

# National

## Racial tension in Oklahoma Oil tanker burns in Gulf

**United Press International**  
IDABEL, Okla. — A black man was shot to death and his companion and a white police officer were wounded Sunday in a gunfight sparked by accusations of arson in a city torn earlier this year by racial tensions, officers said.

The Highway Patrol said Idabel Police Chief Hobby Denison requested stepped-up assistance from state troopers, although the city of 7,000 nestled in the wooded hills of southeastern Oklahoma was reported quiet several hours after the shootings.

Gunfire erupted when three white police officers attempted to arrest two black men who had exchanged shots with another black man during an argument over the burning of a building.

One of the black men, identified as Billy Richards, 28, of Idabel, died in a Texarkana, Ark., hospital about four hours after the shootings.

Richards' companion, Willie Warhop, 26, also was hospitalized in Texarkana and was described as stable after undergoing surgery.

Officer Roy Choate, about 55, was admitted to McCurtain County Memorial Hospital in Idabel for observation and was listed in good condition. Choate's wound was less serious because he wore a protective vest, officials said.

Police officials who asked not to be named said several anonymous phone calls threatening the lives of the officers involved in the shooting had been received at the police station.

The officers spent most of the day being questioned by Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigating agent Steve Smith, who said several more agents were en route to the town.

Other high-ranking police officials said officers from the Highway Patrol and local police force were avoiding "colored town," in hopes of avoiding racial confrontation.

"We're staying out of there," one official said. "If they see me and four or five other officers, it's just going to cause more trouble."

Police said any racial confrontation would mostly likely occur after sunset. Dozens of officers from three law enforcement agencies were on standby alert from 5 p.m. Sunday to 5 a.m. today.

Near the scene of the shooting, residents of the predominately black area spent a normal Sunday. Some were talking with neighbors, young men played basketball and children rode their bicycles.

Religious music could be heard coming from a church next door to the restaurant.

A Highway Patrol spokesman said Warhop owned a disco that burned last week and he and Richards went to General Lee's Bar-B-Q on Idabel's predominantly black west side and accused the establishment's owner, General Lee Diamond, 50, of burning Warhop's disco.

The three men exchanged several shots, police were called and Choate and two other officers responded, the patrol said.

"Warhop and Richards were advised they were under arrest and a gun battle occurred," the spokesman said.

Names of the other two officers involved were not released. It was not determined who fired the shots that killed Richards and wounded Warhop and Choate.

Mayor Rex Helms later issued a statement that

15 shots were fired. He said Warhop fired three shots at Choate, Choate fired three shots at Warhop, Richards fired three shots at another officer who fired once at him, and the third officer fired five shots at Warhop and Richards.

Helms said Warhop was struck by four bullets, Richards by two and Choate by one.

Helms said the gunfight involving the officers began as Choate followed Warhop out of the restaurant.

"Warhop pulled a .357 Magnum pistol and fired pointblank into the chest of the officer behind him," Helms said. "The wounded officer pulled his revolver and returned fire."

He said Richards pulled a pistol after the initial gunfire.

Helms said officers on routine patrol about an hour after the shootings discovered a broken glass door at a store in west Idabel, attempted to investigate and were fired upon as they and the owner approached the front of the store. He said the owner and officers left, returned later and found that a shotgun, a .38-caliber revolver and several boxes of ammunition had been taken.

Helms said he did not know whether there was any connection between the shootings and the burglary.

"Due to the fact that the Idabel police officers were involved, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation was requested to assume full control of the investigation of the shooting incident," Helms said.

The Highway Patrol sent five officers to Idabel to remain on call.

**United Press International**  
NEW ORLEANS — A oil tanker carrying a crew of 32 and an estimated 14.4 million gallons of crude oil caught fire Sunday and burned for several hours in the Gulf of Mexico off the Louisiana coast, the Coast Guard reported.

The fire, which started in the engine room of the 761-foot M.T. Sea Royal, apparently was quickly controlled or extinguished, Coast Guard spokesman Doug Bandos said.

The crew remained aboard. Coast Guard planes flew to assist the tanker, which was "dead in the water" about 200 miles due south of New Orleans.

The ship had been en route to Galveston, Texas, with a cargo of heavy Bunker C grade oil, Bandos said.

A 438-foot tanker, the M.V.

Espoir, was diverted to the Sea Royal and three Coast Guard cutters were also dispatched. A Coast Guard C-131 from Florida circled the vessel.

Bandos said the fire was reported about noon (CDT) and the Coast Guard lost communications with the ship. But about 3:45 p.m., the Coast Guard Rescue Coordination Center in New Orleans received word that the fire appeared out.

"They haven't entered the engine room yet, but they believe the fire is out," said Bandos. "They're going to wait a little before they go in there. They won't know for sure until our cutter the Steadfast gets on scene."

Bandos said the engine room was sealed to cut off oxygen for the fire and filled with carbon dioxide, a fire-

fighting chemical.

In another mishap in the Gulf, crew members from the submersible oil rig Ocean King escaped in survival capsules Saturday after a fire broke out in the engine room. That fire was quickly controlled without injury.

The Ocean King was located 50 miles southeast of Corpus Christi, Texas.

Bandos said the Sea Royal was loaded with 57,000 tons of roughly the equivalent of 141 million gallons.

Tankers that are full are safer than partially full or empty tankers because the danger of explosion is reduced due to a lack of oxygen holds.

## Sick man unaware of illness

**United Press International**  
LOS ANGELES — Richard Huber is somewhere on Skid Row, no different from the thousands that frequent the missions and street corners, except this transient has a rare blood disease that could kill him in two weeks and he doesn't know it.

Doctors and administrators at the downtown White Memorial Medical Center put out an urgent appeal Saturday for help in finding Huber, 33, a "fit-looking" white male who walked into the emergency room last Sunday complaining of fever. Huber was examined and released

on the promise that he would return in a few days for the test results. Hospital spokesman Tom Elstrom said Huber, originally from North Carolina, is suffering from subacute bacterial endocarditis, a blood infection that attacks the heart valves. "This disease is often fatal if untreated," said Dr. Brian Johnston, a medical center. "If this man does not get medical treatment, he could die within two weeks."

When doctors realized the condition two days after an emergency room visit, Elstrom said a telegram was sent to the hotel where Huber listed his address, but it was not returned without leaving the warding address.

"We got a call Friday from Union Rescue Mission saying Huber had been staying there but had gone," Elstrom said. "They sent people out on the street to look for him."

A record of a California driver's license listed a San Francisco address. "We contacted the police but just suggested we contact the media," Elstrom said. "They've been very much help."

Huber was described as about 5-foot-11, weighing approximately 170 pounds, with prematurely thinning brown hair. At the hospital, he was wearing a plaid shirt and blue jeans.

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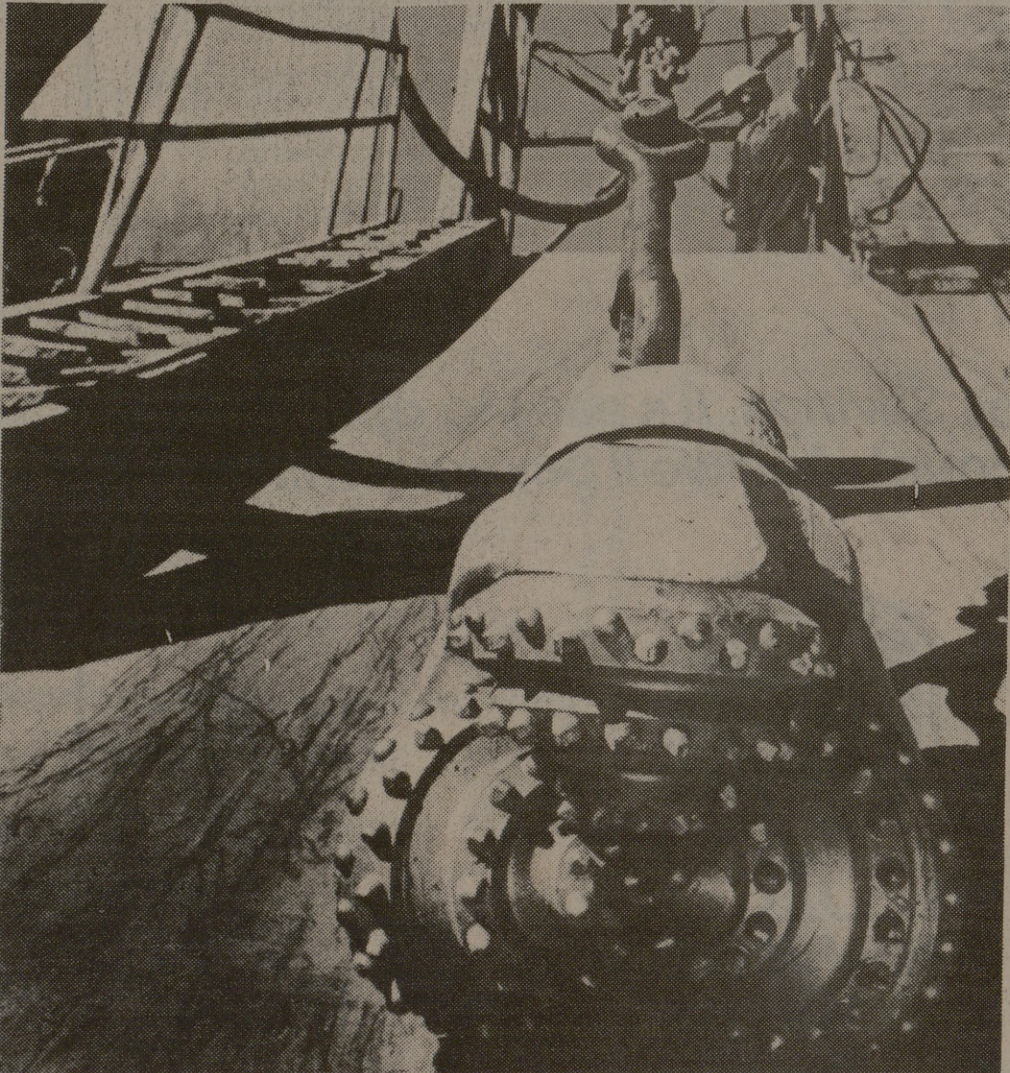
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