

## February 14

Thursday, 10:30 a.m. It was a very chilly -8C (or 18F) in Chicago that sunny morning. George Moran ordered several of his employees to meet him at a warehouse located at 2212 (or 221) North Clark (sometimes labeled Clarke) Street, the S.M.C. Company garage, at 10:30 a.m. It was a red brick building.

The business of the day was to pick up a shipment of cheap Canadian whiskey, which they would then re-sell at a handsome profit. Moran himself would be handling the cash for the transaction. It was the second such transaction with the seller, and the first one had gone off without a hitch. It had proved profitable, so this was expected to be profitable as well.

Seven men were in the building waiting for the boss and the shipment to arrive. Six men worked for Moran. Jon (or John – I saw it both ways) May was an auto mechanic; Frank and Pete Gusenberg (or Gusenburg) were brothers; Albert Weinshank, Albert Kachellek (alias James Clark), and Adam Heyer were Moran's employees. Dr. Reinhart Schwimmer was an optometrist. It is not clear that he actually worked for Moran, but he enjoyed hanging around him. May's dog, a German Shepherd named Highball, was also there, though some reports say it was an Alsatian.

Moran arrived late. He had two employees with him, Willy Marks and Ted Newbury. Just as their car turned the corner onto North Clark, they spotted a police wagon rolling up to the warehouse. It was obviously a routine police bust. Since prohibition was in full swing, Moran thought it best not to stop at the warehouse. He would take care of his employees later.

The police wagon arrived at the warehouse intending to catch the bootleggers. There were either five or six men in the police paddy wagon, depending on the account. I could only find four names for the men, and that number seems to be more common among witnesses, but I really think there were five men. A sixth, the driver, stayed in place in the stolen or borrowed police paddy wagon for a quicker get away after the raid.

Fred Burke was in charge of the raid that morning. Albert Anselmi, John Scalise, and James Ray assisted him. All are known to have been in the wagon. A fifth man most likely entered the building as well, and some reports say there were three dressed as police and two plain clothes officers who entered the warehouse.

There were some others nearby, including Joseph Lolordo, Harry Keywell, and his brother Phil Keywell. Frank McGurn planned the raid, and he may have been there, but it appears, perhaps by design only, that he was elsewhere at the time; more on his whereabouts later. The arrival of the police wagon began a confusing series of events. Exactly what happened was clear, but who the players were remains something of a mystery.

*Note: Some reports say there were four – two dressed as police and two plain clothes officers. Other reports say five, with three dressed as police. I'm not certain, but I'm going with the five, even though it is not as common. I'll explain why a little later.*

Five police officers got out of the wagon. Three uniformed officers got out, and two plainclothes officers wearing topcoats got out. One of the uniformed men announced to the men in the warehouse that it was a police raid and that everyone was under arrest. The confused men complied with the police requests. At that point, there was no whiskey there, so they had not yet committed any crime. The worst that would happen would be they would have to make a trip to jail, but they would be back out on the street in no time. At worst, it was a minor inconvenience.

The officers had the men raise their hands and face the wall. Then they frisked the men, removing handguns from several of them. Then the two plain-clothes officers, who had remained out of sight until that point, stepped forward. Reaching under their topcoats, they each pulled out a Thompson .45 caliber submachine gun and began pouring rounds into the seven men facing the wall. In just a few seconds, they fired somewhere between 80 and 100 ear-shattering rounds. The uniformed officers shot also, joining in with a .45 handgun and a sawed off shotgun.

How effective was the shooting? Very – just seven or eight bullets struck the wall. The rest of them hit human flesh. The event became known as the St. Valentine's Day massacre. The date was February 14, 1929.

*Note: I went with five men instead of four because I think it is likely they wanted the extra firepower one more shooter could provide. I'm also going with five because when eyewitness accounts conflict, it seems logical to me that some may have only seen four of the five. Finally, I found some additional evidence of a fifth shooter that day.*

*Note: As spectacular as it was, the truth is the raid was something of a failure. There was no cheap Canadian whiskey. That was a ruse designed to draw George "Bugs" Moran and his gang to the warehouse where they could be eliminated. It worked because someone from Capone's gang had arranged a prior shipment of cheap Canadian whiskey for Moran's gang to pick up, and that deal had gone off without a hitch. That drew the Moran gang, Chicago's north side gang, in for the kill. They fully believed a second shipment would be coming and expected no problems at all.*

*Note: Officially there was only one suspect to the shooting: Al Capone. The raid was successful at wiping out the Moran gang, but it failed to take out Moran, probably due to a case of mistaken identity on the part of a lookout. Capone was the obvious beneficiary of eliminating the north side gang.*

Meanwhile, just around the corner, Moran heard the unmistakable sound of automatic weapons fire coming from the warehouse and left without sticking around to see what would happen next. But other witnesses reported what happened.

After hearing shots, people's attention was drawn to the warehouse. After the violent shooting, three uniformed officers came out, their Tommy guns aimed at two men in topcoats who had their hands raised. The two men in topcoats were herded into the police wagon. Then the officers got in and the wagon took off.

Everyone assumed the raid went well, despite the racket, and that the police had matters well under control. Since the police so obviously had things under control, having arrested the two troublemakers, witnesses saw no point in calling the police immediately. And all those witnesses were ever able to say they saw was the police.

There were two survivors inside the garage. One was May's dog. Its mournful wailing could be heard down the street. That might be what attracted attention to the garage after the police had allegedly left. Despite being an eyewitness, the dog was never able to tell what happened. That there was a second survivor was amazing.

When the real police arrived a short time later, they saw a gruesome sight. Seven bullet-riddled men were on the floor. Some had fallen on top of others. Blood was everywhere. It did not seem possible that any had survived, but one man did.

Frank Gusenberg was on the bottom of the stack of men, though another report says he had managed to crawl about 20 feet towards the door. He had been hit 22 times (some reports say 14 times – I'm using 22 because it was the more commonly reported number), but was still alive.

Sergeant Sweeney asked, "Who shot you?" Frank, a hardened hood to the end, whispered, "No one. Nobody shot me." Though one report says he died on the way to the hospital, he died at 1:40 p.m. in the hospital.

It seems incredible that someone struck by 22 bullets would live more than three hours, but unless a bullet hit a vital part that causes a quick death, it's entirely possible. On the other hand, one small bullet could strike the right place and the victim would die instantly.

Police Lieutenant Tom Loftus spent almost three hours questioning Frank. Loftus told Frank that his brother Pete was dead, and the police wanted to fry the guys who did it. Frank said "All I know is that coppers did it." He said he didn't know who they were. That seems likely since it appears that McGurn had hired killers from St. Louis who would be unlikely to be known to most in Chicago.

Frank may have recognized some of the local people involved, but if he did, he didn't let on to Loftus. At 1:40 p.m., Frank said to Loftus, "It's getting dark, Tom. I'm cold -- awful cold. Pull the covers up over me." Those were the last words he spoke just before dying.

It is likely that not all of the victims were members of Moran's gang. Dr. Reinhart Schwimmer, the optometrist, is something of a mystery. Was Schwimmer, as alleged, an occultist who used his optometry practice to cover his criminal activities? Or was he just a "gangster groupie" who enjoyed hanging around and talking to mobsters like Bugs Moran? Was he just in the wrong place at the wrong time, hanging around with the wrong people, when the operation went down? He may have been the only innocent victim that fateful day, or he might have been involved up to his ears. If he was just an innocent victim, there's bound to be a lesson about picking who you hang around with more carefully than he did.

Albert Weinshank is another mystery. He apparently did not work for Moran, and he may not have been a criminal either. It is possible that he and Schwimmer were simply there for a completely innocent visit with friends in the wrong business and simply got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some speculate that Weinshank wore a brown topcoat and green hat similar to what Moran wore, and that he was mistaken for Moran that morning. When those watching for Moran saw him enter the warehouse, they believed Moran had arrived and his gang could be pretty much be completely wiped out then. But the mistaken identity caused the plan to go awry.

As for the others, it was hard to believe that someone killed at least five or six hardened armed hoodlums so easily, apparently without a fight. But the truth is professional criminals would likely have cooperated with the police. At most, it would be a few hours of inconvenience. They had no reason for believing their lives were in danger if the police were really police. If they didn't recognize any rival gang members among the police, they would likely have simply complied with what appeared to be legitimate police orders.

Witnesses were confused when the police showed up a second time. The police were confused about the unit that had showed up earlier. As you might have guessed, the "arrested" men never showed up with the arresting officers at the police station. Neither did the police wagon.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that all of the dead men were members or associates of George "Bugs" Moran's gang. The plot was very clever and one man quite obviously benefited, one Alphonse Capone, otherwise known as Scarface Al Capone, and often referred to as Public Enemy #1.

Capone was in Miami at the time. Though he was the only suspect, he was never tried for the crime. In fact, when Capone went to jail, it wasn't for bootlegging, murder, or conspiracy to commit murder. It was for tax evasion. As one man said, "It's not sexy, but it has teeth."

Though it is widely assumed that Capone ordered the hit, it isn't actually clear that Capone planned the massacre, or even authorized it. "Machine Gun" Jack McGurn planned the massacre. His simple but ingenious plot was executed brilliantly. Its only real flaw in the execution was that the primary target, Bugs Moran, was not in the warehouse at the time.

The lookouts McGurn hired did not know what Moran looked like, so they wrongly signaled that he was in the warehouse, probably based on a description that Weinshank appeared to fit. Once they sent the signal, the plan was set into motion. The police wagon was already close to the warehouse.

McGurn allegedly checked into a hotel for the day with his girlfriend. He would later marry her, knowing that gave him an airtight alibi, because his wife could not testify against him. She was known as the "blond alibi."

McGurn was one of Capone's top enforcers, and he had planned dozens of executions. McGurn probably planned it because the Gusenberg's had previously attempted to gun him down in a pay phone booth in a hotel.

For the Moran gang, it was the worst-case scenario. Their attempt on his life failed, leaving alive perhaps the worst killer in Capone's organization, and it left him in a bad mood. McGurn was seriously wounded in the attempt on his life, surviving only because he received prompt medical attention.

Some reports have McGurn at the scene, and even as one of the shooters. It may have happened, but it seems unlikely to me. However, I do suspect there was an unidentified fifth "police officer" who did the shooting, and it could have been McGurn. If so, he would certainly had to have been one of the plain clothes officers since he would have been instantly recognized by several of the victims if he was wearing a police uniform that day.

Capone may not have been able to control McGurn. McGurn frequently had disputes with Capone over acting without Capone's OK. Many assume Capone was in Miami to establish an alibi, but his motive may have been very different. Perhaps Capone merely sought to distance himself from the whole affair since he didn't approve of it but couldn't stop it. He may have seriously wanted to eliminate Moran, though it seems unlikely to me that he would have acted on that desire in such a spectacular way.

Moran had been hijacking some of Capone's liquor trucks and selling the liquor. Without a doubt that would have irritated Capone, but in the big scheme of things, Moran was a small potatoes act. He actually did little damage to Capone. Most of Moran's gang was wiped out that cold day in Chicago, while Capone's gang probably numbered in the thousands. Though he was not dead, Moran's organization was. Moran would eventually spend the rest of his life in jail.

Gangland murders were common then. In fact, through the jazz era, there were over 500 gangland murders in the Chicago area alone. Seven at one time may not have been unusual, but this was a spectacular event. Perhaps it was the date, perhaps it was the use of phony police, or perhaps it was the sheer brutality in a somewhat public setting. I'm not sure why, but in a way that was the event that grabbed the public's attention and got the officials moving to do something about the out of control mob.

The combination of those things was, to me, likely the fatal flaw in otherwise brilliant plan that they executed superbly. I understand why it was done the way it was. The use of phony police significantly reduced the risk to the shooters.

Gangsters would not have wanted to shoot it out with the police. Killing the police was a bad idea and got the wrong government officials irritated in a highly leveraged sort of way. By using the police cover, the shooters were less likely to encounter any resistance.

Gangsters may not have cared that much about their own shooters, but let's face it -- it's a lot easier to get guys to do jobs when the risk of getting killed doing it is low. Professional killers know that bullets are no fun to be hit with, and career longevity is significantly enhanced if victims can somehow be persuaded to not shoot back. Reducing that risk as low as possible makes perfect sense. But the use of phony police also ticked off government officials, especially

the police. And when I say police, I don't just mean the local cops; I mean state and federal agencies as well.

When the event hit the newspapers, Moran said, "Only Capone kills like that." Capone said, "Only Moran kills like that." Of course, it was hard for anyone to believe Moran killed his own gang, and but for the dumb luck that he was late and perhaps that someone else was mistaken for him, he would likely have been a victim too. That clearly pointed the finger at Capone.

I do not know all of the aftermath of this event. None of the five gunmen lived a long time. One of them, James Ray, was allegedly gunned down. Fred Burke was sentenced to life in prison, but died in prison in 1940.

McGurn, the planner of the raid, was himself gunned down on February 13, 1936, and died the following day, seven years to the day after the St. Valentine's Day massacre. He was found with a nickel in his hand, which had been his own personal calling card for his victims to show how little value they had to him.

Burke and Ray were actually from St. Louis. McGurn brought them in, probably so they wouldn't be recognized, and also because of their reputations as efficient killers. My guess is they played the part of the uniformed policemen, but their skill with the Thompson (sometimes called a Chicago Typewriter) argues in favor of them being the plain-clothes officers.

Capone himself took care of two of the shooters. Albert Anselmi and John Scalise were suspected of being disloyal to Capone. He invited them to be guests of honor at a fancy dinner on May 7, 1929, less than three months after the St. Valentine's Day massacre. After filling them with food and wine, they Capone literally gave them each a splitting headache.

Capone gave a speech, using baseball as an example. He talked particularly of hitting, and wandered around the room with a baseball bat. His men tied Anselmi and Scalise, and a third man, to their chairs in the rented hotel room where they held the dinner.

The scene was made famous in the movie, "The Untouchables," though Hollywood didn't tell the story like it really happened. Capone himself then delivered a severe beating to all three men with the baseball bat. It's not clear that any survived the beating, but a guard took a handgun and shot each man in the head.

Bugs Moran might have known Anselmi and Scalise, so I suspect they played the men arrested by the police (the plain-clothes officers). If McGurn participated in the shooting, it is possible that one of them was dressed as a uniformed officer. It is also possible that the victims saw only two uniformed officers, and that the third and the plain-clothes officers entered after the men had been disarmed. Had he been in the warehouse, and recognized either of those two, there might have been a shootout instead of a massacre. Had the real police have shown up during the excitement, there might have been a 3-way gunfight.

Capone's gang was already under a great deal of scrutiny because of some other murders. He knew that they were attracting too much attention. Why would Capone, who seemed to be pretty

intelligent, order such a spectacular murder right then? Why would he order one for someone who amounted to little more than a nuisance to him? That doesn't make sense to me, but maybe he did.

I think it is more likely he knew McGurn wanted revenge and he was going to do it anyway. Capone couldn't completely control McGurn, and McGurn was perhaps the most violent man in Capone's organization.

Regardless of the why, it was a significant event that many think was the beginning of the end of Capone's organization. It brought national, and even international, attention.

Police officers tend to take it poorly when the bad guys dress up as cops and commit crimes, especially brutal crimes like the St. Valentine's Day massacre. The police initially were blamed in the case for shooting the men that day. Whether the plan was to frame them, I don't know, but I'm sure that didn't sit well with the police.

At any rate, the investigation proved to be very difficult. Confused witnesses, the only human survivor not talking, and the alibis of Capone and McGurn made solving the crime impossible. In that sense, it may have been the perfect crime.

The spectacular murders caused President Herbert Hoover to sit up and take notice. He ordered every federal agency to begin going after Capone and his "allies." Obviously not all gangsters were actually allies with Capone, but to the government, all mobsters were the bad guys.

That scrutiny eventually led a small team of treasury agents, the famous Elliot Ness led group known as the "Untouchables," to crack Capone for tax evasion. Though the group had impressive exploits, Hollywood has inflated their actual deeds through the famous movie *The Untouchables*, and the old TV series of the same name.

Until I actually researched this event, I always believed Capone was behind the massacre. There seems to be a lot of people who assume he was, and he may have been, but in my research I came to doubt he was even involved, or if he was involved, it was only tangentially. I think at most he might have approved the plan, but I seriously doubt it. I suspect he tried to stop it. I'm sure he would have tried to stop it if he'd known what negative attention it would bring to him and his organization.

I do see the argument that Capone was behind it, and that it was the mistake that brought him down. I can't completely discredit that argument, but I suspect it is what people want to believe and not what really happened. I think people want to believe that because without a doubt, Capone was a bad guy, and we'd all like to think it was an error like this that brought him down, and not something boring like income tax evasion. I'd like to believe it too, but just don't believe it with the information I've seen. This long after the event, it is likely to remain a mystery as to whether Capone was involved or not.

I hope you enjoyed today's history lesson. And Happy St. Valentine's day!

*Rex L. Hogue*