson sub-machine gun.

Other officers fired into the room and police slammed tear gas shells through the door. There was no return of fire and the hoodlum was found, bundled in several layers of clothes, unconscious.

Smithers, who found the murder weapon, declared if the pistol's mechanism hadn't jammed, Neasbitt would probably have been shot.

Rudisill and Neasbitt were rushed to the hospital where Neasbitt was treated for ankles injured in the jump from the lofty platform.

In the un-heated power-room police found a set of burglary tools including a heavy-duty power drill of the type used cracking safes. A large hole had been nearly completed through to the interior of the store.

Searching for an accomplice, Deputy John Smithers discovered a car parked on the shoulder of US Highway 70 some two miles east of Ardmore. He passed it, radioed for assistance and turned to follow the vehicle as it started up and traveled toward Ardmore.

Fair arrived and teamed up with Smithers to halt the vehicle. Fair leveled a shotgun on the driver while Smithers handcuffed him. The shotgun was empty since all of the shells were fired in the supermarket melee.

The car driven by Brown contained a 30-30 lever-action rifle, a box of .45 caliber cartridges, a crowbar and tools and a power too handle believed to match the drill found in the riddled supermarket room. Also found was a blue stocking hat, identical to the one worn by Jernigan.

Brown told officers he had driven from Oklahoma City and was enroute to Fort Worth. He did not admit being connected with the crime. "I guess the best thing for me to do is not to say anything," the tight-lipped subject drawled.

He gave his occupation as "a skindiver and a bartender." A receipt in his billfold indicated he had recently paid over \$500 cash for an automobile.

Few personal affects were found on the body of Jernigan, but his billfold contained three new \$100 bills.

Sooner Foods manager James R. Howe said the store's safe had contained a full day's receipts.

He said five of the nine refrigeration compressors in the power room were out of commission as a result of the gunfire that riddled the room.

Repairmen were at work on the equipment during pre-dawn hours this morning. Howe said some refrigeration was still working and perishable items could be stored in these units.

The dead patrolman joined the Ardmores force May 16, 1960. He was married and father of a 2 year old son. Rudisill had also been a policeman in Durant, the city where Jernigan also was reared.

Jernigan and Brown are well known police characters in Fort Worth, where Lt. Detective George Hawkins said, "We've been handling those two since they were teenagers."

"They have been in and out of jails since that time," Hawkins said.

Jernigan's police record includes a five year prison term in connection with a bank holdup near Durant, prison terms at the El Reno Reformatory and Federal House of Correction at Seagoville, Texas, and San Pedro, Calif.

Jernigan was also a parole violator and was returned to a California prison in 1958.

Brown, a suspected accomplice, has been charged on numerous occasions for vagrancy and illegal possession of barbiturates, Texas authorities said.

Officer Describes Fatal Gun Battle

Copyright The Daily Ardmoresite

Ardmore, Oklahoma

Thursay, December 22, 1960

By Mike Kraft, Staff Writer

"I've got to see Sue. I don't know what to tell her. I want to give her some of Bobby's things."

Those were the words of Robert Neasbitt, Ardmore police officer and partner of Bobby Rudisill, 29, who was killed this morning in a gun battle with an ex-convict at the Sooner Foods store 1213 North Washington St.

Sue is the wife of Rudisill.

Mrs. Rudisill was notified of the tragedy after she got home from Lake Murray Lodge where she is an employee.

Neasbitt, who injured both ankles, his right one, severely, told of the dramatic even that started at 12:40 a.m. today.

"We proceeded to the area immediately. When we got there, Bobby asked me to check a car that was parked there and he went into the front of the store with the nightwatchman."

The nightwatchman was Jim Redd, whose duties also included maintenance and shelf restocking.

"Moments later that nightwatchman came running out to me and said my partner wanted me to meet him in the back of the store."

Neasbitt said he whipped the police cruiser around to within 10 feet of the back door and the steps which led to a power room where air conditioning and electric equipment for the store are located.

"Bobby had checked the aisles in the store and had gone to the back door when he heard a chiseling noise. That is when he sent the watchman out to get me to help him," Neasbitt said.

"He (Rudisill) started up the steps to the doorway, (The doorway with a wooden door led to the power room). I was one step behind Bobby. When we got to the top of the stairs at the landing we spotted this guy (Jernigan). Bobby shouted, "Come out of there with your hands up!"

"He then crouched but at the same time this guy began firing his gun. Suddenly I felt Bobby fall against me as he fired two shots from his gun. I fired mine until it was empty. The next thing I knew Bobby was falling down the steps.

"I leaped to the ground and ran to the car to get help."

The leap from the top of the 12 to 17 foot stairs apparently is when Neasbitt injured both ankles. Today he was on crutches.

"While I was radioing for help, Ira Wells appeared and grabbed Bobby's gun out of his hand. He emptied it into the door of the room."

Wells, a former Carter County deputy sheriff and now an employee for a trucking firm, was going to work when he heard the shooting.

He parked his car in front of the grocery market and ran to the west end of the building where the shooting was taking place.

It was then he found Rudisill lying on the steps unconscious.

"Ira emptied Bobby's gun and by that time Deputy Sheriff Pete Fair got there and began firing his carbine at the door. Ira pulled Bobby off the steps while Pete fired his gun," Neasbitt continued.

"Bobby and I were then taken to the hospital," Neasbitt said.

"Boy it's rough," he declared in summing up the tragic experience.

Ardmore Police Chief Ott Welch, visibly shaken at the loss of one of his men, said, "They were killers." Welch meant Jernigan and accomplices believed to have taken part in the attempted burglary.

"If they had succeeded in getting into the store, they would have killed the nightwatchman," Welch said.

One veteran police officer at the scene sadly remarked in behalf of all officers in Ardmore, "How can it be a Merry Christmas for us?"

Suspect Gives Self Up To Fort Worth Police

Second Man Sought In Slaying Here

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Ardmore, Oklahoma

Friday, December 23, 1960

BULLETIN

Melvin Thomas Renfro, 37, the last man at large who was believed involved in the killing of an Ardmore police officer and burglary here Thursday was arrested in a Fort Worth cafe at 2:15 p.m. today. City police made the arrest, according to police Capt. O.A. Brown.

A Texas ex-convict arrested in Ft. Worth at 11 a.m. today denied he had participated in the supermarket burglary here Thursday morning that resulted in the death of an Ardmore policeman and a Ft. Worth hoodlum.

Horace Burt Mullins, 21, charged with burglary and the object of a police hunt, was arrested by Tarrant County sheriff's department investigators. He was in the office of his attorney, across the street from the sheriff's office.

Mullins said he was in Ft. Worth the night of the burglary, "drinking a few beers." He made the statement in the office of his attorneys.

Still sought in the slaying here is Melvin Thomas Renfro, 37, also of Ft. Worth. Mullins said the day before the burglary "Keith Jernigan and John Milo Brown" came by his home and wanted to borrow his car so Jernigan could take some Christmas presents to his family in Durant.

"Keith had his car in the shop for repairs and he gave me \$10 to pay cab fares while he had my car - a 1955 Pontiac," Mullins said. The Pontiac owned by Mullins was impounded here as the auto used by the burglars.

Its driver, Jerry Milo Brown, 24, Ft. Worth, was arrested east of Ardmore some two hours after the killing of Patrolman Bobby Rudisill, 29, who was investigating the supermarket burglary.

Mullins admitted he had known Jernigan for some time and had known Brown and Renfro for about one month. He said he had drunk beer with them on several occasions.

He refused to say in which tavern he had drunk beer and one of this lawyers said he wanted to check "those places first." Mullins said he spent the night at his home with his wife and two children.

"The ex-convict said his grandmother called him Thursday morning and told him two detectives had been to his home seeking him. "That's the first I heard about it," he said. "When members of my family started receiving telephone calls that I was going to be shot on sight I began to hide out," he explained.

"I imagine Renfro has been out too, and I guess he will come in and surrender," he said.

He said he would fight extradition to Oklahoma. Mullins' bond was set at \$20,000. He was charged as a fugitive from justice.

Carter County Attorney Jim Payne said he would start extradition proceedings immediately.

At 1 p.m. today Brown's wife arrived in Ardmore to attempt to post bail for her husband.

Brown pleaded not guilty to second burglary charges in the JP court of G.W. Puny Sparger late Thursday. Bond was set at \$10,000 and a local bondsman refused \$500 cash to put up the bond.

Sheriff's office deputies reported today a Mannsville restaurant owner Thursday identified pictures of Brown, Renfro and Mullins. He said the three spent two hours in his all night cafe late Wednesday night.

Questioned by local authorities Thursday, Brown admitted taking part in the burglary but denied he had been involved in the shooting.

G.W. Burks, Texas Ranger from Dallas, said Brown admitted owning the .25 caliber pistol found in the bullet riddled room at the rear of the supermarket. He said Arnold Jernigan took the gun with him when he entered the power room at the store.

Jernigan, 28, originally from Durant but making his home in Ft. Worth was mortally wounded by rifle and sub-machine gun fire from police, highway patrolmen and sheriff's deputies who blasted the power room after Rudisill was killed. The Ft. Worth ex- convict died of a head wound at 5:46 a.m. Thursday in a city hospital.

Sheriff's authorities from Gainesville, Texas, Thursday questioned Brown in connection with two safe burglaries in the nearby Texas city Wednesday night. Some \$230 was taken from two motor companies.

An autopsy here Thursday revealed Rudisill had been killed with a .25 caliber bullet. The murder weapon has not been found. A loaded .25 caliber pistol was found in the power room near the wounded burglar, an empty cartridge jammed in the ejection mechanism.

Authorities here are investigating the possibility of the death shot being fired from the roof of the food store. The bullet entered high on Rudisill's chest on the left side and penetrated to the right side of the body near the stomach.

Texas Ranger Lester Robertson, Dallas, said the four men had been followed by Rangers for more than a week in Texas and Oklahoma. He said all four are former convicts.

From information obtained at the sheriff's office here, Brown admitted the four men had left Ft. Worth for a specific purpose of burglarizing the food store.

The burglary charges were filed by County Attorney Jim Payne, following consultation with Ott Welch, police chief, and Gerald Cobb, county sheriff. Texas Rangers also agreed to the charges as preliminary legal action. The complaint was signed by Welch.

Patrolman Robert Neasbitt and Rudisill were summoned to the supermarket at 12:50 a.m. Thursday by a night watchman, Jim Redd. They walked up the outside concrete stairs and Rudisill called through the open door of the power room.

A shot was fired, originally believed to have come from within the room, and Rudisill fired twice, lurched against Neasbitt and then fell down the stairs. Neasbitt emptied his pistol into the room and jumped from the landing.

A former deputy sheriff, Ira Wells, was passing the market at the time of the shooting and picked up the wounded officer's pistol. He fired into the power room while Neasbitt radioed for assistance.

Brown was later arrested by deputies John Smithers and Pete Fair. He had been parked facing the city some two miles east of Ardmore on US Highway 70 and had started driving back toward the city.

In later testimony, according to the sheriff's office, Brown said he was to pick up the trio at the supermarket at 3 a.m. If they hadn't completed the job, he was to come back one-half hour later, he said.

Policeman's Fund Now Over \$2,100

Copyright The Daily Ardmoreite

Friday, December 23, 1960

Ardmore, Oklahoma

The fund for the Bobby Rudisill family soared over \$2,100 today when numerous donations from city firms and individuals.

Rudisill, a member of the Ardmore Police Department for seven months, was slain early Thursday while investigating a burglary of Sooner Foods.

Sooner Foods started the fund with a \$1,000 donation. Other contributions have poured into the Daily Ardmoreite office. Donations may be made in person or mailed to the Ardmoreite office, Box 1959.

Latest contributions include J. Ray Carson, John Hefley, Burney Lang, John Boryk, Reavis Drug, S.M. Lackey, Tyler and Simpson Co., J.T. Nutting, Kleins, Jimmie Lamer, Guys & Dolls, Burke G. Mordy, J. C. Wilkes, Ardmore Plumbing Supply Co., Daily Ardmoreite Publishing Co., Radio Station KVSQ, Tommy Chapman, Paul Morrell, Hazel Fonville, James L. Dolman.

Bill Hallet, C.W. VanEaton, Exchange National Bank, Jack Conroy, H.L. Caton, Carl Holden, Sam McDaniel, Mrs. Maud R. Tomlinson, Kenny Day, Dyer & Dyer, Mike Massad, Edna McCarty, Quinton Little, Sam P. Hale, Dutch Ledbetter, Harold G. Dexter, First National Bank, James W. Williams, Matt Alexander, T.I. Sanders, Charles Milner, Ray Scrugham, E.J. Watkins, Chester W. Rollins, Scottas, Dibrill's Radio Service, Hardy Murphy, Pesi-Cola Co., Frank Thomas, Elks Club, 7 Up Bottling Co., Finestone Bros., Harris Drug, W.F. McAfee, Buchanan, Tanner, Dalrymple, Mr. and Mrs. Bryce Williams, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene McLain and a number of anonymous donations.

Other donors include J. Lee Davis, Tommy Tudor, Lincoln Income Life Ins. employees, Mrs. M.E. Sillers, Mrs. Amelia Hall, Daubes employees, Mr. and Mrs. V.S. Watson, Mr. and Mrs. O. R. Bridges.

Policeman's Fund Now Over \$2,100

Copyright The Daily Ardmoreite

Sunday, December 25, 1960

Ardmore, Oklahoma

Last Suspect Held In Police Slaying

The second suspect sought in the killing of Ardmore Patrolman Bobby Rudisill and attempted burglary of Sooner Foods Store here surrendered to Ft. Worth police Friday and later that day was released on a \$10,000 fugitive's bond.

The ex-convict, Melvin Thomas Renfro, 37, met officers at a cafe just outside of Ft. Worth. The meeting was set up by two attorneys of the suspect.

Reports of a Ft. Worth newspaper saying Renfro has a broken arm and leg "from jumping form the second story of the store (Sooner Foods) to get away" where apparently incorrect.

In touch with the Tarrant County sheriff's office Saturday, the Daily Ardmoreite learned Renfro had a badly bruised wrist and hip. Renfro said he must have injured the wrist at the garage where he works as a mechanic, the sheriff's office reported.

Earlier Friday afternoon, Horace Burt Mullins, 24, sought in the same case, surrendered to sheriff's office investigators at the office of his attorneys. He is still in Tarrant County jail with bond set at \$20,000.

Mullins said he was drunk in Ft. Worth at the time of the gun battle here, but couldn't say where. A fourth suspect, Jerry Milo Brown, 24, was arrested east of Ardmore shortly after Patrolman Rudisill fell critically wounded from a hoodlum's bullet at the rear of the supermarket.

The .25 caliber weapon that apparently fired the fatal bullet has not been found. At the outset it was thought Arnold Keith Jernigan, 28, the ex-convict killed here in a sea of gunfire, had killed the policeman.

However, after Jernigan was slain the only gun found in the power room with the burglar was a .45 automatic pistol. Authorities now believe one or more men were on the roof of the supermarket and fled after the shooting of Rudisill to death.

Mullins and Renfro both denied they were in Ardmore at the time of the gun battle. Bearded and bleary eyed, Renfro claimed he had been on a two day drunk.

Both men were implicated by Brown, who was driving Mullin's car. Mullins told police that Jernigan and Brown came by his house the day before the burglary and borrowed his car so Jernigan could take some Christmas presents to his family in Durant.

He said he had drunk beer with Jernigan, Renfro and Brown on several occasions. He spent Wednesday evening with his family, he said.

Mullins said he would fight extradition to Oklahoma. County Attorney James D. Payne has initiated extradition proceedings for both Renfro and Mullins.

Brown still is jailed here in lieu of \$10,000 bond on the burglary charges.

Fort Worth police reported Brown and Jernigan had been handled by that department many times. Jernigan was pulled in for questioning just two weeks before the killing here.

He had served time in federal prison for a bank burglary at Colbert and also has served sentences in Texas, Oklahoma and California prisons.

Mullins served five stretches in the Training School for Boys, Gatesville, Texas, before "graduating" to Huntsville Prison on a forgery conviction. Renfro's record includes illegal possession of whisky, escape, bank robbery, bank burglary and burglary.

Brown's rap sheet included numerous arrests for vagrancy and for possession of narcotics.

Rudisill was shot around 1 a.m. Thursday when he and Patrolman Robert Neasbitt were summoned to the Sooner Foods Store to check a possible burglary. Rudisill had yelled through the open door of the darkened power room when the fatal shot rang out.

Police, highway patrolmen, and deputies led by Sheriff Gerald Theo Cobb raked the power room with over 200 rounds of fire from sub-machine guns, rifles, shotguns and pistols. Tear gas slugs were fired through the open door of the second story room.

Jernigan, clad in a stocking cap and heavy clothing, was found face down in a pool of blood near the doorway. The loaded .45 caliber pistol, an empty cartridge jammed in the ejection mechanism, was found nearby.

The ex-convict died at 5:46 a.m. in an Ardmore hospital.

Rudisill Fund Hits \$2,554

Copyright The Daily Ardmoreite

Sunday, December 25, 1960

Ardmore, Oklahoma

Contributions continued to pour into The Daily Ardmoreite office Saturday to benefit the family of Bobby Rudisill.

The fund reached \$2,554 Saturday. Donations may be made through The Daily Ardmoreite, in person or by mail at box 1959.

Latest contributions include: A.G. Whitehurst, Price Earhart, Union Local 670 of Ben Franklin Refinery, Sullivan Ins. Agency, Archie Moore Adjusting Co., Bob Chandler, Walter G. Reed, J.H. Hefley, P.F. Kruse, Jr., Okla. Gas & Electric Co., Baums, Okla. Morris Plan, Webbs Office Supply, Mr. and Mrs. C.A. Suggs, Greenbergs, Robert M. Jones, Clifton G. Whitchurch, Mr. and Mrs. Jim A. Elledge, J.A. Gray, A.E. Ewell.

Rudisill Fund Over \$3,000

Copyright The Daily Ardmoreite

Monday, December 26, 1960

Ardmore, Oklahoma

Contributions for the family of Bobby Rudisill passed the \$3,000 mark this morning as checks, currency and change continued to stream into The Daily Ardmoreite office.

Rudisill was shot to death in a gun battle at the Sooner Food Store here early Thursday morning. Sooner Foods kicked off the drive with a \$1,000 check.

The total today was \$3,055. Donations may be made through The Daily Ardmoreite, in person or by mail at Box 1959.

Latest contributors include:

Hills Shoes, John W. Bartley, Frank J. Herr, Geneva Wilkinson, Walter A. Beaudel, Jack Cross, Tommy Anastasio and employees of the Ardmore Fire Department.

Ardmoreite Carrier Helps Rudisill Fund

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Tuesday, December 27, 1960

Ardmore, Oklahoma

A Daily Ardmoreite carrier boy, who started his own Bobby Rudisill Fund, Monday afternoon turned in \$21.65 collected from other carriers to help boost the fund to \$3,225.90.

Joe Boatman, 14, son of Mrs. Billie Boatman, began collecting from carriers on this own initiative Friday and in three days contacted all but three street salesmen.

Boatman has been a Daily Ardmoreite carrier for only seven weeks.

Asked why he started the drive among fellow carriers, young Boatman replied, "My father died when I was only two. I know what it is to be without a father all your life."

Rudisill, Ardmore policeman slain in a gun battle with burglars at Sooner Food Store last Thursday morning, is survived by his wife, Betty Sue; a young son, 2«, and two step-daughters.

Boatman said his mother and Mrs. Rudisill were good friends as both work at the Lake Murray Lodge.

The young carrier has an older brother, Mike, 18.

He said his father, Robert Mark, died of a heart attack in Oklahoma City 12 years go and the family moved to Maysville to live with his grandparents.

They moved to Ardmore four years ago.

Other contributors to the fund include:

Sarah E. Swartz, McGoodwin Cleaners. Willis Tennyson, Mrs. Kathryn G. Cruce, Mrs. Howard P. Bevins, W.R. Johnson, Elva and Donna McMahan, The Daily Ardmoreite newsboys and Tom H. Hefley, W.L. Senter, Martin Drug Co., Gravitt Drug Co., Opal McAulay, Douglas Ponder, C. Schaefer, Lyndall McCrory, Charles Coe, Jim Castle, D.C. Fitzgerald and Ethel Bancroft.