

WALTER WALSH, G-MAN

By R. R. Keene

Walter R. Walsh is 105. His hearing is ... well, it isn't much, and sometimes his memory isn't what it used to be. But what can you expect from a guy going on a century plus six?

Yet his eyes, shooter's eyes, are clear and sharp. He's in good physical condition for any age and although he was never tall, once he was more than big enough. ...

It was a time of snap-brimmed fedoras, wide-lapel, double-breasted suits and Thompson submachine guns. It was the Great Depression and a long, full and adventurous life was awaiting Walter Walsh, 27, a recent graduate of Rutgers law school and a G-man with J. Edgar Hoover's Department of Justice's Division of Investigation, later known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

It was an era sometimes called "The Dillinger Days," when gangsters such as John H. Dillinger Jr.; Lester J. Gillis, aka George "Baby Face" Nelson; Kate "Ma" Barker, born as Arizona D. Clark; and her sons of the Barker/(Alvin) Karpis Gang with Russell "Rusty" Gibson, and the Alfred Brady Gang, whom the papers said would "make Dillinger look like a piker." They made headlines with often heralded and always dramatic accounts of their nefarious adventures as public enemies in the hardscrabble times of the 1930s.

Their nemesis was a group called the G-men, or government men, which in FBI lore was the moniker tagged on them by George C. Barnes, aka George R. "Machine Gun" Kelly, who in 1933, when finding himself unarmed and surrounded, supposedly shouted: "Don't shoot, G-men! Don't shoot, G-men!"

A year later, on Nov. 27, 1934, Public Enemy No. 1 "Baby Face" Nelson was punctured by a hail of .45-caliber Tommy gun bullets, 17 to be exact, triggered by G-men during a gun battle outside of Barrington, Ill. One agent was killed and another succumbed to wounds the next morning. Nelson's accomplices fled in the agents' bullet-riddled car, taking the fast-fading Nelson with them. He died that night. The gang, what was left of them, left their wounded and fled, and later dumped Nelson's body.

An anonymous phone tip came into a



John H. Dillinger Jr.

Agent Walter Walsh joined the FBI's pistol team in 1935. He shot his way to two marksmanship trophies presented him by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. He also was on the bureau's "Heavy Squad," responsible for arresting the more deadly criminals.

bureau office, saying that Nelson's corpse could be found in a ditch. Special Agent Walter Walsh, on special assignment in the area tracking Ma Barker's son Arthur "Doc" Barker, and another agent were sent to investigate. They found the late "Public Enemy No. 1" in a ditch in front of St. Peter Catholic Cemetery in Skokie.

Nelson's wife, Helen Gillis, stated that she had placed a blanket around Nelson's body as, she said, "He always hated being cold."

Agent Walsh was rising in the ranks of the FBI. According to writer Bill Vanderpool in a 2010 article for *American Rifleman*, "Walsh joined the FBI in the first agent class to be armed. ... Since many of the FBI agents then had little



COURTESY OF WALTER WALSH

It was a shoot-out that still is talked about today in Bangor, Maine. The Brady Gang traded bullets with the FBI and lost. Alfred Brady lies in the foreground after trying to escape from agents, and his accomplice, Clarence Shaffer, shot twice by Agent Walsh, also was dead.



firearm experience, Director Hoover tended to call on his more experienced shooters for 'heavy arrests.' ... The Bureau didn't have restrictions on personally owned guns, and Walsh acquired a pair of registered .357 Magnums (purchased through Frank Baughman, an FBI firearms instructor and designer of the famous Smith & Wesson front sight) and a 'tuned-up' Colt .45 ACP Government Model."

His favorite, however, remained the .357. He liked being with the bureau and once told a reporter: "I thought to myself, this might be a good outfit to tie up with. I am not trying to pin medals on myself, but the people in the FBI knew that I was very handy with firearms."

Born and raised in New Jersey, Walsh, almost as far back as he could remember, was interested in shooting. "I used a BB gun to shoot clothespins

off my Aunt Lena's clothesline until she grabbed me by the collar and told me to stop." His father then presented 12-year-old Walter with a .22-cal. Mossberg. "I used to shoot rats in the city dump."

Walsh said his first formal marksmanship training was with the Citizens Military Training Corps, and in 1928, he joined the New Jersey National Guard as a member of the rifle team that went to the National Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio.

Although only a few inches north of 5 feet, he was a standout shooter and he was becoming a standout agent as well.

On Jan. 8, 1935, still tracking the Barker Gang, Walsh was among a group of special agents investigating a possible address for Doc Barker's girlfriend, Mildred Kuhlman.

"The place had been under surveillance," said Walsh in a 2009 interview.



George
"Baby Face"
Nelson



Alfred Brady

FRONT PAGE AND FRAMES

"We may not have been thoroughly convinced it was the place to be, but when this gal came out ... in this red fox fur coat, we knew we were in the right place."

He and a fellow agent saw that Kuhlman was accompanied by a man. It was Doc. Walsh stepped off the running board of his 1935 Hudson and went up behind Doc, who started to run. It was January on Chicago's North Side, and mud and ice proved Doc's undoing. He slid and fell. Almost immediately he felt the very cold muzzle of Agent Walsh's semi-automatic .45 in his ear.

According to the *American Rifleman* article mentioned earlier, Walsh cautioned him: "Don't move, Doc, or I'll kill you." Doc remained very still. A pat down proved Barker to be unarmed. "Where's your heater, Doc?" Walsh asked. Barker bemoaned the fact that he "had left it upstairs" in his apartment, and as an afterthought told Walsh, "Ain't that a hell of a place for it?"



COURTESY OF WALTER WALSH

Right: Walter Walsh was recognized as a top shooter for the FBI and the Marine Corps when this photo was taken in the 1940s. He capped it off by shooting in the 1948 Olympics as part of the U.S. team.

Below: Indiana State Trooper Paul Minneman was ambushed and killed May 25, 1937, by the Brady Gang, who just had robbed the Goodland Indiana Bank.



INDIANA STATE POLICE PHOTO

without knowing what to expect, and it took a special agent waving credentials to prevent what easily could have turned into a bloodbath.

Gibson wasn't about to give up. He donned a "bulletproof" vest, hefted a Browning Automatic Rifle and made for the backdoor fire escape. Agent Walsh was waiting with a .351 Winchester Self-Loading Rifle. Walsh later succinctly summed it up to writer Vanderpool: "He shot high. I didn't."

Walsh sent a slug of lead "through Gibson's chest that flattened against the inside back of his vest," according to the book "Public Enemies: America's Criminal Past, 1919-1940" by William J. Helmer with Rick Mattix. They further wrote that Rusty Gibson "died a short time later, a Bureau report stated, 'with a curse on his lips for all law enforcement officers.'"

Hoover's agents for "heavy arrests" were now called the "Heavy Squad," and Walsh, as a prime member of the Heavy Squad, was sent on many assignments. In October 1937, the Brady Gang, who had moved up to No. 1 on the "most wanted list," turned up in Bangor, Maine. Walsh soon followed.

"They went into a sporting goods store and wanted to buy a Thompson," recalled Walsh. "The owners grew suspicious and told Al Brady they didn't have any in stock, but to come back on Thursday. Brady was dumb enough to fall for it."

The Brady Gang members may not have

been the brightest apples on the tree, but they were among the most rotten. Wanted for 150 robberies and for breaking out of jail, the gang was responsible for the murders of at least four people, including that of Indiana State Trooper Paul Minneman.

Walsh was the operation leader, with 13 other agents and more than 30 state and local policemen. He posed for several days as a clerk, and on Oct. 12, 1937, at 8:30 a.m., in walked Brady Gang member and former moonshiner Rhuel James Dalhoffer.

Walsh, packing his .45 and one of his .357 Magnums, immediately arrested Dalhoffer. Other agents hustled Dalhoffer to the back of the store, and after a quick interrogation he answered the key question.

"My pals are right outside," he said. Walsh quickly moved toward the plate-glass front door. He had prearranged with agents and police outside that he would pull a cord on the window when the gang arrived. That wasn't going to happen now. As Agent Walsh's left hand grasped the door handle, he realized he was looking through the glass at gang member Clarence Lee Shaffer Jr., who at 21 was a braggart and already a career criminal. Ear-deafening shots rang out almost simultaneously as both men fired and the glass door exploded, according to Vanderpool.

It took only a fraction of a second, but Shaffer put bullets from his .32-cal. automatic into Walsh. One round



COURTESY OF WALTER WALSH



FRANKLIN COUNTY FILES



FRANKLIN COUNTY FILES



FRANKLIN COUNTY FILES

Agent Walsh pushed his pistol a little further into Doc's ear to ensure he had his attention and let Doc know that it was his lucky day. If he had had a pistol, Walsh would have killed him. As it was, Walsh obtained clues to the location of Ma Barker and her son Fred when searching Doc Barker's apartment. The clues eventually led to the death of Ma Barker and son Fred in a shootout with G-men in Florida.

In the late afternoon on the same day that Walsh arrested Barker, he went up against gangster Russell "Rusty" Gibson, aka Roy "Slim" Gray, and hoodlums of the "Central Park Gang," who were affiliated with the Barker/Karpis gang. A small army of agents raided a courtyard apartment building without coordinating with the local police. The result was pandemonium among the local residents. Clouds of tear gas poured forth from canisters, and staccato bursts of gunfire came from all directions. Chicago police rushed to the North Pine Grove location



R. R. KEPPEL

went into his right shoulder and lung, and the other hit his right hand holding the .45. That bullet hit his thumb and hit the pistol's grip and magazine. Walsh fired his .357 twice with his left hand. Both shots were fatal for Shaffer, who didn't realize he was dead and ran into the street and collapsed.

Meanwhile, two agents got the drop on gang leader Al Brady, who was observing the gunfight from a parked car. Brady put his hands up and pleaded: "Don't shoot. Don't shoot. I'll get out!"

Brady lunged out, drew a gun and started firing. Having thus drawn attention to himself, the police returned fire accordingly. One of the agents who fired was Walter Walsh, and Brady dropped dead in the street, his hand still gripping a .38-cal. revolver: the same revolver he had taken from the body of murdered Indiana State Trooper Paul Minneman. That evidence was enough to send the sole survivor of the gang, Rhuell James Dalhover, to the electric chair at Indiana State Penitentiary, Michigan City, Ind., on Nov. 18, 1938.

Agent Walsh, although shot-up, survived, but he needed time to heal. He mended while he honed his shooting skills. He had joined the FBI pistol team in 1935. Within three years, Walsh had shot his way to two marksmanship trophies presented by the director, J. Edgar Hoover. In 1939, he set the world record in pistol shooting with 198 points out of a possible 200 and won the individual Eastern Re-



Arthur "Doc" Barker



"Machine Gun" Kelly



COURTESY OF WALTER WALSH

Above: In later years, Walter Walsh coached the U.S. Olympic team. Today, the top pistol trophy in the Marine Corps Competition in Arms Program is the Walsh Trophy.

Left: Walsh says his proudest achievement was his 44-year marriage to his wife, Kathleen.

gional Pistol championships in 1939 and 1940 and placed second in 1941.

In 1938, he took a commission as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserve. It was a good deal for Walsh, who was able to continue his competitive shooting for the FBI and the Marine Corps. The record reflects that in 1940, he won the DuPont Trophy as the best all-round shot in High Power, Long Range and Service Rifle, Center-Fire Pistol and Small Bore Rifle. His record is yet to be broken, 72 years later.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, it also brought the era of machine-gunning, bank-robbing gangsters to a close. America went to war, and by 1942, Walter Walsh went on active duty. Walsh said it was a "soul-searching" decision, as the FBI needed agents, but the Marine in Walsh saw his duty was to the Corps.

Agent Walsh's jump to the Marine Corps outraged J. Edgar Hoover. Walsh shrugged it off. "J. Edgar had a reputation for being tough. He was a good guy to work for. He was not easy, but he was honest and treated his employees fairly." Yet, Hoover never again allowed FBI agents to be members of any armed forces Reserve organizations.

On the other hand, the Corps had long recognized Walsh's shooting experience and placed him where he was of most value. He trained Marine scout snipers at New River, N.C. Walsh found it to be a challenge, as there were little-to-no written records of the Marine sniper pro-

gram from World War I. He did have a copy of Herbert W. McBride's 1935 edition of "A Rifleman Went to War" as a reference, plus, his own by now extensive shooting experience, which included putting bullet holes in somewhere between 11 and 17 gangsters.

By 1944, the challenge of training Marine shooters had worn thin and Walsh wanted to see combat. The Marines were fighting their way closer to the Japanese homeland, and he feared the war would end before he saw any of it. He got his wish in the form of orders to the First Marine Division as it readied for the invasion of Okinawa.

Okinawa was a meat grinder. Still, Walsh, now a lieutenant colonel staff officer, couldn't stay off the front lines, often indistinguishable and smeared with the blood and bodies of Americans and Japanese. On one occasion, he shot a Japanese sniper between the eyes with one shot from his .45 automatic through a bunker aperture at 90 yards.

On another occasion, he was out with a Marine patrol when a fire fight developed with the Marines firing M1 rifles and the Japanese firing Type 99 Arisaka rifles. Suddenly, through the din of the battle, came another recognizable and distinctive sound familiar to Marines—the steady cadence of well-aimed and perfectly timed fire from a .45-cal. pistol. Walsh squeezed off his rounds and dropped those Japanese unfortunate to have drifted into his sight blade.

With the surrender of Japan, the Corps, ever mindful of Walsh's experience as an FBI agent, sent him to North China as provost marshal over Marines protecting the railroads and supplies from Chinese bandits and the Chinese soldiers.

Right: Walsh enjoys living alone in Arlington, Va., although he does have family and friends who look in on him. He believes that those who follow the path of the straight and narrow receive mercy from God in the form of longevity.

Below: Walsh was a lieutenant colonel in April 1945 on Okinawa. Although in a staff billet, he couldn't resist seeing the war close up. He was personally responsible for killing several Japanese soldiers with long-range pistol shots.



COURTESY OF WALTER WALSH

By 1946, he was back in civilian clothes and back with the FBI. But he was not welcomed with open arms. The FBI basically drove him back to the Corps, never to return.

Shortly afterward, the Corps made him commanding officer of 1st Battalion, Eighth Marine Regiment at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., and he took up where he left off in shooting—shooting with distinction.

Walsh won competition after competition, including the Marine Corps Pistol Championship in 1946 and the Eastern Division Rifle Championship in 1947. He went on to shoot on the U.S. Olympic Team in 1948. In 1962, in recognition of his shooting prowess, the Marine Corps posted him as commander of Weapons Training Battalion, MCB Quantico, Va., the home of the Marine Corps' competitive shooting program.

Walsh was right at home and remained in command, leading the Corps' shooting program until 1969, his retirement from active duty. While in command, in 1964, Walsh was awarded the International Distinguished Medal, becoming the first Marine to earn Triple Distinguished honors. Today, the top pistol



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trophy in the Marine Corps Competition in Arms Program is the Walsh Trophy, named for Col Walter Walsh.

Walsh continued to shoot and develop competitive shooters. In 1994, he served as the team captain for the U.S. International Muzzle Loading Team at the world championship in Switzerland. Walsh also served as a director for the National Rifle Association, and in 1997, he was recognized with the Outstanding American Hand Gunner Award. He continued to coach the U.S. Olympic Team until 2000.

Over time even the FBI again proudly claimed Walter Walsh as one of their best. What could they do? He's the oldest living former agent, older than the agency itself.

"So, Colonel," he was asked, "looking back, what do you think was your greatest achievement?"

"My life has been very routine. Anything special was my beloved wife, Kathleen. She was warned to stay away from me. They told her, 'He isn't very damned good.' We were married in 1936, and she remained with me until 1980. She lived long enough to give us five kids: Kathleen, Linda, Rosemary, Walter Jr. and Jerry.

Although he has relatives and friends who visit, Walsh prefers to live alone in Arlington, Va. "I don't do much, but I'm doing it very well."



FRONT PAGE AND BULLS

Rhuel James
Dahlover

He is often chauffeured by his longtime friend, Jim "Horse Collar" Smith, a Central Intelligence Agency veteran and World War II Marine Raider, who at 92, is a youngster according to Walsh. They drive to the Globe & Laurel Restaurant, a watering hole for Marines, FBI agents and policemen south of Quantico. The proprietor, 86-year-old retired Marine Major Richard T. Spooner, ensures Walsh has his seat in the "Privates" Mess, where a plaque summarizing Walsh's accomplishments hangs.

Asked to what he credits his longevity, Walter Walsh ponders for a moment and answers: "To start with, you have to be lucky. Then, if you listen to your parents and follow the path of the straight and narrow, then I think God has mercy on you—permits you to live. That's about it. It has worked very well for me for a long time ... and I've forgotten the SOBs. That makes my life easier."

Does anything about his past bother him? He shook his head and lapsed back in his memory and forgot to come back with an answer. He is 105 you know. He once told his old friend Spooner, "Those stories about shooting that Japanese soldier at 90 yards and perfect timed fire during the firefight aren't true. It wasn't timed fire and the Japanese sniper was only 70 yards away."

