

ROBLES SHOT DEAD IN TWO-HOUR SIEGE OF FLAT IN HARLEM: ROBLES IS SLAIN ...

By ALEXANDER FEINBERG

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pg. 1



The New York Times (by Carl T. Gossett Jr.)

ON TARGET: A policeman on a 113th Street roof shoots into window at August Robles. Tear gas billows from flat.

ROBLES SHOT DEAD IN TWO-HOUR SIEGE OF FLAT IN HARLEM

Gunman, Trapped in Hideout
and Wily to Last, Battles
Several Hundred Police

2 DETECTIVES WOUNDED

Desperado Opens Fire, Then
Is Pinned Down by Bullets,
Tear Gas and Flames

By ALEXANDER FEINBERG

The three-day hunt for August Robles, squint-eyed killer, ended violently about 5 P. M. yesterday. He was shot dead in an East Harlem flat after a two-hour siege by several hundred policemen.

Thousands of persons saw some part of the battle. It started with Robles firing five shots through a partly opened apartment door. Two detectives were wounded in this fusillade.

Then hundreds of policemen and firemen were mobilized in a mass assault the like of which the city has not seen since Francis (Two Gun) Crowley was tear-gassed out of his West Side hideaway two decades ago. Unlike Crowley, Robles was not destined to come out alive.

When the battle was over Robles, who had boasted he would never be taken alive, lay dead on the floor of a back bedroom. Tear gas bombs had set the flat ablaze. It was flooded by firemen in putting out the blaze.

To the last, the 44-year-old suspected triggerman in a Brooklyn "ride" murder sought to outwit the police, as he had done twice early Friday when he disarmed three detectives and then shot his way to temporary freedom in a battle with four others.

Slayer Stalls for Time

During a lull in his final engagement he asked the policemen to "wait till I get done writing a letter." This was when they called on him to "come out backwards with your hands up and drop your guns." The fugitive was stalling for time, although he must have known there was no escape.

Robles tried another ruse at a time when his doom was almost sealed. With flames licking at him and choking tear gas fumes driving him to the back bedroom of the flat—which is where the police wanted him because its two windows permitted them to get clear shots at him—he asked for a priest.

Their answer was another shouted order for him to surrender, which he ignored. At 5:10 P. M. a priest, the Rev. Martin J. O'Donnell, a Police Department chaplain, entered the besieged four-room flat in the six-story tenement at 67-69 East 112th Street, but that was five minutes after word had come from the building that Robles was dead.

"They got him! He's dead!"

The cry was taken up in the street. It was echoed by tenants in the six-story tenements on the south side of 112th Street who were kept in their houses for the duration of the battle,

Continued on Page 14, Column 1

ROBLES IS SLAIN IN HARLEM SIEGE

Several Hundred Policemen Engage in Furious Tenement Gun Battle With Elusive August Robles

Continued From Page 1

but who watched it from their windows and rooftops.

The cry leaped in every direction—to Madison Avenue where vast crowds strained police lines and later were to break them; east to Park Avenue where other crowds stood the death watch along the side of the James Weldon Johnson housing development; north to 113th Street and south to 111th Street, and beyond in both directions.

The hunt was ended. It was not over officially, however, for the thousands of watchers until 6:45 P. M. when Robles' body, his chest riddled with bullet holes, was brought out of the house in a police canvas sack.

Recovered earlier were the three detectives' revolvers he had taken on Friday and which he used in yesterday's battle and his own.

Robles got his hands on the police revolvers after he was seized by three detectives in a sixth-floor flat at 29 East 104th Street.

As the detectives filed out Robles pretended to break for the stairway. One detective moved to block him, only to have Robles step swiftly behind him and put a revolver in his back. Then after the detectives had dropped their revolvers in response to his order, Robles scooped them up and raced down the stairway to the street.

Robles, 5 feet 6 inches and 140 pounds of viciousness and guile, was wanted as the triggerman in the murder of Joseph Aronowitz whose body was found in Brooklyn early Tuesday. Aronowitz was to have testified in Baltimore last Wednesday as a state's witness in the attempted robbery of a Baltimore policy banker—a case having overtones of police protection.

Every policeman in New York, detective and patrolman alike, had become a part of the city-wide search for Robles since his two escapes on Friday. Robles had a long record since he started as a delinquent. The use of a revolver had figured in every crime.

Tip Discloses Hideout

The beginning of the end of the search came before noon yesterday with "information" that Robles was in a flat on the fourth floor at the East 112th Street address.

Policemen had been searching the city at random, stopping subway trains, searching movie theatres and following other false tips for two days. The third day they were going to be more deliberate while not passing up anything that might lead them to Robles. On the latest information, in the words of Chief of Detectives Thomas A. Nielson, the police "laid out a plan" after doing some checking that convinced them they had caught up with their man.

Six policemen, five of them detectives, were sent from the East 104th Street station, which is only a few blocks away. Ten others were deployed around the building, the third building from the northwest corner of Park Avenue and 112th Street. They were placed on roofs, on the street and on fire escapes, front and rear.

Under the command of Acting Detective Lieut. Charles C. Dauner, the detectives at 3:30 P. M. went up the stairs. One of the detectives was Vincent J. Hefferen who had engaged in the pistol battles with Robles Friday morning.

When the policemen all had taken their positions, the detectives pushed open the door of a rear apartment on the fourth floor. They were met with a burst of five shots. Detective Hefferen was struck in the left knee, Lieutenant Dauner in the left forearm.

Detectives Return Fire

The detectives returned the fire. Then, to get the wounded men down, they retreated temporarily. A signal 30 (holdup, shooting on street or other violent crime) was sent out over the police radio at 3:31 P. M. At 3:35 P. M. all police radio cars in the Twenty-fifth Precinct were ordered to 112th Street and Park Avenue.

Thus was the real battle joined. Police Emergency Service trucks arrived with submachine guns and tear gas bombs. The Fire Department responded with hook and ladder and emergency equipment. Additional patrolmen were summoned by the hundreds. Ambulances came from near-by hospitals.

Up again went the attackers. Now others swarmed in the streets, they went to roofs and cellars of adjoining buildings and buildings in the rear; they were everywhere. Firemen unfurled their hoses. Gas masks were adjusted. Weapons were held at the ready. The siege was on.

This is how it went:

4:10 P. M.—A sergeant yelled out of a window of the house to the left, 65-67 East 112th Street, for more machine guns and tear gas. Reverberations of the shooting were heard clearly in the street. Reporters were ordered back with the warning, "You'll get hurt."

4:11 P. M.—Another call, this time from the roof of 61-63 East 112th Street, for covering head gear for the policemen. The shots did not come so often now; they seemed almost timed. There was one at 4:12, another at 4:15.

4:17 P. M.—The same sergeant, this time on the roof of the adjoining building to the left, called for fifty rounds of ammunition for the machine guns.

4:19 P. M.—Single shots were fired, spaced, followed a minute later by a loud report.

4:21 P. M.—A gray-haired detective put on a gas mask, strapped it under his chin and entered the building. A New York Central train rumbled by, northbound, on the Park Avenue tracks. Then a New York, New Haven and Hartford train heading for Grand Central.

4:25 P. M.—Firemen dragged



Some of the thousands of persons who thronged East Harlem streets are pushed back behind police lines by detectives



A fired policeman emerges from 67-69 East 112th Street carrying tear gas gun and shell. It was in fourth-floor flat in this five-story tenement that gunman fought for his life.



August Robles

the brass nozzles of their hose lines to the entrance of the building. Planes droned overhead. There was a thudding noise that might be a shot or the crashing of an axe on a door. The echoes reverberated in the street.

4:30 P. M.—Renewed activity by the firemen with shouts that "the apartment is just going up in a blaze."

A minute later four shots were heard in quick succession. Grim preparations were made. Four stretchers, white sheets gleaming, were laid side by side on the street to the left of the hallway entrance.

Tear Gas Started Fire

4:32 P. M.—The sergeant yelled from a fifth-floor window in the house on the left: "You'd better get that hose up; it [the fire] is going up good." The fire in the apartment, Chief Nielson told reporters later, was started by the bursting tear-gas bombs.

4:33 P. M.—Tenants, led by policemen, began leaving the building. Some of the evacuees grinned as if the whole thing were a huge joke.

4:36 P. M.—The pumper on the Park Avenue corner was turned on. Hoses dragged up three flights started to pour water on the flaming apartment. Smoke and flame were visible to watchers in the rear of the building, which runs about half way to 113th Street and looks out on a lot filled with tin cans and rubbish, extending to Park Avenue. Other firemen were attacking the fire from the lot below and an adjoining house. Policemen in that house leaned out of windows, pointing their revolvers at the besieged flat.

4:42 P. M.—Six sharp reports in rather rapid succession were heard in the rear on the Park Avenue side. They sounded like giant firecrackers. The crowd standing on roofs along the row of tenements on the north side of 113th Street cried in derision (whether at the fugitive or at the police one could not tell), "You missed again."

4:43 P. M.—Heavy smoke from the blazing apartment began billowing upward and was blown west to Madison Avenue, smarting the eyes of the crowd there.

4:47 P. M.—Two of the stretchers were removed.

4:55 P. M.—Staccato sounds, this time as if a door were being chopped down. A green police pennant was planted in front of the Boricua Restaurant at 71 East 112th Street, signifying that the lunchroom had become headquarters for the police.

5 P. M.—Two firemen, yellow oxygen tanks strapped to their backs, entered the building. A detective wearing a gas mask entered the cellar of the house to the left.

5:05 P. M.—It was all over but the fire in the apartment had not yet been subdued.

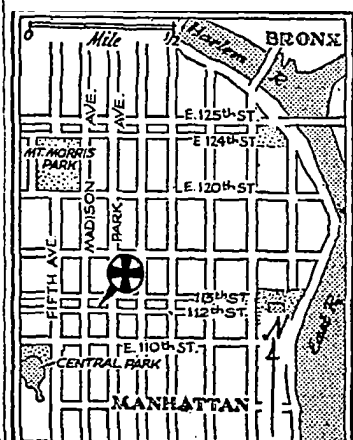
Father O'Donnell came out of the building at 5:16 o'clock, after administering the last rites of the Roman Catholic church conditionally.

He reported that Robles, clad in an undershirt and trousers, was lying on the floor face up, his head under a bed. There were two cots in that back bedroom, placed in upper and lower tier fashion. The rest of the apartment was not visible through the smoke and tear gas, the priest said, and the bedroom was flooded.

Chief of Detectives Nielson said he "deeply appreciated" the cooperation of the emergency service and uniformed forces as well as that of the Fire Department. In the absence of Police Commissioner Francis W.



Policemen and detectives look toward tear gas enshrouded building in which Robles died



The New York Times Feb. 21, 1935
Cross shows scene of shooting

H. Adams, First Deputy Commissioner James R. Kennedy thanked the men "for the great job they did."

The name Robles appeared along with the names Rodriguez and Cruz on adhesive tape affixed to the letterbox for the fourth-floor apartment. A metal plate in the same letter box bore the names Sayans-De Jesus Silva-Rodriguez.

An examination of Robles' body disclosed that he may have been wounded, if only superficially, in Friday's pistol battle. There was a gauze bandage on his neck held by two pieces of adhesive tape, criss-crossed. A diamond ring was on a finger of his left hand and he still wore the tinted glasses without which he had difficulty in seeing.