

DOUBLE GALLANTRY AWARD

Since the war the George Cross has been awarded to officers of only two British police forces: five to the Metropolitan Police and two to Lancashire. These provide the only example of a double George Cross award to police. The incident they resulted from saw the highest number of bravery awards ever won by the police.

At about 9.45am on Monday August 23, 1971, four masked men burst into the shop of Preston's, the jewellers, on The Strand, a narrow street not far from the north pier at Blackpool. Frederick Sewell was armed with a sawn-off shotgun and an automatic pistol; John Spry was armed with a .32 revolver; and Dennis Bond and Thomas Flannigan carried a hatchet and a jemmy. In nearby Queen Street was a stolen Triumph 2000 estate car on false plates driven by Charles Haynes. All five were London criminals with long records.

The staff were forced to lie on the floor while the gang ransacked the shop gathering jewellery valued at £106,033. Fireman Ronald Gale was passing when he saw jewellery being snatched from the window display. He asked a couple to call the police and returned to the shop just as the robbers were leaving. Sewell pushed

Only once has a police force been awarded two George Crosses for the same incident. Sgt Anthony Rae, Lancashire, concludes his account of those who have won this highest honour

the shotgun into Gale's stomach and said: 'Move and I'll drop you.' Then before he had chance to do anything Gale was clubbed with an iron bar and fell unconscious.

The police had already been alerted by a silent alarm activated by the manager and as the gang ran to the getaway car PC Carl Walker arrived on the scene in a police vehicle. Bond was last to the car and as he struggled to get in Walker drove at him trying to trap him between the cars. As he drew alongside, the rear window of the Triumph was lowered and the shotgun pointed at his head. Walker sat perfectly still as Bond was pulled inside and the car sped off.

A high speed chase followed and the Triumph was temporarily lost in the maze

of side streets. But Walker found it again in Back Warbreck Road. There the robbers had left a Ford Capri, also stolen and on false plates, the keys on the sun visor and a loaded .38 revolver in the boot. Two of the gang were walking towards the Capri but when they saw Walker's police car they jumped back in the Triumph and sped away.

Walker again lost the Triumph, then saw it in a blind alley off Lord Street; the car had crashed and been abandoned by the robbers who were looking for a way out. Walker drew his car across the top of the alley to block their escape and started to get out when one of the gang came towards him pointing a gun. Walker shut his door and remained where he was.

Fierce struggle

The robbers jumped back in the Triumph, now with Sewell driving, and the car was reversed furiously up the alley smashing the police car aside. PC Walker was dazed but as the Triumph drove away PC Ian Hampson arrived in another police car and took over the chase.

Hampson followed the robbers at high speeds through a network of streets. He had to drive the wrong way down one-way streets, around the wrong side of a roundabout and across pavements but the robbers could not shake him off. Finally the Triumph screeched to a halt in Clevedon Road and Hampson pulled up a few yards behind; Spry jumped out and ran back to the police car.

As Hampson opened his door to get out, Spry aimed his gun through the nearside window and fired. The bullet hit the officer in the left arm and went through into his chest, narrowly missing his heart. Hampson fell out of the car and collapsed on the roadway but managed to radio his position and what had happened.

Walker had by now resumed the chase. He was speeding along Egerton Road to the scene of the shooting followed by PC Patrick Jackson in another police car and DC Andrew Hillis in a CID car. The Triumph was approaching Egerton Road along Clifford Road. Walker saw it as he passed and turned sharply back into Clifford Road.

This caused a Vauxhall in front of the Triumph to brake suddenly and the Triumph ran into its rear. Before the Triumph could drive away again Jackson rammed it on the offside and Hillis drove across the pavement to ram it on the front nearside trapping the car between them.

The robbers jumped from the car and



PROUD WIDOW: Maureen Richardson, widow of Supt Gerald Richardson, receives the news of her husband's award. A photograph of Supt Richardson is on her right

Haynes ran down Egerton Road and disappeared. As Sewell got out Jackson kicked open his door to confront him but Sewell pointed a gun at him and said: 'Get out and you're dead.' Jackson again kicked the door hitting Sewell's gun arm. Sewell hesitated for a moment then scrambled away over the bonnet of the police car.

Hillis ran round the Triumph shouting: 'I'm a police officer, will you stand still.' Sewell fired two shots which missed, then ran off down an alley behind Spry and Bond. Flannigan tried to run past Hillis who chased him and after a fierce struggle arrested him.

Walker and Jackson ran up the alley after Sewell and they were joined by Insp Stephen Redpath who had just arrived with Insp Edward Gray and Supt Gerald Richardson, the head of Blackpool police. After dropping off Redpath Richardson and Gray drove on to see if they could cut the robbers off at the other end of the alley.

In the alley Sewell fired at the pursuing officers from about 10 yards away but missed. The three robbers then stopped by a Ford Transit van parked in the end of the alley at Cheltenham Road. Sewell turned and fired a second shot and Jackson and Redpath dived for cover. Walker who was in the lead ran on and was about six feet from Sewell when he fired a third time. Walker fell with a bullet through the top of his right leg.

As Walker tried to raise himself Sewell walked back and pointed the gun at his head. Walker turned his face away but just then Richardson and Gray drove into Cheltenham Road. Sewell ran to the van and drove off with Bond and Spry in the back. Redpath went to help Walker and Jackson joined Richardson and Gray who drove off in pursuit of the stolen van.

Glancing blows

The van drove into Sherbourne Road then into Carshalton Road where it swerved to avoid a lorry and crashed at the top of an alley. The police car pulled up behind and Richardson and Jackson ran to the driver's door but Sewell had already got out of the passenger side. Gray went to the rear of the van and tried to keep the doors closed but Bond and Spry burst out and were joined by Sewell. The officers tried to persuade the robbers to give up their guns but Sewell held them at gunpoint while Bond and Spry ran off down the alley.

Sewell forced the officers back pointing his pistol and shouting: 'Move, you bastards. Move or you'll get this.' Sewell then ran towards Sherbourne Road and Richardson told his colleagues to stay at the car and ran after him. Sewell went to



BRAVE MEN: Eight of the nine officers decorated in 1972 (left to right): Sgt Carl Walker (then PC), Sgt Ian Harrison (then PC), PC Patrick Jackson, Insp Kenneth Mackay (then Sgt), D/Sgt Andrew Hillis (then PC), Supt Edward Gray (then Insp), DC Edward Hanley and Insp Stephen Redpath

a van being driven up an alley across the road but as it stopped Richardson caught up with him.

Richardson asked Sewell for the gun and held out his hand saying: 'Don't be silly, lad.' It was to no avail. Richardson then tackled the gunman grabbing him around the neck. They fell against the side of the van and Sewell fired twice. One bullet tore a hole in the officer's tunic sleeve; the other, fired with the gun pushed into the policeman's stomach, passed right through his body and Richardson fell dying.

Sewell then forced the occupants from the van and drove away. Gray and Jackson had run over to help but there was nothing they could do and Richardson died later in hospital.

Meanwhile PCs George Bott and Graham Taylor saw Spry and Bond in the alley; they chased them on foot but took cover when Spry pointed his gun. They were next spotted by D/Sgt Kenneth Mackay who was with PC Edward Hanley in a CID car. These two officers drove up the alley after the robbers and as they drew level Spry pointed his gun at Mackay's head but he threw open his door and knocked Spry off balance.

The car stalled and Hanley continued the chase on foot. Then Mackay restarted the engine and again drove at the robbers. From about six feet Spry aimed his gun at Mackay and Bond shouted: 'Shoot him.' Mackay saw him pull the trigger but there was no shot (the gun was later found to have jammed after the shooting of Hampson). Mackay knocked them both over with his car but they regained their feet and the chase resumed with

Spry continuing to threaten the officers with his gun.

Mackay caught the robbers two more glancing blows with his car but he was unable to halt them and he left the vehicle to continue the chase on foot.

Life sentence

Redpath was still at the scene and saw Spry come out of the alley closely followed by Mackay who shouted: 'Stop him; he's got a gun.' Mackay then jumped on Spry and as he brought him to the ground Redpath ran up and kicked the gun out of his hand and he was arrested. At the same time Hanley caught Bond and he was also taken into custody.

Sewell and Haynes escaped from Blackpool in a car driven by Sewell's girlfriend with Sewell hiding in the boot. Haynes was arrested two days later. Then after a manhunt lasting six weeks Sewell was arrested in Holloway, north London, by a team led by Lancashire D/Chief Supt Joe Mounsey.

After a six-week trial the gang received sentences totalling 193 years. Sewell was convicted of murder with a recommendation that he serve not less than 30 years of the life sentence.

The George Cross was awarded posthumously to Gerald Richardson and a second George Cross went to Carl Walker. George Medals were awarded to Ian Hampson, Patrick Jackson, Andrew Hillis and Kenneth Mackay. British Empire Medals for gallantry were awarded to Edward Gray and Edward Hanley. The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct went to Stephen Redpath. ○