

Billy Ross Watts, Class of 1946.

Bedside Vigil Ends in Death of Billy Watts

Youth, Mistaken for Prowler, Shot by Father as He Kissed Mother

A vigil of a Memphis mother and father for six virtually sleepless days and nights at the bedside of their son ended last night.

Billy Ross Watts, 15, died at 9:30 p.m. at St. Joseph's Hospital. The parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. Watts, 2550 Harvard, and their other son, Pfc. Howard Watts, had stayed at the hospital since Billy was shot a week ago tonight by his father who, awakened as the boy leaned over the bed to kiss his mother goodnight, fired a rifle at what he thought was a prowler. Grief-stricken, the mother and father went with him to the hospital. The next day their older son came from Fort Oglethorpe. The three took up their vigil. Several times Billy seemed to be getting better. Late yesterday he took a turn for the worse.

Billy was a 10th grade pupil at Tech High School and a member of Merton Avenue Baptist Church.

Last Wednesday night, he and several other boys took up a watch across the street from Billy's home. A prowler had been getting into houses of the neighborhood. (Neighbors say the prowler still is getting into houses.) The boys were determined to catch him if possible. Everybody in the neighborhood had been alarmed, and that's why Mr. Watts kept his rifle at the bedside.

Billy went back home about midnight and had just tip-toed into his parents' room to kiss his mother when the fatal shots were fired into his chest by his father.

Services at 2:30 p.m. tomorrow at Merton Avenue Baptist Church, Rev. C. L. Randall officiating. Burial in Memorial Park.

Looking for Burglar, Father wounds son

Billy Ross Watts in Critical Condition After Accident.

Billy Ross Watts, 15, was accidentally shot in the chest last night shortly before midnight by his father, Thomas A. Watts of 2550 Harvard, who was on watch at his home in an attempt to catch a burglar who has been prowling the Watts home.

The boy did not know his father was on watch for the prowler and entered the house without identifying himself in any way. W. C. Holland, a Thompson Brothers Mortuary attendant, said he was informed by the family. The boy was shot in the chest and left hand with a .22-caliber rifle.

He was carried to St. Joseph's Hospital, where attendants said his condition was "critical" early this morning.

While the boy lay in the hospital calling for his father constantly, Mr. Watts was being questioned by police, who refused to release him at the request of relatives.

Victim of Shooting Slightly Improved

Rallying after several blood transfusions Billy Ross Watts, 15, was slightly improved today at St. Joseph's Hospital, physicians reported.

Billy was shot in the chest with a .22 caliber rifle bullet Wednesday night by his father, Thomas A. Watts, 2550

Harvard, who mistook him for a prowler that had been operating in the neighborhood of the Watts' home.

Billy had gone to the bedroom of his parents to kiss his mother good night. Mr. Watts awoke and seeing someone standing near the bed, thought his son was the prowler and fired two shots.

Boy Shot in Chest 'Holding His Own'

'Critically Ill,' Says Doctor; Father Keeps Vigil

Billy Ross Watts, 15, shot in the chest Wednesday night when his father mistook him or a prowler as the boy leaned over his parents' bed to kiss his mother goodnight, is "still critically ill" at St. Joseph's Hospital.

Dr. E. A. Canada, Billy's physician said the boy "has a chance and is holding his own."

His father, Thomas A. Watts, 2550 Harvard, awakened as the boy leaned over the bed, seized a rifle and fired. Mr. Watts, grief-stricken, has refused to leave his son's bedside since the shooting.

Youth Little Better

Billy Ross Watts, 15, accidentally shot in the chest by his father, Thomas A. Watts of 2550 Harvard, Wednesday night, showed "slight improvement" at St. Joseph Hospital yesterday, but still is in critical condition, attendants reported. Mr. Watts told police he mistook his son for a prowler. Police released Mr. Watts after questioning him.