Veteran, Shot By Motorman, Dies At Lawson-General

The Crime Report—Bureau of the Atlanta Police Department lists two homicides over the weekend, Walter Lee Johnson, the 22-year-old veteran of 420 Rock Street, N. W., who was shot by a Georgia Power Company street car motorman, Saturday night, died between 8:15 and 9:00 Sunday morning at Lawson General Hospital. The second homicide victim was stabbed on September 20, and died on September 24, but the police report was not made out until Monday. The total number of homicides for the year now stands at sixty-one.

Atlanta World reporters talked with Mr. Johnson, shortly after the shooting Saturday night, before he was transferred from Grady to Lawson General Hospital. During his brief interview, the young veteran stated emphatically that he had not been on the street car and that he was not attempting to get on the car. Witnesses corroborated this statement.

CONFLICTING VERSIONS

News accounts of the shooting varied sharply in the Atlanta dailies Sunday, Monday. The Atlanta Daily World contacted Miss Harriet Ponder, cousin of the victim who was with him at the time of the shooting and gave substantially the same version that was given Saturday night.

According to Miss Ponder, she and her cousin were standing on the sidewalk, near the corner of Simpson and Gray Streets, around 9:20, Saturday night. The inbound street car on the River line, pulled up and stopped to let a passenger off at the rear. There were no passengers wanting to get on the car. Miss Ponder said that Mr. Johnson yelled to one of his friends, who was passing in an automobile, saying: “Straighten up and fly right.”

The motorman, who was listed by the police as W. D. Lee, 22, 823 Argonne Street, N. E., thought he was talking to him and got off the car and asked him to repeat those remarks, she continued. Miss Ponder further stated that the street car operator snapped his pistol at the young veteran, and that he in turn tried to take it from him.

OTHER VERSIONS

One newspaper account of the shooting indicated that Mr. Johnson was shot on board a River trolley while in a scuffle with the operator. This account was based on a report made by Detectives H. O. Newton and J. A. Preston. Another newspaper account, based on a report made by Officers J. V. Linn and N. W. Flanagan quoted the street car operator as saying, “The Negro cursed me and reached in his pocket as though he was going to draw a gun or knife. I then shot him.”

The Atlanta Daily World rechecked the police report, Monday.

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and this particular report quoted the street car operator as saying, he ran out of a beer-joint yelling and cursing me. This report also quoted the motorman as saying that the veteran attempted to strike him with his fist. Officers Lynn and Flanagan listed three eye-witnesses to the shooting: Mrs. Lula Sims, colored, of 297 Hayes Street, N. W. H. G. Potts, white of 446 Simpson Street, N. W., and James Marshall, colored 346 Tyler Street, N. W.

RELEASED ON "COPY"

Witness to the shooting told Atlanta World reporters Monday that the motorman was not arrested immediately after the incident. The police report, however, indicated that he had been arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and shooting at another, around 3 o'clock. Monday, The Atlanta World checked with the Lieutenants' Office at the Police Station and learned that he had been released on "copy." The Recorder's Court hearings were set for Wednesday, October 9, at 4:30 p.m.

Mr. Johnson was in the Army for three years and six months, having served in England, France and Germany. He was honorably discharged in November, 1945. He was living with his wife and three-year-old son, Walter Lee Johnson, Jr., at address listed above. He was a member of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, and was employed at Zac-Lac Paint and Lacquer Co., 350 Simpson Street.

The other homicide victim was Jimmie Louis Burston, 27, of 103 Pestal Street N. W., who was stabbed on September 20, at 157 Davis Street. He died at Grady Hospital on September 24, but the officers did not make a report until after the suspect was arrested in Detroit, Sunday.

Detectives J. E. Helms and W. M. Holland quoted eye-witnesses as saying that the victim was stabbed by Miss Gertude "Tommie" Mooney, while he was engaged in an argument with her sister. These witnesses told the police that the victim was not doing anything to the suspect at the time he was stabbed.