

MAN THE COURTS COULDN'T CONVICT WAS '70S CAUSE CELEBRE

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Author: W. KIM HERON Free Press Staff Writer

In the early 1970s, **Hayward Leslie Brown** 's name was synonymous with gun battles, the most extensive manhunt in modern Detroit police history, political controversy and seemingly endless court cases.

He was accused of being a "mad dog" cop killer and was hailed as a would-be Robin Hood by some community activists.

After the first round of charges against him worked their way through the courts, he returned to the public eye in several criminal cases charged with drug possession, weapons possession and armed robbery. In all, Brown was charged with more than a dozen crimes -- from murder and arson to gun and drug violations.

In 1981, a Recorder's Court jury found him guilty of possession of heroin. He was sentenced to 2 1/2-to-4 years.

Meanwhile, though he was no longer regarded as important figure in Detroit's radical political circles, he continued to appear at political meetings and rallies to give symbolic support for causes such as opposition to the U.S. invasion of Grenada.

On Wednesday, Brown was murdered in an inner-city apartment.

BROWN CAME to the attention of the public Dec. 4, 1972, in a shoot-out with Detroit police officers from the now-disbanded undercover STRESS -- Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets - unit. Four officers were wounded.

A Dec. 27 street shoot-out between police and the alleged assailants in the Dec. 4 shooting -- Brown, Mark Bethune and John Boyd -- left another policeman dead and his partner critically wounded.

Bethune and Boyd later died after confrontations with Atlanta police. Boyd was killed in a shoot-out Feb. 23, 1973, in which his half-brother, Owen Winfield, also was shot and killed. Bethune, who was wounded, killed himself four days later as Atlanta police closed in.

A month earlier, on Jan. 12, 1974, Brown, then 18, was arrested after the firebombing of a federally financed birth control clinic near Wayne State University. Boyd and Bethune had been in their early 20s.

Before being charged with the firebombing, he was tried and acquitted five times in Recorder's Court on charges stemming from the police shootings.

He was convicted in U.S. District Court in 1975 on firebombing charges and sentenced to eight years in prison. He was released in 1977 from Sandstone federal prison in Minnesota when an appeals court overturned the conviction. Charges were then dismissed.

Later that year, two trials on concealed weapons charges ended in hung juries.

AFTER AN ARREST following a 1980 robbery, Brown reportedly tried to commit suicide by hanging himself in the Detroit police's 13th Precinct jail. By one account, he told police he was "just tired of being arrested." Brown later claimed that police had tried to kill him, a charge police investigators said could not be substantiated.

At the high point of Brown's notoriety and through his first round of trials, he was a political folk hero to some.

Gene Cunningham, a former editor of Wayne State University's then-radical student paper, "The South End," recalled that Brown's face appeared on T-shirts along with a slogan advocating vigilante actions in the black community to drive out dope dealers if the police wouldn't.

Cunningham said Brown often appeared at rallies against STRESS, which was disbanded by Coleman Young after he became mayor.

But as STRESS receded from memory, Brown's symbolism became less important, although he continued to show his support for leftist causes. Said Cunningham: "In later years he fell on hard times just like a lot of those movements fell on hard times. I understand he was pretty disillusioned."

The manhunt was also a flashpoint for community opposition to the STRESS units. Those units used plainclothes squad members as decoys to lure muggers. The mostly white unit was seen by many in the black community as more dangerous than the muggers they were supposed to be fighting. Most of the alleged muggers killed by the units were black.

THE ORIGINAL shoot-out took place when, according to four STRESS officers, they tried to pull over a Volkswagen on Livernois near the University of Detroit and the three men came out shooting.

The manhunt intensified after two other STRESS officers staked out a suspected hideout near W. Chicago and Schaefer. The three escaped, leaving one of those officers dead and another seriously wounded.

Hundreds of police officers participated in the initial manhunt and scoured sections of west Detroit in house-to-house searches, combing alleys and looking in garages on the ground while helicopter searchlights glared from the sky.

Relatives and acquaintances and some who didn't even know the suspects said their homes were illegally broken into. They said they were searched, dragged out of their homes, harassed and in some cases arrested for no cause.

Four years later, in 1976, city attorneys admitted there had been illegal behavior on the part of the police and authorized the city to pay \$85,000 to 15 persons who sued the city after their houses were searched.

Later, Wayne County Prosecutor William Cahalan said Brown was acquitted in his original case not because of the evidence but because of the way jurors viewed his treatment by police. "They came out afterward and said they thought he was hunted down like a dog," Cahalan said.

In an interview before his conviction on the heroin charge, Brown said: "I used to be a St. George, you know, fighting those dragons. I was a chaser of causes. I was for the underdog. . . . "

Caption: Photo 1973

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