

BERKS YOUTH SLAYS

STATE TROOPER

3 Policemen Held at Bay By Teen-Ager

By CHARLES H. KESSLER
Staff Writer

A shotgun blast in the head from a weapon held at point-blank range by a 16-year-old Douglass Township boy yesterday brought instant death to State Trooper Philip C. Melley, 43, a veteran of almost 20 years of police service.

Before the shooting, the teen-ager had disarmed two state troopers and handcuffed them to trees. The Douglass Township police chief also was disarmed and held at bay.

The boy, William Clayton Henderson, Boyertown R.D. 2, was held in the Reading barracks last night and will be charged formally today with murder.

Pvt. Melley was slain in a heavily wooded area on Rattlesnake Hill about 200 yards off Squirrel Hollow road near Pine Forge yesterday afternoon shortly after 1 o'clock. The shooting occurred during an attempt to disarm the boy.

After the shot was fired, police said, Henderson ran home, told his mother, returned to the scene and surrendered.

From reports pieced together from various police officials, the bizarre affair started yesterday morning when Henderson decided to go squirrel hunting with his father's single-barrel, 12-gauge shotgun. The boy's parents, William O. and Ella Mae, objected and there was a heated quarrel. Police said the boy threatened to shoot his parents and then, in high anger, took the gun and went hunting.

Township Police Called

Shortly afterward, the boy's father telephoned Douglass Township Police Chief Irvin R. DeHaven. DeHaven went to the Henderson home and undertook a search for the boy.

After combing a woodland area behind the Henderson home, the police chief found the boy and attempted to talk him into surrendering the gun. After trying to coax the boy for almost an hour into surrendering, DeHaven called the Reading state police barracks.

State Troopers John A. Divine and Thomas McCann, cruising in separate cars, were dispatched by radio to the scene. Melley, who resided in the barracks, also was sent out on the call.

Divine and McCann arrived at the Henderson house before Melley, and, with DeHaven, went into the woods in search of the boy.

State Police Capt. Reese L. Davis emphasized that the troopers could have shot and killed the boy at almost any time, but refrained from shooting because of his age.

Troopers Disarmed

The teen-ager, however, got the "drop" on Divine and ordered him to disarm and surrender his handcuffs. He then handcuffed the trooper to a tree. According to DeHaven, Henderson threatened to kill Divine unless McCann also disarmed and gave up his handcuffs. McCann also was disarmed and gave up his handcuffs. McCann also was handcuffed to a tree.

DeHaven was forced to relinquish his handcuffs, but he told the boy he did not have a key. At about this time, Melley, carrying a high-powered rifle, arrived.

Davis said the boy saw Melley approaching and told him to halt or he would shoot the other troopers. Melley tried to talk with the boy, moving closer all the time.

Finally, when he was only a few feet away, Davis said, Melley lunged at Henderson, and the youth fired a point-blank shotgun blast into the state trooper's forehead, killing him instantly.

Henderson then ran to his home, some 200 yards away, told his mother, ran back to the shooting scene and released the handcuffed troopers.

Melley, who had almost 20 years of service as a state trooper, was stationed previously at Schuylkill Haven, Pottsville and the Pennsylvania Turnpike. He was transferred to the Reading barracks last spring.

Sister, Brother Survive

Melley was a graduate of Summit Hill High School, where he was a star football player in the 1930s. The 43-year-old trooper was a bachelor. He is survived by a sister and a brother.

Henderson is one of seven children, who range in age from seven to 20. DeHaven said the boy had been the cause of previous trouble in the township and that he had made several efforts to "straighten him out." Henderson quit Boyertown Junior High School last summer after completing the eighth grade. He was unemployed. His father is an employe of the Lochman Rug Co., Phoenixville.

Asst. Dist. Atty. John E. Marx was at the barracks to question participants in the shooting. All the state troopers last night were distressed by Melley's death.

"I've known Melley since he was a student," Davis commented. "He was under me at Pottsville when I was a sergeant."



Philip C. Melley

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