Hero of Seekonk bank robbery honored at Police Chiefs meet

Attleboro Police Chief John D. Coyle Jr., President of the Southeastern Police Chiefs Association, presented to Patrolman Thomas W. Gosnear III of the Seekonk Police Department the first Medal of Honor ever given out by that Association at its April meeting, hosted by Westport's Chief of Police Frederick Palmer at White's Restaurant at the Narrows last Wednesday noon.

This award, presented in recognition of Patrolman Gosnear's professional handling of the robbery from the B.M.C. Durfee Trust Company Bank in Seekonk on March 21, cited the police officer's response to the alarm, his confrontation by two armed and masked men who opened fire on him wounding him in one arm and damaging the police cruiser. It commended his response in returning fire, wounding him in one arm and damaging the police cruiser. It commended his response in returning fire, wounding one man three times and the second man twice. His sixth shot went into their fleeing vehicle.

His Chief, George Sykes of Seekonk, spoke of the department's pride of Officer Gosnear's service with them.

Patrolman Gosnear spoke of how this award, "coming from men who know what it is like out there, what it's like to be a police officer" means more to him than all the publicity at that time.

Othere honored guests at this gathering of 25 police chiefs and 75 association members were Mrs. Phyllis Bernier, the first select-woman of Westport, Westport Selectman Charles Costa and retired Westport Police Chief Albert Blais.

Care programs must be in effect by July 2, 1977. Mr. Fitch advised the chiefs to budget for 100 training hours for each patrolman by this time and stated that "you are the first responder. You are going to have to be trained and much more equipped than you are now."

This necessity will be added to the goals stated by Secretary Henry F. Maiolini of the Association's priorities for this year.

The Southeastern Massachusetts Police Chiefs Association hope to help increase the probation period from nine to eighteen months by legislation; to reinstate the death penalty; to have trained rape units in all departments; and to continue to suport the Southeastern Massachusetts Police Academy in Fall River. The Chiefs Association provides the matching funds for the Academy.

Swansea Police Chief Ernest Bell was thanked for his donation of an oil painting; the painting was raffled to bring in $65 for the Jimmy Fund.



SEEKONK POLICE CHIEF GEORGE E. SYKES looks on while President of the Southeastern Massachusetts Police Chiefs Association John D. Coyle Jr. presents one of his officers, Patrolman Thomas W. Gosnear III, the first Medal of Honor ever presented by the Association. (Davies photo)

Bank heist ends in shootout

"He did a great job of shooting", says Seekonk Police Chief George Sykes of Patrolman Thomas Gosnear who was shot in the right arm by one of two men who allegedly stole $13,000 from the B.M.C. Durfee Trust Co. bank branch on Fall River Ave. last Thursday morning.

The Chief continues, "The suspects were coming out of the bank door as he (Gosnear) pulled up. He gave them the first shot and then, after being hit himself, returned the fire using boths hands on he gun," wounding both men before they drove off.

Both front windows of the police cruiser were shot out as was the rear window of the suspects' car. (See related story).

The suspects, Anthony Perry, 20, of Providence and Warren Correia, 24, of East Providence were later arrested at a home in Riverside after an extensive search by East Providence police, FBA agents, Mass. state police, and local police. Perry and Correia were taken to Rhode Island Hospital where they were guarded by Seekonk police until arraigned, says Chief Sykes, at which time they became the responsibility of Rhode Island as fugitives from justice from Massachusetts.

Extradition proceedings will be started to bring the suspects back to Massachusetts on prosecution of several charges in addition to robbery, according to Lt. James Healey of the Seekonk Police Department, who adds that "all the evidence pertaining to the case is in the possession of Seekonk police."

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The drama began to unfold about 10:30 a.m. Thursday when the suspects entered the bank, disarmed a bank guard, and ordered others to lie down, according to Patrolman Richard Krieger who arrived at the scene shortly after the shoot-out.

As the men, dressed in identical ski jackets, jeans and ski masks were collecting money from the teller, a bank employee who had been in the basement came upstairs. saw the holdup in progress and opened a rear door which automatically set off an alarm at the police station.

One of the suspects noticed a bank camera and attempted to break it with a pocketbook taken from a woman present but only changed the camera's direction.

When Patrolman Gosnear arrived in the cruiser, the two men left the bank and the shootings took place.

Patrolman Gosnear was taken to Rhode Island Hospital in the Seekonk ambulance.



PTLM. THOMAS GOSNEAR, age 27 and Badge 27 with the Seekonk Police Dept., was wounded in the arm in a shootout with thieves at a local bank last Thursday. Married seven months, he has been with the police for five and a half years.

Ptlm. Gosnear:

'Cool as a cucumber'

By Beatrice Jette

"I never saw anything like it. -- It was just like Adam 12, you know the TV program?" said Edward Veader, Sr., eyewitness to the shoot-out after a bank robbery at BMC Durfee Trust, Seekonk last Thursday morning.

Seekonk Auto Body, directly across the street from Durfee Trust, provided Edward Veader, Sr. and his son Robert with an excellent view of the shooting between Seekonk Ptlm. Thomas Gosnear and the two bank robbers. "He was from the front fender to the back calm as a cucumber," Mr. Veader said of Patrolman Gosnear.

Robert Veader had just returned from making a deposit at the bank at a few minutes after 10 A.M. As he entered the auto body shop, he heard a shot and ran into the office where his father was and warned him to "duck down." Both men called the police and stood at the window.

The Veaders were too stunned to fear for themselves "I couldn't believe my eyes," said the elder Mr. Veader stating he "didn't think a bullet would reach across the street."

Mr. Veader had high praise for Patrolman Tommy Gosnear's performance under fire from the two men. "The guy did a terrific job. He was taking his time and not shooting wild."

Patrolman Gosnear had been injured, a shot in his right arm, but that did not stop him.

It was not until the two men got away while Ptlm. Gosnear reloaded his pistol that he called the station to report he had been hurt. "Then he went back and punched the top of the car," angered that the men got away, reported Mr. Veader.

Town Praises Ptlm. Gosnear On Shootout



Ptlm. Thomas W. Gosnear 3rd

By HENRY J. PERATES
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

SEEKONK — The courage and devotion to duty of a town policeman was officially noted last night by the board of selectmen.

Ptlm. Thomas W. Gosnear 3rd was also praised, commended and congratulated in letters prompted by his action in a shootout with two robbers at the B.M.C. Durfee Trust Co. branch on Fall River Avenue last Friday.

The 27-year-old policeman was wounded in the right arm by one of the gunmen but returned their fire and struck one of them three times and the other twice. He is recuperating at home. The robbery suspects are hospitalized and the more than $13,000 taken in the holdup recovered.

"Patrolman Gosnear's professional approach to the situation and his personal courage are reflect the highest tradition of police protection and public service," said Police Chief George E. Sykes in a letter of commendation read by Robert L. Del Rosso, chairman of the selectmen.

The board reappointed John Alves as its representative to the Southeast Regional Planning and Economic District. It appointed Alfred Charette inspector of animals, Mrs. Helen Drohan as secretary to Veterans Director James T. Smith and Arthur Cordeiro as a special policeman.

A framed letter of congratulations was presented by the selectmen to Donald Britton of Seekonk for establishing a new national high school indoor record for the 45-yard low hurdles.

In answer to a letter from the Planning Board asking whether a proposed one-year moratorium on subdivision of single-A zoned land would be on the Town Meeting warrant, the selectmen said that it would be an article at the special Town Meeting May 12.

In response to a letter from

Gosnear Receives Citations

Tribute for Seekonk Patrolman Thomas Gosnear III has continued since the hold-up of the Fall River Avenue branch of the BMC Durfee Trust Co. on March 20 when the 27-year-old policeman shot two alleged bandits as they attempted to make a get-away from the bank's parking lot. Ptl. Gosnear was wounded in the shoulder in the gun-fire, but the seriously wounded suspects were later tracked down in East Providence where the $13,000 in hold-up money was later recovered.

In addition to being honored at a meeting of the New England Association of Police Chiefs and letters of citation from the Somerset and East Providence Police Departments and the BMC Durfee Bank, Ptl. Gosnear was cited last week by state Sen. John Parker who appeared at the meeting of Seekonk Selectmen to award Gosnear the Golden Dome Citation for "bravery and coolness under fire."

The award has been recorded in the senate records as an expression "of the Commonwealth's and Seekonk's appreciation for the safety and security of the town," Sen. Parker noted in presenting the citation.

The Golden Dome Citation notes, "When Patrolman Gosnear went on duty, Thursday, March 20, he did not realize that sometime after 10:30 that morning he would be tested in a circumstance of incredible proportions. He would be called upon to 'shoot it out' with two callous bank robbers and assist in bringing them to justice at the risk of his own life."

The citation continues, "In a period of time when some people say that courage is a lost attribute and that individuals look out for themselves, Ptl. Gosnear stands as a shining example of the willingness of our men in blue to face danger and bring honor to themselves and credit to the police establishment.

"In recognition of Tom Gosnear's performance under fire, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is proud to present this Golden Dome Citation to a brave and dedicated member of the Seekonk Police Department."

Ptl. Gosnear, still recuperating from a shoulder wound, will be returning back to active duty within a few weeks, according to Seekonk Police Chief George Sykes.

Hanlon praise

This is to express the appreciation and respect that my family feels for one of your well-known writers, John Hanlon. The harrowing experience that we lived through on March 20, namely the wounding of my policeman son in a local bank holdup and subsequent events, was ably covered by Mr. Hanlon.

The praise and flattering comments on the excellent column he wrote concerning the personal emotions of Tommy and his family were overwhelming! Having met him personally at the emergency wing in the hospital, we all found John to be a fine gentleman and very compassionate in his writings.

The Journal is fortunate, indeed, to have on its staff a writer of this man's caliber. Please accept our humble thanks and sincere admiration for John Hanlon and *The Journal.*

Mrs. Claire A. Gosnear
Seekonk, Mass.