

A RIGHTEOUS TACKLE

By John F. Hall

This is a true story that happened when I was 32 years old. At that time, I was patrolling the highways as a State Trooper in a large four-county area. I had state-wide jurisdiction and I could be involuntarily assigned to work any where in Kentucky. That was one of the conditions of my employment.

My story begins as I received a dispatch to investigate a two-car fender bender outside of my assigned area. There was no Trooper available in that area and I was the closest to the accident. The accident was across the road from a church in an unincorporated town that had no local law enforcement. I arrived on the scene and talked to the two drivers. I obtained their driver's information. As I was writing down their insurance information, a Pastor came out of a two—story parsonage located next to the church. He walked over to my police car. I first thought that he might have witnessed the accident. He said he just heard the two cars hit. He requested to know what it would take to have a Trooper assigned to live in the town. He said the Trooper could live in the parsonage at no charge. The Pastor lived alone. I told him that I would pass that information on to my Post Commander.



At the time, I was renting a room from a widower in the center of my area of assignment. I had a pending transfer request to be assigned to my home county. No openings were available at that time. The Post Commander said he would allow me to live in the parsonage under one condition. I was not to do any law enforcement in the unincorporated town because it was not in my assigned area. I informed the Pastor that I would accept his offer to live in the parsonage. I told the widower that I had a request from the Pastor to live in the parsonage. He was sad to see me go, but he understood. I moved into the parsonage. The following is an accurate account of what happened, one night when a little girl came crying to the parsonage for help. I never knew the name of the little girl or the names of the other people that live in her house. The Kentucky writer, Jesse Stuart created the names of 4,000 fictional characters in the 460 stories that he wrote. I merely identified the people by the part that they played in this story.

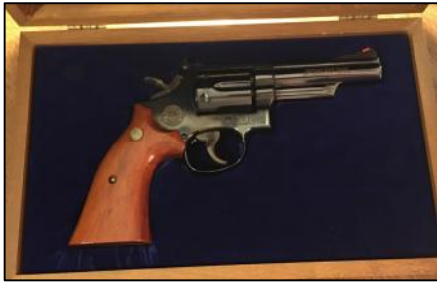
It was a very late spring night. The doorbell rang at the parsonage. The Pastor woke up from a sound sleep and walked down the stairs. This was before his hip surgery and it was painful for him to go up and down the stairs. He turned on the front porch light and opened the front door. He glanced down at the little girl crying in the moonless night. The Pastor ushered the little girl into the parsonage and listened to her story.

The Pastor rushed up the stairs as fast as his hip would allow. He knocked at my bedroom door and said: "John! We have a serious problem. You better get up and come downstairs." I hurriedly put on my blue jeans and ran down the stairs in my bare feet. I

observed the little girl crying and I walked over and asked her the reason for her tears. She stopped crying and looked me in the eyes and said: "My uncle is shooting his gun at my daddy!" I asked the little girl to tell me where she lived."

She told me that it was just a very short walking distance from the church. I was under a direct order not to do any law enforcement in the town. In a life or death situation, the Post Commander's order had to be ignored. I asked the Pastor to stay with the little girl until I returned.

I ran back upstairs, taking two steps at a time. I ran to my room, changed into my Trooper uniform and grabbed my pistol belt. I ran back down the stairs, ran out the front door and



ran to my police car. I opened the car door and threw my pistol belt on the seat. I put the keys in the ignition switch and started the engine. The police radio came on and I keyed the held-held mike. I talked to the dispatcher and said: "413 (my badge number) I am 10-8 (on duty). I am in route to a report of a man shooting a gun at his brother. It is only a few minutes from the parsonage. Please notify the

Supervisor on duty." I put on my pistol belt, put the car in drive, and drove to the little girl's house. I did not turn on my emergency lights and siren. I did not want the man shooting the gun to know that I was coming.

In a matter of minutes I arrived near the little girl's house. I observed several people standing in the middle of the street. I got out of my police car and walked over to talk to the people. They told me that they were family members and the man with the gun had been drinking and was shooting his gun at his brother. I told them to go the safety of a relatives house. My main concern was for the neighbors due to the close proximity of the houses in that section of town. I went back to my police car and called the dispatcher. I said, "I have an intoxicated man with a gun. He has fired a couple of shots at his brother. No one has been injured. The man is inside the house. All the family members were able to leave. I am concerned that the 'man might start shooting out the window. Have the Supervisor advise me on the next course of action to take."

It seemed like an eternity before the dispatcher called me back. This is what he said: "413, the Post Supervisor is in route back to the Post to pick up some tear gas shells. Try to contain the situation until he arrives." I acknowledged the message and glanced at my watch. It was nearly 3:30 in the morning. I was tired and facing a gun battle in the small town. I got out of my police car and walked over and stood behind a tall oak tree. The slamming of a screen door broke the night silence. I drew my 357 Magnum revolver and put the man in my sites. I could see that the man was intoxicated by his movements. I knew that I could not contain the situation if he started to fire his gun into the nearby houses. I kept my concentration on his gun. If I could find a way to get that gun, the nightmare would end. I watched the man sit down on the steps and put his gun in his shirt. I holstered my weapon and thanked Christ that the gun battle had been delayed. Several minutes later, a Deputy Sheriff drove in and parked behind my police car. I had a

hand-held county radio loaned to me by the Sheriff of my specific county assignment. I talked to the Deputy Sheriff on the county radio and told him to seek cover behind another tree in the front yard.

The man with the gun got up and went back into the house. I walked over to the Deputy and briefed him on the situation. We waited and watched. The man with the gun came out the front door and sat down on the front porch steps. I decided to take some action. I explained my plan to the Deputy. I instructed him to warn me on the county radio if the man decided to come back into the house. The county radio came with an earplug that allowed me to hear the Deputy without giving my position away. My plan was simple. I would go into the house by the side door and attempt to disarm the man by a surprise attack. I quickly and quietly went into the side door. I could feel the sweat running down the back of my neck as I slowly made my way towards the front door.

I was about to open the front door when the Deputy called me on the radio. He said: "413! The man is on his feet and coming back into the house!" I drew my weapon and got behind a wall and waited. I could hear the man trying to open the front door. For some unknown reason, the man with the gun changed his mind. He turned around and walked back to the steps and sat down. The Deputy called me on the radio and told me that the man put the gun back into his shirt. I holstered my weapon and moved towards the front door. I slowly tried to turn the front door handle. It was locked! This explained why the man with the gun changed his mind. He locked himself out of the house.

I unlocked the front door; rushed across the front porch, and tackled the man with the gun. We flew off the front porch and into the grass. I was controlling the man's arms as the Deputy ran over and handcuffed him. I got the man's gun and gave it to the Deputy. He took the man to jail. I walked back to my police car and called the dispatcher. I said: "413 Post, the situation is over. No one was hurt. The Deputy will carry the arrest and I am going back to bed." The knees of my gray uniform were stained from hitting the grass. I drove back to the parsonage. The parents of the little girl drove up. They were thankful that no one was hurt. They picked up their child and she smiled at me as they drove away.

After that incident, I was offered a teaching position at the Police Academy. Such a position is a fast track for promotion. My dad wanted me to quit the force. He felt they were getting expert help dirt cheap. I agreed with his advice, but there were other issues that I faced. I had just earned a Master's in College Teaching degree. The tuition, fees and books were paid for by the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP). I incurred an obligation to remain in law enforcement for five years or incur a penalty to repay that money. My wife, Paula had put in 10 years working in Civil Service on Fort Campbell. I declined the offer to teach at the Academy. Another Trooper requested to move out of the county that I wanted. My transfer to move to that county was approved. Ten years later, I was able to take an early retirement.

Looking back at that incident, I remember being on a football team when I was in junior high school. I was the shortest and lightest defensive player on the team. I played

defensive cornerback. I was agile, quick, and could out run any other player. As the cornerback, I would try to block or intercept a football pass.

If that failed, and the receiver caught the football, I would run after him. I would not grab the front of the face mask. I would jump on the back of the receiver and use my legs to cause him to lose his balance and down him with a trip movement. I never imagined that one day I would tackle a person with a gun.

The hymn, "In Christ Alone.(My Hope is Found)," expresses how I felt when I was in law enforcement. I patrolled alone and all I had was Christ by my side. The hymn was written by Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend. These are their lyrics: "In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song. This Cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm. What heights of love, what depths of peace. When fears are stilled, when strivings cease. My Comforter, my All in All, here in the love of Christ I stand. In Christ alone! - who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe. This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones he came to save. Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied. For every sin on Him was laid here in the death of Christ I live. There in the ground His body lay, Light of the world by darkness slain; then bursting forth in glorious day. Up from the grave He rose again. And as He stands in victory sin's curse has lost its grip on me. For I am His and He is mine brought with the precious blood of Christ. No guilt in life, no fear in death. This is the power of Christ in me. From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand. Till He returns or calls me home, here In the power of Christ I'll stand."

In some cowboy movie endings, the lawman rides off into the sunset. When the time came for me to retire, I turned in my badge and my gun. They encased my badge in plastic and gave it back to me. They said I could purchase my service revolver. They engraved my badge number (413) on the 357 Magnum and put it in a custom made, felt-lined, wooden commemorative box and gave it back to me along with a gold watch. When my life is over, they will send two Troopers, in military style, Honor Guard uniforms. The Troopers will take turns standing silently by my coffin until the visitation and funeral ends. My soul will witness the customary honors and hear the prayers and the eulogy. But I will take with me the righteous tackle that I made one night, so long ago. Christ was with me when I bolted out that door. He will be with me as He opens His heaven's door and bids me to come in.

Bob Dylan wrote the song, "Knockin' On Heaven's Door." These are just a few of his lyrics: "Mama take this badge from me. I can't use it anymore. It's getting dark too dark to see. Feels like I'm knockin' on heaven's door. Mama put my guns in the ground. I can't shoot them any more. That cold black cloud is comin' down. Feels like I'm knocking on heaven's door. Knock-knock-knockin' on heaven's door..."

John F. Hall

*Read other stories by John F. Hall at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>