

Ex-Officer Dies in Shoot-Out As He Opens Fire on Police

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A retired Detroit police officer who was a former track star at the University of Michigan and one of the first black patrolmen on the force was shot and killed Saturday in a wild street gunfight with two policemen.

A teen-age girl a block from the shooting scene at Dexter and Sturdevant on the city's near northwest side was wounded by a stray bullet.

Division Commander James D. Bannon identified the dead former policeman as William Watson, 56, of 9301 LaSalle Blvd., a one-time captain of the U-M track and field team and 1943 National Amateur Athletic Union decathlon champion.

BANNON SAID WATSON was killed when for no apparent reason he opened fire on two policemen who were making a routine traffic arrest.

The policemen, Patrolmen Virgil Hollins and Charles Gabriel, fired 11 shots and hit Watson once in the chest. Watson was dead on arrival at Detroit General Hospital.

Police said their initial investigation showed Hollins and Gabriel, of the Livernois Station, were in uniform walking their beat on Dexter about 4 p.m. when they flagged over a motorist because of excessive smoke was coming from his car.

As they were ticketing the driver, who was not identified, Watson drove up alone in his car. He saw the ticketing and stopped his car.

Bannon said the ticketing was routine and there was no disturbance.

According to witness, Dennis Jefferson, Watson yelled at the two policemen to "turn the boy loose." Then, police said, Watson cursed Hollins, who also is black, and said: "I'm going to kill you."

Hollins saw Watson had a revolver in his hand pointed at him and Hollins shouted to his partner to duck.

Watson, police said, got out of his car, ducked down behind his open car door, stuck the gun through the open window and fired a shot.

The bullet hit the windshield of the ticketed motorist's car.

Hollins and Gabriel, who is white, opened fire. Hollins fired eight shots from two .375 magnums and Gabriel fired three shots from his .38 pistol, police said.

Hit by several bullets, Watson fell.

THE INJURED GIRL was identified as Cookie Robinson, 16, of 3258 W. Boston Blvd.

Miss Robinson had been in the Esquire Restaurant at 12647 Dexter with two friends when they heard shooting. They ran from the restaurant and, seeing the gun battle, began to run away from it.

The girl was hit in the thigh by the stray bullet. She was taken to Henry Ford Hospital. Her condition was listed as satisfactory.

Police said Watson joined the force in 1941 and retired in 1966.

Bannon said he knew Watson because the two men worked together in the old Bethune Precinct station. Bannon described Watson as a good police officer. Police could give no reason for Watson's actions.

Lt. William Hoston of the Livernois Station, who knew Watson well, said that after Watson retired he retained his friendship with police buddies.

HOSTON SAID Watson had a license to carry a gun but last Wednesday after a confrontation with some police officers on the street he was taken to Livernois Station and his gun was taken away.

In his college days, Watson won in the shot-put, discus and broad jump in three successive years while leading U-M to outdoor Western Conference titles in 1937-39.

He was regarded as one of the greatest field men ever produced at Ann Arbor.

Bill Watson death 3-3-1973

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