

## HOW IT ALL STARTED

By John F. Hall

Forty Seven years ago, I was a Kentucky State Trooper temporarily assigned to patrol the Mississippi River counties of Ballard, Carlisle, Fulton, and Hickman. I was renting a room from a widower named Leon "Shorty" Thomas. One fine day, I received a dispatch from the Kentucky State Police (KSP), Post One Dispatcher, in Mayfield, Kentucky. The



Dispatcher advised that there is a 10-45 (non-injury traffic accident) in front of the Saint Jerome Catholic Church in Fancy Farm. That unincorporated town is about two miles from the Carlisle County line, in Graves County. No Trooper was on available in Graves County, and I was the closest unit, so I was dispatched to Fancy Farm. When I arrived, I observed a minor fender bender in front of the church. Father Walter Hancock came out the rectory and walked over to my cruiser (police car). I first thought that he might have witnessed the accident. He said that he just heard the noise. Then he asked me this question: "What do I have to do to have a Trooper stationed in Fancy Farm? He can live in the rectory for free." I told Father Hancock

that I would forward his request to my Post Commander, when I drove to the Post to pick up supplies. The following day, I drove to Post One and I told my Post Commander about Father Hancock's request. The Commander was not really wanting me to live in Graves County. But it was also a political thing. The Annual Fancy Farm Picnic drew in over 10,000 people, to include the Kentucky Governor and state representatives, and senators. If the Post Commander denied Father Hancock's request, it might be difficult for him to explain his denial. I told the Post Commander that I would be, more than, willing to move into the rectory. He said to me: "I will let you move into the rectory, but you are not to do any law enforcement in Fancy Farm or Graves County." I told Shorty that I appreciated him renting me a room, but Father Hancock wanted a Trooper to live in the rectory. Shorty was a good Christian man, he treated me like one of his sons.

The Saint Jerome rectory is a large three story house that is connected to the Saint Jerome Catholic Church. The following is a true account of what happened late one spring night. The front doorbell rang. Father Walter Hancock woke from a sound sleep, and slowly walked down the stairs, from the second floor bedrooms. This was before his hip replacement surgery, and it was painful for him to climb or go down stairs. He opened the front door and glanced down at a little girl. The girl was about nine years old, and she was crying. Father Hancock ushered the child into the rectory and listened to her story. He rushed upstairs as fast as his hips would allow. He knocked on my bedroom door and said: "John! We have a serious problem. You better get up and come downstairs." I hurriedly put on my jeans and ran downstairs in my bare feet. I observed a young girl crying, and I walked over and asked her the reason for her tears? She stopped crying, looked me in the eyes, and said: "My uncle is shooting his gun at my daddy." I asked the girl where she lived. I asked Father Hancock to stay with the girl until I returned. I ran back upstairs, taking two steps at a time. I ran to my bedroom, changed into my uniform

and grabbed my pistol belt. I ran back downstairs and ran to my cruiser. I opened the cruiser door and threw my pistol belt on the seat.

I put the keys in the ignition and started the engine. The police radio came on and I keyed the mike. I called the dispatcher: "413 (my badge number) Mayfield (KSP Post One Headquarters), I am 10-8 (on duty). I am in route to a report of a man with a gun here in Fancy Farm. Please notify the Supervisor on Duty." I put on my pistol belt, put the cruiser in gear and slowly drove out of the rectory drive way. In a matter of minutes, I arrived at the little girl's home. I observed several people standing in the middle of the street. I got out of my cruiser and walked over to talk to them. They informed me that they were family members, and that the man with the gun had been drinking, and that he was shooting the gun at his brother. I told them to go to the safety of a relative's house. My main concern was for the safety of the neighbors due to the close proximity of the houses in this section of Fancy Farm. I walked back to my cruiser and called the dispatcher and said: "Mayfield, 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 family members were able to leave. I am concerned that the man might starting 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. The Dispatcher 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 the prospects of a gun battle in Fancy Farm. I got out of my cruiser and walked over, and stood behind a tall tree. The slamming of screen door broke the night silence. I observed the man with the gun coming down the side door steps. I drew my 357 Magnum pistol and put the man in my gun 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 his neighbor's houses. I kept my concentration on the man's 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 the gun in his shirt. I holstered my weapon and thanked God that the gun battle had been delayed. Several minutes later, a Graves County Deputy Sheriff pulled in behind my cruiser. At that time in history, the KSP did not provide Troopers with screens in the back of their cruisers. They did not provide them with hand-held radios. I had a hand-held radio loaned to me by the Carlisle County Sheriff. I called the Deputy on my hand-held radio, and told him to seek cover behind another tree in the man's yard.

The man with the gun got up and went back into his 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 asked him to warn me on the hand-held radio if the man decided to come back inside his house. My hand-held radio had an earplug, and I could 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 in the door. I could feel the sweat running down the back of my neck as I slowly made my way to the front door. I was about to open the front door when

the Deputy called me on the radio: “413! He 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 reason, the man with the gun changed his mind. He turned around, walked back to the front porch 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 continued to move towards the front door. I slowly tried to turn the door handle. It was locked! This explained why the man with the gun changed his mind. He locked himself out of his house. I unlocked the front door, rushed across the front porch, and tackled the man with the gun. We flew off the front porch steps, and hit the ground. I was controlling the man’s arms as the Deputy ran over and handcuffed him. I got the gun and gave it to the Deputy. I called the Dispatcher and said: “413, Mayfield. The incident is over. The Deputy will carry the arrest, and I am going back to bed.” I drove back to the rectory. The parents of the little girl, who was crying in the night, drove up. They were thankful that no one was hurt. The little girl smiled at me as they drove away.

I wrote this story for the Saint Jerome Journal in 1977. At that time, I was also enrolled as a graduate student at Murray State University, under the Law Enforcement Educational Program (LEEP). The Program paid for my books, fees, and tuition. However, I incurred a five-year obligation to remain in law enforcement after receiving a degree, or I would have to repay those expenses. I was allowed to drive my cruiser from Fancy Farm to Murray State. I had to be in my KSP uniform. If I came upon a traffic accident, I would have to stay until another unit arrived on the scene. Once I arrived on campus, I would have to change into civilian clothes, in one of the men’s bathroom on campus. I would put my uniform and pistol belt in the trunk of my cruiser and go to class. Once the class was over, I put on my uniform and drive back to Fancy Farm.

From the Spring semester of 1971, until the Fall semester of 1978, I completed 51 graduate hours at Murray State. The KSP wanted me to move to Frankfort and become an instructor at the KSP Academy. I declined for several reasons. I disliked Frankfort. I felt the town was in a hole. My dad wanted me to quit the KSP. He felt the KSP was getting expert help, dirt cheap. But, mainly, because my wife, Paula was in the middle of her career at the Fort Campbell Hospital. In 1977, I worked with 24 high school seniors, at the former Fancy Farm High School, on a Guidance Project that I developed. The students asked me to be their Commencement speaker. I transferred to Trigg County in 1978. I was given a Crime Prevention Award from Governor Julian Carroll. A person broke into his home in Paducah, while the Governor was in Frankfort. The Governor had engraved his finger nail clippers with identifying numbers. The thief was caught with the finger nail clippers in



**Governor Julian Carroll  
presented the Crime  
Prevention Award to  
Trooper John F. Hall  
1978**

his pocket. During my last year on the force, I would work the late shift. I would ask the Dispatcher how many other units were on duty. The Dispatcher would say: “It’s just

you.” I had to patrol all eleven counties in Post One. I patrolled from Trigg County to the Mississippi River, and from the Tennessee state line to the Illinois state line. I was fortunate to have Christ, have my back, and for giving me the grace, the inspiration, and the talent to write four stories a year for the Saint Jerome Journal. As for my Post Commander, he stayed angry that I disobeyed his direct order not to enforce the law in Fancy Farm. He never mentioned, in my personnel file, that I tackled the man with a gun.

\*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>