

Howard Crumley Killed

Suspect Arraigned Near Lone Grove

Ardmore Pair Is Kidnapped And Released

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Ardmore, Oklahoma

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In a tragic slaying near Lone Grove about midnight last night, Highway Patrol Trooper Howard Crumley was killed with two blasts from his own service revolver, a .41 Magnum. It was to have been the last shift he worked before being transferred to a new assignment in Locust Grove.

Crumley, who lived in Healdton, was killed by a shot in the left temple and another in the heart. It is believed that he died instantly.

Roadblocks were thrown up almost immediately in all directions. The only clue officers had to work on was a blood smeared drivers license found next to Crumley's body. The name on the license was Hubert Wilkinson. The address was in Duncan.

About two and a half hours later, an Ardmore hospital reported to the Ardmore Police Department that Raymond Merle Wilkinson had just been admitted suffering from a gunshot wound to the head. Wilkinson, 26, is believed to have lived in Rush Springs. He died shortly afterward from the wound, which officers think was self inflicted.

With this evidence, officers were able to backtrack and piece together a bizarre chain of events that began about 3 p.m. Sunday they said, when the brothers left Duncan to pick up a girl friend.

Sometime later they went to the isolated home of an elderly man north of Comanche, officers said. There they tied the man so that his feet were drawn almost up to the back of his head, and apparently robbed him. The pair then took the man's own shotgun and blasted away with both barrels at this face.

Motive for that slaying had not been determined. District Attorney Burke Mordy said the pair had only about \$5 between them, possibly ruling out robbery as a motive.

Officers believe that the brothers drove immediately to the point where Crumley intercepted them about three miles west of Lone Grove on U.S. Highway 70.

Crumley apparently was running radar in the area. His radar unit was still on and the red and yellow lights on his patrol car were still flashing when a passing motorist saw him lying in a ditch and called patrol headquarters in Durant. The call was logged at 11:58 p.m. Crumley is believed to have died only moments earlier.

The first officers at the scene were Trooper Don Roush and field supervisor Lt. Charlie Townsend. They found Crumley lying on his back in the bar ditch in front of and to the right of his patrol car. His blood smeared hat and flashlight, still burning, were about two yards north of his feet.

The search began immediately, but was largely fruitless until the telephone call from the hospital. After that, things began falling into place.

It was learned that approximately an hour after Crumley was killed, two persons were kidnapped from their home east of Ardmore - they were Charles Walters and his sister, China Kay Hunley.

Walters was released shortly afterward, but Mrs. Hunley was ordered to drive the Wilkinson brothers around in her car for approximately two hours. Most of the driving was in the Lake Murray area.

The driving around ceased only after one of the brothers apparently turned a .22 caliber revolver on himself. Mrs. Hunley was then ordered by Hubert Wilkinson to take his brother to the hospital.

In the interim, other persons in the Walters home had notified police of the kidnapping and had furnished a description of the car.

After Mrs. Hunley and Wilkinson left the hospital, a security patrolman, Johnny Camp, spotted the car and followed it to a home about eight miles east of Ardmore, watched while Wilkinson got out and went inside the house. The home belonged to another brother, Melvin Wilkinson.

Camp stopped Mrs. Hunley, got her story and relayed it to police.

City police, county deputy sheriffs, and a swarm of highway patrol troopers converged on the house, surrounded it and took the pair without incident.

Kidnapping and murder charges were filed late this morning against Hubert Wilkinson. He was arraigned in the court of Judge Earl A. Brown.

He was brought to the courtroom with his hands cuffed behind his back and flanked by deputies. He sat silently staring ahead during most of the proceeding, speaking only once when he said, "I would like for the court to appoint me a counsel."

Judge Brown stated that an attorney would be appointed immediately and Wilkinson was led away.

His brother, Melvin Wilkinson, is being held as a material witness.

In a statement to the district attorney, Mrs. Hunley said the pair had told her they had shot a highway patrolman and another man that day.

As Mordy and his investigator, pieced together the story, they surmised that Crumley stopped the car on a routine traffic violation - probably speeding since the radar was turned on.

Palm prints clearly visible in the dust on the hood of the patrol car indicate that Crumley had the driver, probably Hubert Wilkinson, spread eagle for a possible weapons search.

It appears that while this was taking place, Ray Wilkinson got out of the car and pulled a gun on Crumley. Then one of them took the trooper's own revolver and killed him.

When arrested the pair had only a .22 automatic in their possession. Mrs. Hunley, however, led officers to a spot where several other weapons, including Crumley's service revolver, had been dumped at the roadside.

Crumley's body has been sent to the medical examiner's office in Oklahoma City for an autopsy. The body of Ray Wilkinson has been set to Ada for a post mortem.

More than 10 highway patrol units joined in the search and roadblocks. One trooper, Bob Perry, Ardmore, was injured when he attempted to stop traffic near the Red River bridge, but not believed to be serious. The runaway car also struck three vehicles.

Covering This One Different

By Kay Evers

Daily Ardmoreite Staff Writer

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The shrill jangling of a telephone in the middle of the night is not common at my house. As a police reporter, I am called on fires, wrecks, and other newsworthy incidents at all hours of the day and night.

So when my phone rang about 12:15 a.m. today, I thought little of it as I stumbled out of bed to answer it. When I picked it up, "A trooper has been shot west of Lone Grove."

This was the territory, I knew, of Trooper Howard Crumley and his new partner Jim Moody, and fear clutched at my heart. Knowing that the police department had little or no more information than they had already given me. I said anyway, "Who?" They didn't know.

With a growing feeling of foreboding, I dressed with shaky hands, backed my car out of the garage and headed for the scene.

Enroute, I kept telling myself that officers around here had been shot and shot at before during the three years that I've been on this beat and somehow they've all miraculously survived.

But I couldn't shake the growing feeling of apprehension.

Then I pulled up to the site, I saw two ambulance attendants standing quietly beside their ambulance and I knew. An injured man is rushed immediately to a hospital. Only when there is no need to rush do they stand idly by.

Feeling sick and weak in the knees, I got out of my car and walked over to the spot where a small group of men were gathered. And then I saw him, sprawled on the ground on his back, his arms resting peacefully at his sides, was Trooper Howard Crumley, one of the best friends I have ever had.

And I broke down. I've seen just about everything during my three years on the police beat, but until last night I'd never lost my cool. I sobbed openly on the shoulder of the nearest man in sight, county jailer Shorty Claxton, also a close friend of Howard.

Shorty stroked my hair as if I were a little girl, let me cry and said nothing.

Not until Howard's body had been covered and placed in the waiting ambulance could I force myself to make a token effort at doing what I was there to do - take pictures and gather information.

Howard Crumley was one of those truly unique persons who thoroughly enjoyed living - every minute of every day. He had a rare and wonderful sense of humor that delighted everyone it touched.

I'd known him three years and still I wasn't always sure when he was kidding. Seldom did he ever call in a story to me when it didn't give me two or three outrageous versions of it, before I finally managed to get the real facts from him.

Just last week, on one of the hottest days we've had this summer, he investigated an accident near Lone Grove. When he came into give me the facts, I casually asked him how it had happened.

He looked at me, the merest twitch of a smile on his face, and deadpanned, "He hit a spot of ice on the highway and lost control of his car." And we laughed. People laughed a lot around Howard Crumley. He was that kind of a man. And he could laugh at himself too.

I saw Howard just last Friday in the Courthouse. We stopped on the stairs and talked and he said to me, "Well, I finally got it."

Then he told me that he'd finally gotten a transfer back to northeastern Oklahoma. I know that he'd been trying to do this for months. He told me that he'd been assigned to the small community of Locust Grove, just 50 miles from his hometown of Afton. And he was elated.

The transfer was to be effective July 1. Howard said he'd already been to Locust Grove to look over the town and to scout for a house. He was so looking forward to the move that even though I hated the thought of his leaving, I was glad for him.

That he has been so senselessly, so needlessly, so brutally murdered stuns me still. It was such a waste I kept telling myself. Howard was 35 years old. He had a wife and three fine boys. And now he's dead.

Perhaps this tragic event will step up efforts to have two troopers ride together on all night shifts. This nightmare might have been prevented if Howard hadn't been alone last night.

In a joint statement issued by District Attorney Burke Mordy and Safety Commissioner Bob Lester, they said, "Howard Crumley was one of the finest troopers we have ever known."

I agree. Howard was one of the best. But he was more than that to me - he was a friend.

And today I mourn.

Kidnap Victim Tells of Drive

By David Spears

Daily Ardmoreite Staff Writer

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Mrs. China Hunley and her brother, Charles Walters, were awakened at 12:45 this morning at gun point by two men she identified as the Wilkinson brothers, wanted in the slaying of Trooper Howard Crumley.

According to Mrs. Hunley, the two men selected the Walters home because they knew they had a car. They said they had decided to change cars because the one they were driving was "hot" and they needed a driver.

I volunteered to drive the two men in my car just to get them away from my family," said Mrs. Hunley. "I asked my brother to come along. They were not going to force him to but they did hold a gun to his head afterwards.

I knew that the two men were desperate so I continued to talk to them as we drove around. They said that they were out for a good time and were drinking but wouldn't hesitate to take a few people with them if they had to."

Before leaving the house the two men promised Mrs. Edward Walters, the mother of the brother and sister, that they would be allowed to call back in a hour to prove that they were safe.

"They released Charles to call our folks," said Mrs. Hunley, "but they told him that they would kill me if he call the police."

"I then drove the car to a cattle road southwest of Dickson, where the men began discussing how to reach Mexico. I noticed that one of the men kept saying that his was his last cigarette and soon afterwards shot himself in the head with a pistol.

"The other brother then told me that I would be the next to die if I didn't get his brother to a hospital before he died."

"The man kept his gun on me the entire time we were in the hospital so I knew it was useless to try and make a break," Mrs. Hunley said.

"After we left the one brother at the other hospital we just walked away. It was real strange, no one asked us to identify the wounded man or anything about what had happened," continued Mrs. Hunley.

"He then told me to drive him to his brother's house and said that he would be gone two minutes after I left."

Mrs. Hunley said that at the one time the men mentioned a third party and claimed that they killed the state trooper only because they thought that he was checking for them.

"I guess the only thing that kept them from killing me was that I won their confidence by talking to them and doing exactly what they wanted," said Mrs. Hunley.