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Managing Editors

Robert Nieman 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

Byron A. Johnson 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

Byron A. Johnson 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

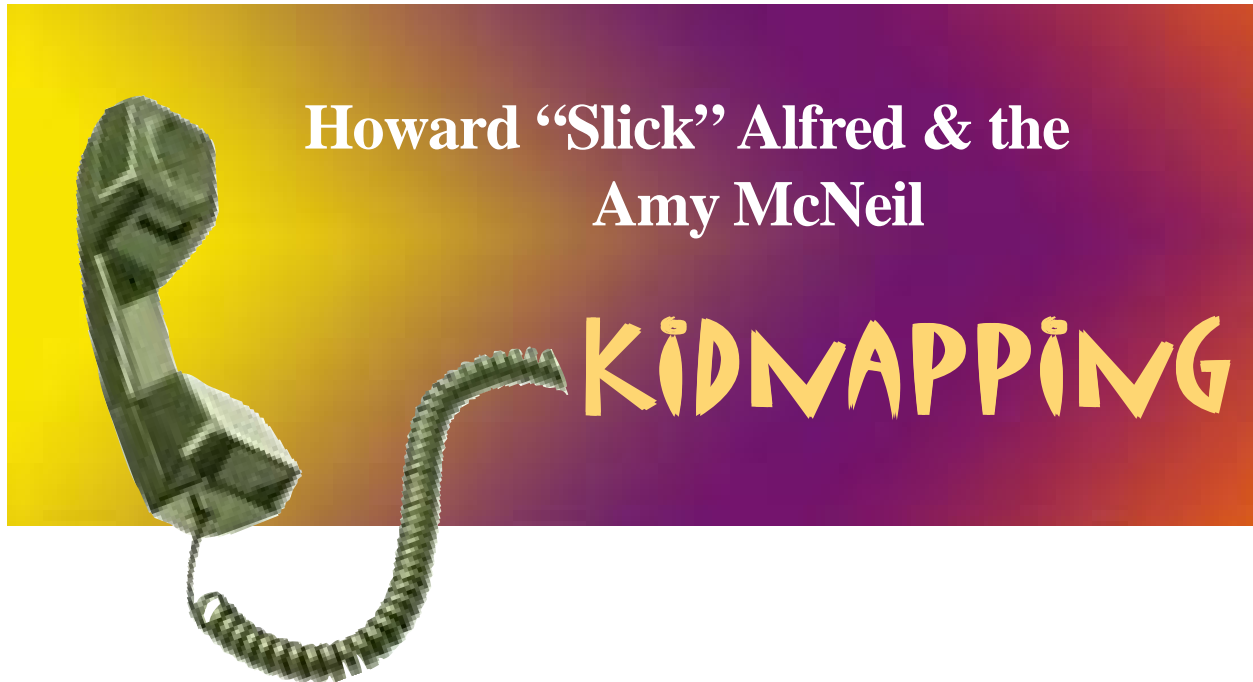
Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

Pam S. Baird



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by Robert Nieman

Friday, January 11, 1985, was a bitterly cold day. It was also a day when one of the most serious crimes that a person can perpetrate upon another was committed. Don McNeil was a board director in a local bank in Alvarado, which is south of Fort Worth, Texas. His son Mark was driving his thirteen-year-old sister Amy to school when, suddenly, the vision of an automobile appeared in his rearview mirror. The vehicle roared past and cut in front of him, forcing him to stop. Hooded men leapt out, swarmed McNeil's car, drug Amy away and into their automobile, and then they were gone. From start to finish, it only took a few seconds.

Company F was in the middle of a meeting at their headquarters in Waco when the call came in that Amy McNeil had been kidnapped. Captain Bob Mitchell immediately ordered the entire company to Alvarado. Arriving in that city, Mitchell sat up his headquarters in the bank where Don McNeil worked. Then the waiting started because little could be done until the abductors made contact.

The phone finally rang on Saturday night, and McNeil answered. The kidnapers demanded that he take \$100,000 to a mini-mart in Mesquite, a suburb in east Dallas. Once there, he would be contacted with further instructions.

With Company F Rangers following discreetly behind him, McNeil obeyed the kidnapers' instructions and drove from Alvarado to the Roadrunner convenience store on Jim Miller Road in Dallas. There, he was contacted and told to go to the Texaco station at the Tyler exit on I-20 and Highway 69. He then received directions to head north to Mount Pleasant, from where he was ordered to head east on I-30 about seven miles to a Gulf service station.

As soon as the Gulf station was designated, Ranger Johnny Aycock was sent ahead to wait for developments. Arriving at Mount Pleasant, he was joined by Brantley Foster, the Company B



Ranger stationed there. The two men lay in wait, wrapped in sleeping bags on the freezing ground.

Don McNeil soon arrived and waited for about an hour, but nothing happened. It was decided that, except for Aycock and Foster, everyone would return to Mount Pleasant and meet at the mini-mart on the south side of the first Mount Pleasant exit.

Captain Mitchell and the FBI, which had now joined the hunt, arrived at the mini-mart and went into conference as to their next step. Ranger Billy Gunn had been riding with Howard Alfred ("Slick" to his friends), and he got out of the car and walked over to the captain. Ranger Johnny Waldrip joined Slick, and they sat there talking. Soon, Aycock and Foster radioed Captain Mitchell that a suspicious car, described as a Buick, had pulled through the Gulf station parking lot and re-entered the interstate heading west.

A Hollywood scriptwriter could have written what followed.

Waldrip did not take time to go back to his car. He climbed into Slick's vehicle, and they headed for the I-30 westbound ramp just as the suspects' Buick roared past. The chase was on.

At this time, it was suspected that the Buick contained the kidnappers, but no one was 100 percent sure. With Rangers Alfred and Waldrip right on its tail, the speeding car swerved out to pass a cattle truck. Suddenly, the suspects darted in front of the semi and raced onto an exit ramp. Ranger Alfred was beside the cattle truck, and he had no time to follow. It was later learned that the fugitives were running low on fuel and only exited the interstate looking for gas.

Alfred radioed Rangers Jimmy Ray and Joe Wilie, who were closely following the chase in a police car. He advised them that the suspects had exited and told them to continue the pursuit. Ray, who was driving, followed the Buick off the interstate as Wilie radioed Captain Mitchell for instructions. The answer came back immediately: "Stop the suspects."

On the roof of their car, Wilie placed a small, flashing, right light (called a "Kojak light" after a popular TV show at the time). As soon as he did, men suddenly appeared leaning out the windows of the fleeing car. Rangers Ray and Wilie abruptly found themselves the target of a barrage of gunfire.

Wilie was in the passenger seat and radioed Captain Mitchell as bullets slammed into their vehicle. He said, "We're receiving gunfire, and our car's on fire!" After several calls with no response, Wilie radioed again, "We're receiving gunfire, and our car's on fire!"

Company F Sergeant (later Captain) Bobby Prince was also at the mini-mart with Mitchell. He relates this account:

Through this real weak radio, obviously a walkie-talkie that's about run down, we hear Captain Mitchell ask, "10-9 (repeat), did you say you're receiving gunfire?"

Joe Wilie radioed back, "10-4. We're receiving gunfire, and our car's on fire!" He then started giving the location.

This faint voice on the radio calls back and asks, "10-9. Did you say you're receiving gunfire?"

Well, Joe called back, "10-4. We're receiving gunfire, and our car's on fire!"

There was a pause, and we heard a weak reply. "Say it again. Are you receiving gunfire?"

Finally, Joe Wilie calls and says, "10-4. We're receiving gunfire and our car's on fire—but we'll welcome a second opinion!"



Ranger Ray's police car started really blazing, and he was forced to stop. Unfortunately, he was in a construction area, and his position blocked all the other vehicles that were coming to his assistance. Since they couldn't get around him, they couldn't continue the chase. With no pursuit, the suspects headed for the interstate.

While this was going on, Slick and Waldrip had proceeded to the next exit. Hearing that the suspects were heading back for the interstate, Slick drove down the westbound entrance ramp just as the Buick again roared past.

Slick was driving a brand-new Ford. At the time, Rangers did not have high-performance engines, and all he could get out of the vehicle was about 100 mph. He was about a half mile behind the Buick and could keep it in sight, but he could not gain on the criminals.

As the fleeing Buick passed the Mount Vernon exit, Slick saw a car with a flashing red light join the chase. He feared that it was a Franklin County deputy thinking he was chasing a speedster. Several times, he radioed that all Franklin County lawmen who were chasing a speeding Buick on I-30 should stop their pursuit. He got no response. He then tried radioing the DPS airplane and helicopter to contact the unknown vehicle. Unfortunately, both aircraft had returned to the Tyler airfield to refuel. Only later did Slick learn that the unidentified police car was occupied by FBI agents. At the time, the DPS and FBI did not have direct radio communications.

Still holding the accelerator to floor, Slick saw another car show up on his mirror and then go past him. Ranger John Dendy was driving, with Johnson County Deputy Sheriff D. J. Mulder in the passenger seat. They were in a Chevrolet, and Slick knew that it was "simply faster than my Ford." Fortunately, this was happening at about four o'clock in the morning and there was very little traffic on the interstate.

At the tiny community of Saltillo, the kidnapers again swerved off the interstate. With the FBI and Dendy right on their tail, the Buick sped into a mini-mart's parking lot, circled the store, and headed into Saltillo. By the time the suspects exited, Slick had dropped in behind Ranger Dendy.

Back on the service road, the Buick traveled only about 100 yards before turning north onto a city street. The car suddenly ran off the road and into the yard of a private home. Moving to the right of a new Dodge van parked in the driveway, the suspects drove into the grass and slammed to a stop when they hit a flagpole. They leaped from the Buick and sought protection between a closed garage door and the van parked directly in front of it.

Meanwhile, the FBI car had followed into the driveway and parked directly behind the van. John Dendy came to a stop on the edge of the road, to the right of and behind the FBI car. Slick parked to the left of the van and FBI car. As soon as the Rangers stopped, the gunfight started.

Company B Ranger Ralph Wadsworth was in the circling DPS aircraft. The sky was dark, and he was able to see the flashing from the muzzles of the guns. No one who knows Ralph can remember him ever using a four-letter word except for this one time. He was heard over the plane's radio saying, "They're having a gunfight down there! They're having a hell of a gunfight!"

Indeed, it was one hell of a gunfight. From his position, Ranger Dendy was firing his rifle straight at the suspects. Ranger Alfred was shooting at them from an angle with a Smith & Wesson 357 Magnum while Ranger Waldrip, with his shotgun, was trying to work himself onto the bad guys' flank. The FBI agents, finding themselves in a triple crossfire, did the smart thing and hugged the floorboard in their car, not even taking time to turn off the siren.

For the next several minutes, the firing was deafening. Between the gun flashes and the

lights from the FBI and Ranger cars shining at the garage, the officers were able to see faint images of the kidnapers.

Alfred, who had taken a firing position behind his car door, emptied his revolver, blindly reached under his car seat for more ammunition, and pulled out a box of 357s. To meet any emergency, he always carried a multitude of bullets there for a 357 Magnum, .45-caliber, and 9-mm, among others. As Slick says, "All these boxes of bullets had slid into my floorboard. I didn't even look; I just reached and pulled out a box. They were 357s, and I knew right then that there is no doubt about it—the good Lord does look out for you."

Not having a clear shot at the fugitives, Alfred started firing from under the parked van, bouncing bullets off the concrete driveway. Ranger Dendy was doing the same thing. Two of the suspects were hit—one in the foot, the other in the elbow. Finally seeing the futility of their position, they surrendered.

As soon as the shooting stopped, Deputy Mulder rushed to the fugitives' vehicle. One of the kidnapers, a female, was still inside and offered no resistance. Also in the car was Amy McNeil, unharmed.

As Mulder pulled Amy out of the backseat, Alfred ran up to the car and asked, "Is that Amy?" Mulder replied in the affirmative. Alfred said, "Let me have her. I'll take her to my car."

Amy looked at Howard, and calmly asked, "Are you a Ranger?"

It was only then, several minutes after the firing had ceased, that other Ranger cars started arriving. When Amy and Alfred got to his car, the first person they saw was Sergeant Bobby Prince. Looking at him, Alfred said, "I have Amy." Prince told him to take her to a nearby mini-mart, contact her father, and tell him that his daughter was okay.

That Sunday morning, Ranger Alfred was able to see the joyous reunion of the father and



Capture of Amy McNeil Kidnappers
Left to right: Ranger Brantley Foster, Ranger Jack Morton, unidentified, Captain Bob Mitchell, Ranger Bill Gunn. Photo courtesy of Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum



daughter. Today, he says that this was the most satisfying case he ever worked. He feels that to have helped save the life of a youngster is rewarding beyond words.

In gratitude for their exceptional work, Don McNeil presented identical, nickel-plated, Colt .45-caliber Combat Commanders to Texas Rangers Howard Alfred, John Dendy, and Bob Mitchell, and also to Johnson County Sheriff Eddy Boggs. In a ceremony in Austin, Governor Mark White made the formal presentations. Today, these pistols are among the most prized possessions for each officer. The engraving on the right side reads, "Love and Appreciation – Amy – 1-13-85." The left side is inscribed to each of these individuals. Alfred's reads: "Texas Ranger – Howard Slick Alfred."



Ranger Slick Alfred and his Colt Commander from Amy McNeil.

Postscript to the story: An elderly widow lived alone in the house where the gunfight happened. Slick remembers her being the "darndest witness you ever saw." She said, "I just heard all these sirens, and then I heard that gunfire, and I heard these people screaming, and I knew people was getting just killed." After what must have seemed an eternity of shooting, she heard a knock on her door. "I was so glad to hear him. He said his name was Captain Mitchell with the Texas Rangers."

*For a complete and in-depth telling of this story, see Robert Utley's book, Lone Star Lawmen. For more on Texas Ranger Howard "Slick" Alfred, see **Dispatch 20**.*



Ranger Slick Alfred's Colt Commander given by Amy McNeil and her father Don in appreciation of her rescue from kidnapers. On the right are closeups of the engravings.

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