

For Immediate Release

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John Henry Gulden

Commissioned – April 3, 1929
End of Watch – December 23, 1942



Washington State Highway Patrolman John Henry Gulden was shot on December 22, 1942 as he approached a vehicle he had stopped for driving with no headlights on Maryhill Loops Road, south of Goldendale. He was unaware the vehicle carried two teenaged suspects wanted for robbery and car theft. He died the following day, Wednesday, December 23. He was the eighth of thirty WSP personnel who have died in the line of duty in the agency's 100 years of service but the first to be mortally wounded during a gunfight. He was 43.

Originally from Montana, the Gulden family moved to Pleasant Valley, west of Goldendale in 1914. He was a son, a brother, a husband, a father, a farmer, and eventually to a grieving state and agency, a highway patrolman remembered for his commitment to duty and friendly smile. He was one of only five members of Washington State Highway Patrol's third class graduating in 1930 just nine years after the agency's formation. Now, with most of a century passed, he is a man recalled for duty, courage, and sacrifice. We remember...

BIO

John Henry Gulden was born on April 29, 1899, in Belt, Montana, to Charles J. Gulden and Alice K. Stegeman. John and his three siblings grew up in Montana until the family moved to a farm in Pleasant Valley, west of Goldendale, in 1914.

Gulden married Ruth M. Derby on April 24, 1924 in Lansing, Michigan. The couple returned to the family farm one year later and had two sons: Lawrence Charles, born in 1925 and Robert Henry, born in 1927. Lawrence tragically died at the age of three.

John Gulden joined the Washington State Highway Patrol in 1929, taking his oath of office on April 3 at the age of 29. (The agency would change its name to the Washington State Patrol in 1933.) He graduated in 1930 as a member of the third Washington State Highway Patrol Class as one of only five classmates. WSP was still under the leadership of the agency's first Chief at the time, William Cole.

Freshly minted Highway Patrolman Gulden was initially sent to Spokane, but also worked in Seattle before transferring back to Goldendale in November of 1939.

END OF WATCH

In the days before Christmas of 1942, local law enforcement was on the lookout for two teenage boys, Robert Jennings, 18, and John Windmayer, 16, who were involved in a string of robberies and thefts in the Yakima area.

In the early morning hours of December 22, police had set up roadblocks hoping to stop Jennings and Windmayer before they could escape the area, likely fleeing out of state into Oregon. Unknown to police, the pair had already ditched two cars and stolen a third - a 1937 Ford pickup truck with non-working lights.



The stolen 1937 Ford pickup was traveling without headlights when Patrolman Gulden spotted it and pulled it over. The white arrows added to the photo indicate bullet holes from Gulden's revolver during the ensuing shootout.

Just after 4 a.m., Patrolman Gulden observed the Ford traveling with no headlamps. He turned on his lights and siren and stopped the truck. A member of the Yakima County Sheriff Posse, E.C. Kaiser, also pulled up alongside. Gulden contacted the driver's side while Kaiser contacted the passenger side. Kaiser was met by Jennings wielding a gun saying "Stick-em up!" A scuffle ensued, and Kaiser's rifle was knocked from his hands. A shot rang out as the pair fought. Kaiser jumped over a guardrail and down an embankment while Jennings went back to the pickup truck to retrieve a .38 revolver from the driver's side door and fired several shots at Gulden. Gulden was able to return fire but was seriously injured. Struck in the neck, the bullet penetrating into his right lung, Gulden was still able to empty his revolver and reload, striking the stolen pickup at least twice.

Uninjured, Jennings and Windmayer stole Gulden's patrol car and left the fallen officers behind. Kaiser, now separated from the darkened scene, assumed Gulden had been killed in the melee and made his way back to the main highway several hundred yards away. He flagged down a passing pickup and headed to a nearby house to report the shooting and get help. Returning officers found Patrolman Gulden down on one knee, conscious, but in pain and obviously very seriously injured. He was taken to the hospital where he crawled into a hospital bed under his own power, refusing help. He was later transported to the Dalles Hospital in Oregon. He succumbed to his injuries the next day.

He was 43 years old.

EPILOGUE

Jennings and Windmayer were found after an intensive 20 hour manhunt. Abandoning the stolen patrol car, they hiked into the rugged backcountry, hiding in an unused shed for much of the following day. They had actually planned to swim across the bitterly cold Columbia River to Oregon after dark but upon arrival realized the lunacy of their plan. They then tried hiding under a load of wood on a truck crossing the river on the Dalles ferry. They were observed by the truck driver and captured by Oregon State Police, taken into custody without incident on the Oregon side of the crossing.



Convicted of Murder - Robert Jennings and John Windmayer

Jennings confessed to the killing and received a life sentence for first degree murder but escaped the death penalty because of his age. He was released after serving 16-years. Within an hour of Jennings sentencing, Windmayer plead guilty to 2nd degree murder and was sentenced to a maximum sentence of 25 years. He was released after serving 10 years in prison.



Washington Highway Patrolman John Henry Gulden was survived by his wife and son, Robert, who was 13 at the time of his father's death. Patrolman Gulden received the Law Enforcement Medal of Honor on May 11, 1998.

In Patrolman Gulden's obituary, it notes he was "always conscientious in his duty, but never unjust." A memorial was erected in 2010 at the Goldendale Detachment Office. It is inscribed with a poem written in the community newspaper shortly after his death, including the line, "So rest in peace now friend John / We'll miss you a long while / And as the time goes marching on / We'll miss your friendly smile."

The Washington State Patrol misses his smile, remembers his courage, thanks him for his conscientious service, is inspired by his sense of justice, and honors his sacrifice with ever-continuing and ever-dutiful service.

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Washington State Highway Patrolman John Henry Gulden

End of Watch – December 23, 1942

Gone But Never Forgotten