

## Police murders at Bondi Junction, 1931



In Bondi Junction's bloodiest day, two police constables, Ernest Andrews, aged 22 years and Norman Allen aged 29 years, were killed on Saturday 3 January 1931, while attempting to detain an armed and disturbed man.

John Thomas Kennedy, aged 42 years, had been behaving strangely for some time. He went to Mick Simmons Ltd, a shop in Oxford Street armed with a rifle and after getting cigarettes and cigars, hurried towards the shop entrance, without paying, telling the staff to "charge it to the Government", at the same time brandishing the rifle above his head.

Constable Allen of Waverley, who was directing traffic at the time, was informed. He approached Kennedy who levelled his rifle and shot him three times through the chest.

Constable Andrews from George Street North Station, while off duty and on his way to Bondi Beach, learned of the tragedy. He set off in pursuit after Kennedy to 54 Lawson Street where Kennedy lived. On reaching Kennedy's home, he made for the back door, where the agitated man appeared. Andrews was shot twice, and mortally wounded. He struggled to reach Kennedy, who produced a knife and stabbed him in the throat.

Meanwhile Sergeant Seery and Constable Johnson from Waverley Police Station had

arrived at the front door. Kennedy fired at them and Constable Johnson then shot him through the chest. He later died in St Vincent's Hospital.

### **Who was John Thomas Kennedy?**

John Thomas Kennedy loved toy soldiers and as a teenager joined the militia. He became a highly skilled printer, becoming one of the few colour printers of his day. Standing all day printing took its toll on his legs, giving him serious and painful varicose veins at an early age. This forced him to leave the militia.

When World War I broke out he was one of the first to enlist, but the condition of his legs caused him to be rejected. With most men of his age and younger going off to fight, Kennedy undertook a painful and expensive series of operations to have the varicose veins removed. But still the army turned him down. His boyhood dream of becoming a soldier was fast fading and Kennedy suffering from depression is said to have continually brooded over his rejection for army service during the war.

White feathers were sent to taunt him. The notion of a white feather representing cowardice goes back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, arising from the belief that a white feather in the tail of a game bird denoted poor quality. To 'show the white feather' was therefore to be 'unmanly'. For those men, who necessarily remained at home, including pacifists, the effect of being presented with a white feather was often one of shame. For a patriot like Kennedy to receive one was the ultimate humiliation.

This and the death of his mother while he was in Canada, where he spent a successful nine years with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, disturbed him. Neighbours residing in the immediate area were well aware of Kennedy's strange behaviours and habits. He was often observed wandering around the streets muttering to himself with his rifle tucked under his arm, but the residents were too afraid to inform the police, fearing personal reprisals. Often he was heard parading inside the house and rifle shots were heard from his backyard.

An examination of Kennedy's home after his death revealed that he lived alone. The house was sparsely furnished and contained only the barest amenities and necessities. In every room, investigating police found open boxes of cartridges containing many rounds of ammunition, sufficient to enable him to have withstood a lengthy siege.

A diary with disjointed entries indicated Kennedy's disturbed state of mind. At the rear of the house, a portion of the yard has been used as a miniature rifle range, with the cement wall of the house being scarred with countless bullet markings. Gardening implements had also been used as targets.

It is thought that at the time of the shootings Kennedy believed that he was shooting German soldiers. Even as he lay dying in hospital he turned to his brother-in law and said, pointing to the constable at his bedside: "There's another German I have got to fix up!" (*Sunday Pictorial*, 4 January 1931, p.3)

### **Three deaths, three different funerals**

Constables Allen and Andrew received full police funeral honours, with internment taking place at the Church of England section of Rookwood Cemetery, where both officers were buried side by side. As the cortege left the funeral directors, Wood Coffill's Parlours in George Street, to the mortuary siding at Central Station (which took bodies directly to Rookwood Cemetery) thousands of spectators lined George Street and Railway Square in tribute.

Only a few relatives and friends attended the funeral of John Thomas Kennedy. The time of the departure of the hearse from the funeral parlour in George Street was kept as secret as possible. The internment took place in the Roman Catholic section of Rookwood Cemetery where a full service was held at the grave (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 January,

1931, p.10).

The government of the day, appalled by all the grim circumstances of the tragic event, and disturbed by the huge public outcry which followed concerning the ease of purchase of automatic weapons, promised an immediate revision of the existing gun laws and amended legislation where necessary to avoid repetition of a similar tragedy. (*NSW Police News*, May, 1992, p.20)

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