

THE YOUNG BROTHERS MASSACRE

The Bloodiest Chapter in the History of the Greene County (Missouri) Sheriff's Department

By Captain Jim Barber, G.C.S.D.

All of us should solemnly pray that we would never see a day as bloody as Saturday, January 2nd, 1932. On that dreary and merciless winter afternoon, 6 officers from the Greene County Sheriff's Department and the Springfield, Missouri Police Department perished in a shootout with two brothers, Harry and Jennings Young. This event holds an infamous record: the deadliest encounter between law enforcement officers and criminals in an armed confrontation, and though it occurred so very long ago the gallant men who fell that day deserve our remembrance.

Greene County Sheriff Marcel Hendrix led two of his deputies, Wiley Mashburn and Ollie Crosswhite to the Young farm near Brookline (southwest of Springfield.) Springfield's Chief Detective Tony Oliver, and police officers Sid Meadows, Charlie Houser, Ben Bilyeu, Owen Brown, Virgil Johnson, and Frank Pike accompanied the Sheriff, all of them determined to arrest the outlaws Jennings and Harry Young. A civilian named R.G. Wegman went along as well, presumably for the sport people often presumed inherent in police work.

Among his other villainous activities, Harry Young was wanted for the June 2, 1929 murder of the Republic, MO town Marshal Mark S. Noe (shot in the head after he caught Harry driving drunk down Main Street.) The Springfield Police also suspected the brothers of stealing automobiles: in particular a car which two of their sisters tried to sell in Springfield two days before the massacre. The car dealer provided the tip to the authorities, which caused the Springfield Police to arrest the sisters a few hours before the bloodshed. Police interrogation of the women revealed Harry and Jennings were at their farm west of town, and so in observance of protocol the city Chief of Police requested that Sheriff Hendrix take the city officers out into the county in a collaborative effort to apprehend the fugitives. Before the sun set that fateful day, Sheriff Hendrix, deputies Mashburn and Crosswhite, as well as officers Oliver, Meadows, and Houser would find their eternal rest upon the hard, cold ground.

As one might imagine the battle that culminated in the deaths of these officers amounted to unbridled carnage. The Young brothers, armed with ordinary hunting guns (a Winchester 12 gauge semi-automatic shotgun and a Remington repeating rifle,) made a formidable obstacle for anyone who might venture to subdue them. The 10 officers equipped themselves with nothing more effective than handguns, a tear gas gun, and the Sheriff's faith that since he had once resided near the Young boys they would recognize him as a neighbor, and go peaceably to jail. Harry Young's killing of the Republic Marshal, however, left no doubt as to Harry's willingness to slay an officer of the law. The Youngs also possessed considerable marksmanship skills honed by hunting, and prison time left them with a hard edge. All these circumstances conspired to leave the officers tragically unprepared for the devastating fight that ensued.

When they arrived at the farm, the officers strolled around the yard and peered into windows to see if the Young brothers lurked inside. After agreeing that they should put a tear gas round through a window, but neglecting to allow the gas a few moments to take effect, Sheriff Hendrix, Wiley Mashburn and Frank Pike went to the back door of the Youngs' white farmhouse. On breaking open the door, they immediately met the brutal fury of a shotgun blast, which killed the Sheriff. A second shot tore the face and eyes from Deputy Mashburn and injured officer Pike's arm. Maimed, and mortally wounded, Wiley Mashburn endured tremendous suffering until death finally claimed him later in the evening. The two Young brothers opened fire on the other officers, and in the raging gun battle Meadows, Pike, and then Brown expended all the ammunition for their revolvers. One of the Youngs engaged the remaining police officers with his rifle, and he ruthlessly picked off Sid Meadows, Ollie Crosswhite, and Charlie Houser by sending bullets through their heads. Tony Oliver took two rifle shots through his body, and died in agony.



In the midst of this melee, Detective Oliver ordered Virgil Johnson to retreat to town, and return with help and ammunition. Somehow, despite a hail of bullets and shot sent their way, Johnson, Bilyeu, and Wegman managed to get in a vehicle and escape. With no cartridges remaining for their handguns, Brown and the wounded Frank Pike had to accomplish their retreat on foot, under fire from the Youngs. When the survivors of this massacre arrived back in Springfield, they summoned an even larger posse (including National Guard troops) to respond to the Young place.

But it was to no avail, as the Young Brothers fled the scene and made their way to Houston, Texas. The word about the awful calamity spread across the nation by radio and newspaper. A tip to the Houston police led them to a home where the Young brothers had boarded, and after the police surrounded the house they fired tear gas into it. When the officers made entry to the dwelling, shots rang out, and Harry and Jennings Young were found dead inside, apparent suicides.

Admittedly, my telling of this tale is incomplete and all too brief. For further reading I recommend the book [Young Brothers Massacre](#), by Paul W. and Mary Barrett (published by University of Missouri Press) as well as [The Young Brothers Massacre](#) by John R. Woodside. Mr. Woodside's book was written shortly after the massacre, and is long out of print, but may be read on the Internet at <http://www.chrisanddavid.com/YoungBrothers/index.shtml>

Sheriff Hendrix, Wiley Mashburn, Ollie Crosswhite, Charlie Houser, Sid Meadows, and Tony Oliver died in the conduct of their duty and they merit our continuing commemoration in both word and deed.



Marcell Hendrix
Sheriff
Greene County



Ollie Crosswhite
Deputy Sheriff



Wiley Mashburn
Deputy Sheriff



Tony Oliver
Chief of Detectives
Springfield Police



Sid Meadows
Detective
Springfield Police



Charles Houser
Springfield Police



The sheriff's sedan (1) was parked in the south row of trees. Detective Johnson entered city sedan (2) and was followed by Policeman Bilyeu and civilian Wegman to bring more tear gas and ammunition. Chief Oliver stood behind large tree (3) until he walked to rear. Patrol driver Houser (4) fell backward near his tree soon after Johnson left for Springfield. Detective Meadows (5) fell near his tree without removing hands from pockets. Detective Pike (6) had cover behind a tree. Deputy Sheriff Crosswhite and Detective Brown were at the northeast corner of the house (7)