

Defensive Strategies



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After the incident, nobody seemed to know the answers to lots of questions, but mistakes were easy to enumerate.

Why did Leon Roberson, 20, and his pal, Marcus Gould, 25, travel by bus, according to the ticket later found, from their home in Los Angeles to Fort Smith, Arkansas? The answer wasn't clear, but making that trip was the latest in their series of mistakes.

Perhaps Roberson's first mistake might have been committing robbery, burglary and theft in his home state. He had been arrested a few times.

On this, their latest go-round, in December 2014, they each had a gun, both semi-automatic pistols. Roberson acquired a car, a red Buick LeSabre, and the pair drove from Fort Smith to Springdale, about an hour away.

Springdale was the home of various businesses, including one called the C & S Gun and Pawn Shop. The sign clearly said "Gun and Pawn Shop," not just plain "Pawn Shop" or "Pawn and Gun Shop." The business obvi-

Lessons in Reality: How Many Mistakes Does It Take?

ously had both guns and pawned goods inside.

Was the duo after guns or other goods? Again, no answer, but if you were going to rob a pawn shop, would you pick one that featured guns so prominently? If you wanted to steal guns, would you choose to rob a gun store, where the owner would probably be armed?

Their next mistake was deciding to rob that particular shop.

The C & S Gun and Pawn Shop was owned by Clint and Shirley Cornett, and both were in the store the morning of December 6. This couple knew what could happen. Two years previously, the shop had been robbed at gunpoint. 74-year-old Shirley kept a gun handy at all times. No mistakes there.

Leon Roberson and Marcus Gould entered the store about 9 in the morning, hooded sweatshirts, one gray, one orange, pulled around their heads. No other customers were there.

They wandered around the store for a bit, then split up—probably to better cover the two occupants—then drew their guns.

In a flash, 74-year-old Shirley drew her gun, a revolver, from behind her right hip. The draw was fast and smooth. This woman was practiced. She had no time to acquire a two-handed grip, though her left hand was clearly reaching toward it as her right fired the gun.

Without hesitation she fired at the man nearest her, the one in the

gray sweatshirt, Marcus Gould, who was trying to jump over the counter. She hit him in the arm! No mistakes there. She kept firing at him, at least two more shots.

Gould fired back at her, missing badly. His shot hit a stack of books on the counter and ricocheted into Shirley's chest.

Ricochets generally have lost much of their velocity and penetration ability because of what they hit between the gun and their eventual resting place. When shooting bowling pins at the Second Chance matches years ago, I was often hit with bullets that had bounced off the bowling pins that were my targets. All those that hit my clothing caused no injury at all. One that hit bare skin caused only a slight scratch.

Shirley's experience was identical. The round that bounced off the books and hit her chest did not break her skin.

Clearly, another mistake, (are you keeping score?) was underestimating the preparedness and willingness to shoot of that senior citizen.

After those two had started the battle, Roberson at the other end of the store decided to get into the fight. He started firing at no clear target, but his gun had trouble, possibly stove-piping, after his first shot, so he can be seen on the store's security video racking the slide after each subsequent attempt. Or maybe he didn't know how the gun actually operated and thought he had to rack the slide. His mistake was

either having an unreliable gun or not knowing how to use it. He hit nobody.

At this point, they are thinking only of getting out of there. Gould fired a few shots on his way out, also hitting no one.

They got into their red Buick, and Roberson drove Gould to a hospital in Fort Smith. Gould used a fake name and concocted a story about the origin of his injury. While he was still there, Roberson first left, but then came back to check on his friend, parking that distinctive red Buick in the hospital parking lot. Another mistake. It was easy for police to pick both of them up in Fort Smith by the end of the day.

Another mistake was keeping everything in their car. Police found their distinctive clothes, the

guns, and the one thing they had actually managed to steal from the store: a bracelet.

That's right. Another mistake was going in to steal a big haul and ending up with just a bracelet.

They made so many mistakes they might be candidates for the Stupid Criminals Hall of Fame.

Both have been charged with Attempted Capital Murder, as well as Aggravated Robbery.

Shirley Cornett's use of lethal force was entirely proper under Arkansas law and the investigating police recognized this immediately. She was not arrested or charged with anything.

Shirley was very shaken up by this experience, and briefly collapsed at the scene. You can see her falling on the video, but she was unhurt and was revived by

EMS personnel. Even after a few months she declined to talk to me in person about it, so I have used media sources for this story, including the video of the shootout, which can be seen at:

<http://5newsonline.com/2014/12/06/springdale-police-are-investigating-early-morning-robbery>

What are the take-aways here? You cannot count on the criminals you encounter being as clueless and making as many mistakes as these two. Know the law in your state, especially regarding crimes against property as opposed to against a person.

The most important thing is: have a gun with you that you can access quickly and use reliably.

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