

THE "AMERICAN BOYS"

"My American Boys" was the term Alphonse Capone used to refer to his henchmen Burke, Carey, Goetz, Nugent and Winkeler, and a sixth man, Bryan Bolton. (Charles Fitzgerald was not a regular member of this group.) Capone used this term because these men were not of Italian or Sicilian extraction as were almost all of his other "employees." The group came together under Capone between the Fall of 1927 and the Spring of 1928,⁴¹ just prior to the Zientara murder.

All six of the men had served during World War I, and it is believed that Burke, Carey and Nugent actually knew each other from their Army service. Bolton served in the United States Navy. The Great War was one of the deadliest conflicts in world history, involving trench warfare and hundreds of thousands of casualties. The men became inured to bloodshed. What's more, they became proficient in the use of weapons and in the practice of killing other men.

After the war and the enactment of Prohibition, most of the men became affiliated with the Egan's Rats gang of St. Louis. Fred Burke also acted as a contract killer for the Purple Gang of Detroit. After the Egan's Rats gang dissolved, the men moved across the Midwest, engaging in a variety of crimes.

Winkeler, Carey and Nugent were involved in a scheme that involved the kidnapping of gangsters in the bootlegging trade for ransom. Almost always, relatively small amounts were paid, and the victim was released unharmed. When the three took a friend of Capone's hostage, Capone quickly found out the men's names through his underworld contacts and summoned the gang to meet him in his Chicago offices.

Rather than have the three killed, Capone decided he could use them for his own purposes. At that time, the "Americans" were relatively unknown to Chicago police and other Chicago mobsters. Capone decided to designate the men as a special jobs gang. It was this relative anonymity that Capone later believed suited them to commit the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

All six of the men eventually became permanent employees on the Capone payroll. Capone discouraged their involvement in other crimes, although the men continued to freelance jobs as they did with the Express robbery. Capone did not want the attention the commission of these other crimes brought to his organization. Capone considered himself a legitimate businessman, providing the public with victimless crimes of vice, including liquor, gambling and prostitution. Of course, Capone was not above ordering the murder of his competitors. Because of this position, Capone severely chastised Fred Goetz after the murder of Officer Zientara, since Goetz believed he had shot Zientara. Only the intervention of Gus Winkeler prevented Capone from having Goetz killed.⁴²

Over the course of their various criminal careers, the American Boys were involved in literally hundreds of crimes including theft, armed robbery, bank robbery, safecracking, extortion, kidnapping and murder. This group of men was one of the most dangerous, if not *the* most dangerous, gangs of criminals in the country during the 1920's and 1930's.

Following, the five American Boys involved in the American Railway Express Company robbery and the murder of Officer George Zientara, along with Charles Fitzgerald, are listed individually.

THE ST. VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE

The so-called St. Valentine's Day Massacre occurred on February 14, 1929 at approximately 10:45 AM. The mass murder occurred in the garage of the S. M. C. Cartage Company located at 2122 North Clark Street, in Chicago.⁹¹ This business was a front for the North Side Gang run by George "Bugs" Moran. Moran himself was the target of the attack, since he was a direct rival and competitor to Alphonse Capone and his "Outfit." Both men had made repeated attempts on the life of the other, along with orchestrating attacks on their opponent's subordinates.

The attack on Moran was planned at the summer resort of Fred Goetz, one of Capone's "American Boys," during the Fall of 1928. The resort was located near Cranberry Lake, Couderay, Wisconsin. Two high-ranking public officials were also supposedly in attendance.⁹²

Contrary to popular belief, the killing was not meant as a "valentine" to Moran from Capone, and was not planned for Valentine's Day. Lookouts were in place in two apartments across the street from the garage. They watched the area for approximately two weeks before they observed the man thought to be Moran enter the garage. The murders simply happened to occur on that day.⁹³

After lookouts, including Bryan "Monty" Bolton, one of the "American Boys," spotted a man they thought to be Moran walk toward the garage, they telephoned the team of five killers standing by in a nearby location. The five killers included Fred Burke, Bob Carey, Fred Goetz, Ray Nugent and Gus Winkeler, the remaining members of the American Boys group used by Capone. Capone had designated these men because they were not well known to other Chicago mobsters. Burke and Goetz wore Chicago police uniforms. The killers dressed as policemen also wore bulletproof vests.⁹⁴ The remaining three were dressed in plainclothes to appear as detectives. The men were armed with shotguns and two Thompson submachine guns.

Operating a Cadillac made to look like a police car, two of the men in plainclothes stopped their vehicle in front of the garage. The two men dressed as cops, with the third plainclothesman, stopped their Peerless automobile, also made to look like a police vehicle, in the alley behind the garage. When a rear overhead door was opened, the "officers," armed with shotguns, and the third "detective" entered. Appearing to be conducting a raid against bootleggers, the killers forced the seven men in the garage against a side wall and disarmed them. One of the killers then opened the front door to permit the two plainclothesmen to enter. The two "detectives" cradled the two machine guns under their long coats. They then passed these to Burke and Goetz, the two uniformed "officers."

Burke and Goetz then proceeded to empty their weapons, with one of the Thompsons equipped with a 50-round drum magazine and the other loaded with a 20-round stick magazine. In addition to the rounds of .45 ACP ammunition fired, two shotgun rounds were discharged, blowing off the tops of the heads of two of the victims; this done apparently to administer a final coup de grace. Seventy spent .45 ACP shell casings and two 12 gauge shotgun shell casings were subsequently recovered from the floor of the building by police.⁹⁵ There were more than 70 wounds among the victims, however, since a number of the bullets had pierced the men's bodies and ricocheted off the garage's brick wall, causing additional wounds.

It was Fred Goetz's 32nd birthday.

After the shooting, the two uniformed killers, now armed with shotguns, exited the front of the garage with two of the men in plainclothes in front of them, as if under arrest. They then drove away in the Cadillac. The fifth killer exited the rear of the garage and left the scene in the Peerless automobile.

The six men dead at the scene were: Peter Gusenberg, Albert R. Weinshank, Adam Heyer, John May, Reinhart H. Schwimmer and Albert Kachellek. Frank Gusenberg later died at a hospital. He had been hit fourteen times.⁹⁶ John May was simply a mechanic employed to maintain the gang's vehicles. Reinhart Schwimmer was an optometrist and merely a hanger-on or gang groupie. Bolton later told Bureau of Investigation agents in 1936 that, as the killers had been selected because they were not known to the mobsters, they in turn did not know Moran. In order to ensure they got Moran, they killed all of those present.⁹⁷ Only later did they learn that Moran had been delayed while getting a haircut and was

not present. Bolton also later confessed to F. B. I. agents that he had purchased the Cadillac used in the massacre, and that Burke, Goetz, Winkeler, Nugent and Carey were the actual killers.⁹⁸ His story was later confirmed by Winkeler's widow.⁹⁹

Public outrage over the Massacre brought intense public pressure down on organized crime, ultimately leading to the demise of the Capone empire. On February 20, a \$100,000 reward was posted for the arrest and the conviction of the killers.¹⁰⁰ Feeling the heat across the country, organized crime bosses summoned Capone to a meeting on the East Coast. It was decided that Capone must be removed from the public eye for a period of time. He was arrested with his bodyguard on an engineered weapons charge in Philadelphia on May 16, 1929. Instead of the brief sentence expected with his guilty plea, Capone was given a year in jail. He served ten months.¹⁰¹ But the government wasn't through with Capone. Internal Revenue Service agents and federal Prohibition agents, led by Eliot Ness, pursued Capone on a charge of income tax evasion on his illegal profits. Alphonse Capone was convicted in October 1931 and served an eight-year sentence, including time on Alcatraz. In his absence, Frank Nitti usurped his empire. Capone's syphilis went untreated while in prison, and he died of the disease at his Florida home in 1947, a raving lunatic.¹⁰²

A few honest Chicago police detectives pursued the Massacre investigation on their own and eventually learned the names of those involved. Both Fred Burke and Raymond Nugent became solid suspects. Because of the pressure created after the Massacre, both Burke and Gus Winkeler underwent plastic surgery on their faces and had their fingerprints altered.¹⁰³ After Burke's murder of Officer Skalay in Michigan at the end of 1929 and the location of the Thompsons used in the killings, Burke became the only man ever actually charged by the Coroner's Jury for the Massacre.

The F. B. I., as an agency, was not really interested in the killings, since these were the purview of the Chicago Police Department. The F. B. I. was interested in pursuing only its own federal investigations.¹⁰⁴

The St. Valentine's Day Massacre also led to the formation and publication of the Chicago Crime Commission's "Public Enemies List."¹⁰⁵ J. Edgar Hoover opposed such a list claiming that it would encourage criminals to commit additional crimes in order to achieve placement on the list. Many believe that Hoover was simply angry because the list did not originate with his agency. Public and government pressure eventually forced the agency to post its own "Ten Most Wanted" list.

THE THOMPSON SUBMACHINE GUN

Two days after the killing of Officer Zientara, Toledo Police Chief Louis J. Haas asked the city for funding to purchase ten of the Thompson guns.¹¹⁴ Toledo City Council subsequently authorized the purchase of ten bulletproof vests at a cost of \$1,000, ten motorcycles at a cost of \$3,000, and the ten Thompsons at a cost of \$1,700.¹¹⁵ All of these purchase authorizations were a direct result of the Zientara killing and the thought that the police were under-armed and under-equipped. Although the department already had one Thompson, it was privately owned by a sergeant. Eventually, Toledo Police purchased a total of thirteen Thompsons, more than any other U. S. law enforcement agency other than the F. B. I., with its many offices.¹¹⁶

With respect to the history of this firearm, since the Auto-Ordnance Company manufactured the first Thompson model, the Model 1919 Annihilator, in Cleveland, Ohio police officers were some of the first to test the new weapons.¹¹⁷ Initial Army tests of the gun found it to be unacceptable, although the Marines purchased a number of the weapons to guard the mails.

Under Chicago's concealed weapons law, the guns were legal to own since they weren't concealable. The gun's first use by mobsters is believed to have occurred on September 25, 1925. The first victim of a gangland killing, Charles Kelly, died on October 4, 1925. Both of these incidents occurred in Chicago.¹¹⁸ The first killing by Capone's men using the weapon took place on April 27, 1926.¹¹⁹ Because of the negative publicity caused by the use of the gun by the underworld, in 1930 the Auto-Ordnance company discontinued all sales to wholesale and retail dealers. Sales were limited to law enforcement and the military. With many of the original 15,000 guns made remaining unsold, the company itself was sold in 1939.¹²⁰ A relatively short time later, with World War II looming, the Thompson gun suddenly became in high demand. It was widely used by Allied forces, with more than two million sold by the end of the war.¹²¹

The following is the serial number list of the Thompson submachine guns owned by the Toledo Police Department: Nos. 2026, 3992, 4582, 5535, 5679, 5840, 6008, 6054, 6221, 6271, 6331, 6544 and 6861.¹²²



This Thompson submachine gun, No. 6861, was formerly owned by the Toledo Police Department. It was sold by the Rock Island Auction Company in 2017 for \$46,000.