



# METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Veteran MNPD Detective Mike Roland has completed his follow-up investigative review of three Nashville civil rights era bombing cases from 1957, 1958, and 1960. Mayor O’Connell last summer asked that the MNPD undertake a review to determine if new actionable information could be gleaned concerning the unsolved bombings after he read the 2024 book Dynamite Nashville authored by Betsy Phillips.

The three bombing cases occurred before the creation of the Metropolitan Government in 1963 and involved Hattie Cotton Elementary School, 1033 W. Greenwood Avenue (September 10, 1957), Jewish Community Center, 3500 West End Avenue (March 16, 1958), and the home of J. Alexander Looby, 2012 Meharry Boulevard (April 19, 1960).

Detective Roland’s follow-up investigative work did uncover information that heretofore was unknown. In reviewing a report written by W.E. Coleman, who was the Fire Marshal in 1960, Detective Roland saw that a school age girl’s photograph was found at the scene of a burglary of Simpson Stone Company in Clarksville involving the theft of a large quantity of dynamite two days prior to the bombing of the Looby residence. Coleman identified the girl as a student at an elementary school in Ohio. The only information noted was that there was no association between the girl, who was age 11, and any individual who worked at the location of the burglary.

Through his investigative work, Detective Roland was able to locate the girl in the photograph, who is now age 75 and lives out of state. She agreed to speak with him over the telephone. She had no knowledge of her photograph being found in Tennessee in 1960 and had no recollection of the Nashville bombings. However, she did provide information about an uncle, who she described as a racist and very prejudiced. The man was born in 1921 and died in 1984. Computer and telephone queries concerning this man provided little information on his background and no information placing him in Tennessee. Unfortunately, the question of how the photograph of a school girl from Ohio wound up at the dynamite burglary scene remains without a definitive answer.

As a part of his investigation, Detective Roland made contact with, and sought information from, a number of individuals, both members of the community and persons from government/private archives. Nevertheless, he encountered a number of challenges as he attempted to advance these decades-old bombing investigations.

Foremost was the lack of written and/or poorly documented information from that era. Much of the information in federal and state law enforcement files consisted of newspaper clippings. Some of the paperwork consisted of memorandums, many of which were not legible. None of the information Detective Roland read definitively named a suspect beyond a reasonable doubt.

Secondly, the lack of physical evidence. Several memorandums and reports reference evidence, such as plaster casts of tire impressions, different pieces and lengths of wire, and pieces of metal. One report said that evidence collected at one scene was not labeled and was impossible to determine from where it originated. Detective Roland was unable to locate any of the physical evidence.

Third, is the probability of death or the very advanced years of any witnesses, suspects and law enforcement personnel. Detective Roland was unable to locate any living person directly associated with these cases, other than a man now in his 70s who was age 11 when the Jewish Community Center bombing occurred in 1958. He related that he was the last person to leave the JCC just before the explosion. He vaguely described a possible suspect vehicle, but had no information that could help in the positive ID of the vehicle or any suspect.

The three Nashville bombings were only a few of the bombings that occurred in the United States during this time period. It was a common belief in the 1950s and early 60s that organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Confederate Underground, and other racially motivated organizations were behind the attacks.

Detective Roland's investigative opinion is that the possibility of solving these heinous Nashville crimes in modern day would require a confession from a person who committed the act(s), was directly involved in the planning, or was a witness with actual knowledge of the person(s) responsible.

These cases will remain open but classified as inactive unless and until any new information is discovered.

If anyone has information on these bombing cases from the 1957, 1958, or 1960, please contact Nashville Crime Stoppers at 615-742-7463.

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