

# Officer Did Not Realize Gunman Was Fugitive

By Don Terry  
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Several hours had passed before Police Officer Jannet Caban realized she had been in a shootout with one of New York City's most wanted fugitives during a robbery Tuesday night, she said yesterday.

The fugitive was Ralph Richardson, who killed himself Wednesday after being sought in the shooting of two police officers last week, the murder of an elderly woman and two other killings.

For days, Mr. Richardson's picture had been in the newspapers, on television and on the walls of police stations throughout New York City. But Officer Caban said she did not recognize him when he walked into her video store, Request A Movie, at 4709 Avenue D in the Flatbush section, just before 10 P.M. Tuesday.

Moments after entering, he pulled two guns from his coat, announced a stickup and threatened to kill her.

"I didn't have time to look at his face," Officer Caban said at a news conference yesterday at Police Headquarters. "I looked at both guns. That's all I looked at." Trying to Protect 3 Others During the gunfight between Mr. Richardson and Officer Caban, in which they were as close as six feet, she wounded him in the right hip before he escaped in a stolen car. A few hours later, he shot himself in the head, the police said.

A spokesman for the Medical Examiner's office, Ellen Borakove, said Mr. Richardson's death had been ruled a suicide.

"I was glad when I found out it was Richardson," Officer Caban said.

Since the gunfight, the 25-year-old officer has been praised by police officials as a hero. But she said yesterday that she was simply trying to protect her cousin, Linda Sylvester, 26, and two customers who were in the store.

"I know I tried to keep cool, calm and collected," she said. "I just wanted to save my life. That's it." First Time She Shot Someone

Nine shots were exchanged, and Officer Caban said it was the first time she had fired her gun at another person. A five-year veteran of the Police Department, she is the crossing guard coordinator for the 77th Precinct in Brooklyn.

When Mr. Richardson, 20, announced the holdup, Officer Caban was behind the counter, near the cash register of the store, which she owns with Ms. Sylvester. Her off-duty .38-caliber pistol was out of view, about an arm's length away, she said.

Mr. Richardson ordered the four to lie on the floor, Officer Caban said.

He walked toward the counter and demanded money. Officer Caban said she gave him everything in the register - \$200 - but he demanded more. He put a gun to the middle of her forehead.

"He said it wasn't enough," she said. "He stated he'd come around the counter and if he found any more he was going to kill me." 'I'll Be Back,' He Yells

She said Mr. Richardson started moving backward instead of toward the counter, she reached for her gun and the shooting began.

"I knew where my revolver was," she said. "I had time to think."

She said they both ducked and fired several times as Mr. Richardson continued backing toward the door. Then one of her shots dropped him to the floor. But he continued crawling away, firing his pistol as he went.

At the doorway, he paused and shouted one last threat: "I'll be back."

"He said it with the attitude that he was going to come back," Officer Caban said. She had fired all five rounds in her gun.

She sounded the store's alarm and then she, her cousin and the customers left to look for a telephone.

"I thought he might have some backup outside," she said. "I thought he might come back with an Uzi or a shotgun." More Surgery on Officer

At 3:15 A.M. Wednesday, Mr. Richardson's body was found in the front seat of a car that the police said he had stolen the night before. It was parked on a dead-end street near East 98th Street and Ditmas Avenue in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn.

The police said Mr. Richardson had shot himself to death with the .38-caliber pistol he had taken from Detective Louis R. Rango, 51, one of the officers he had shot last Friday as they tried to arrest him. Detective Rango was struck in the shoulder and has been released from the hospital.

The other officer shot that day, William T. Gunn, 28, was in critical condition yesterday at Kings County Hospital with a severe head wound.

As Officer Caban talked with reporters yesterday, Officer Gunn was undergoing surgery to remove a blood clot from his brain.

A \$35,000 reward had been offered for information leading to Mr. Richardson's capture and conviction. Lieut. Stephen Davis, a Police Department spokesman, said yesterday that no one would receive the reward.

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