

Harry (Henry) “Red” Oland

The murder of Dan Roberts and the attack of Mrs. J. L. Warren and Roy Lee Culver

On Friday, November 27, 1942, forty year-old Harry “Red” Oland believed the people of Morton were calling him a “slacker”. He became increasingly infuriated over this, and went into Morton, where ran in to a laundry where Dan Roberts, a laundry operator, worked and without warning, stabbed him in the back, killing Roberts almost immediately.

Oland then reportedly “chopped” his way in to the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Warren, her invalid mother, and the Warren’s two young children. Oland struck Mrs. Warren on the head with the hatchet and threatened to kill Mrs. Miller and the children before the women’s pleas for their lives and those of the children persuaded him to leave the home.

Still in a rage, Oland ran out in to the street where he came across twenty-seven year old Roy Lee Culver, who was visiting from Dallas. Oland slashed Culver several times, severely wounding the man. Culver, like Mrs. Warren, would survive the attack

By this time a mob had formed was looking for Oland. Upon hearing the approaching mob, Oland attempted to take his own life by cutting his throat with the hatchet, but was instead ran down by an automobile driven by Carl Williams, breaking one of Oland’s legs and one of his arms.

Sheriff Tom C. Standefer had Oland taken to an undisclosed jail to be held until trial. Oland was officially charged with murder on December 2nd and was indicted by the grand jury on April 13, 1943. On April 26th Oland, heavily guarded by Texas Ranger Captain Maney Gault, Texas Rangers Norvell Redwine and Raymond Waters and Cochran County Sheriff W. E. Angley and his deputies, plead guilty to murder and was sentenced to life in prison.

A Note:

I had heard this story around town from a few different sources over the years, and while they all differed somewhat, they all told the story of an African American man who “went crazy and murdered several people with hatchet”. Some say it happened in the late 1930s, others the early 1940s. Those stories all have the same ending, the man was being kept in the county jail in Morton when a mob overran the jail and lynched the man from a tree on the courthouse lawn. After doing research I believe these are made up variations of the Harry Oland case.

Not much is known about Harry Oland and the events of November 27, 1942 other than what can be found in newspapers articles from 1942 and 1943 and what little information is available in the Texas Convict and Conduct Registers, and on his death certificate.

Harry Oland was born October 31, 1902 in Louisiana to Auguste and Mary (Lewis) Oland. His occupation was listed as longshoreman on his death certificate and one newspaper article referred to him as a “shipyard worker”. Though he is listed as single on his death certificate, it is unknown if he had a wife or children. Whether he was living in Morton or just passing through is also unknown as it is not documented anywhere nor is he ever mentioned as being a resident of Morton.

After his sentencing on April 26, 1943, Oland was transferred to the penitentry in Huntsville on April 28, 1943. In 1946 Oland was transferred to the Rusk State Hospital, where he was diagnosed with “paranoid type schizophrenia” Harry Oland died at the age of 48 in the Rusk State Hospital of stomach cancer on March 5, 1952.

Sources: Texas Convict and Conduct Register, Convict Record of the State of Texas, death certificate # 10796
Lubbock Avalanche-Journal: November 29, 1942; April 11, 1943; April 18, 1943; April 25, 1943
Lubbock Morning Avalanche: December 2, 1942; December 3, 1942; April 14, 1943; April 27, 1943