

Miami: 11 April 1986

An unvarnished and illustrated forensic examination of the FBI's devastating firefight in South Florida

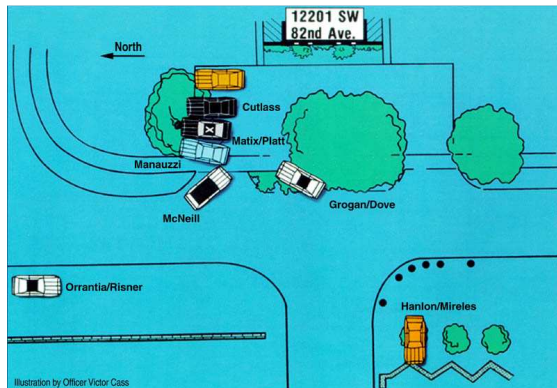
Outside of the 1963 Kennedy assassination, no 20th Century homicide by gunfire has been more extensively examined and generated more speculation than what has come to be known as the "FBI Miami Firefight" of 11 April 1986. Indeed, one would have to travel back to October 1881 and the O.K. Corral to find a shootout which has so assumed the mantle of the Epic.

"The repercussions of 11 April 1986 were massive and as far-reaching as any other event in the annals of Law Enforcement..."

That event has spawned articles in both gunzines and the popular press, paperbacks, numerous lectures and presentations on the law enforcement circuit, a well-mounted video re-enactment by the Federal Bureau of Investigation aptly entitled "Firefight," a totally dismissable and error-laden segment of the Pernell Roberts-hosted half-hour TV series, "*FBI: The Untold Stories*," and one shoddy, fanciful two-hour teleflick in NBC's dreadfully revisionist "In the Line of Duty" series, "*The F.B.I. Murders*", with David Soul and Michael Gross¹ as the too-bad-to-be-believed killers, Michael Lee Platt and William Russell Matix, but who were, for all intents and purposes, "Freddy Kruger" and "Michael Meyers" incarnate, and as despicable a pair of murderers as were ever imagined by producers of the **Nightmare on Elm Street** and **Halloween** series of dead teenager splatter flicks.

The repercussions of 11 April 1986 are still being felt, as firearms author Charlie Petty has elsewhere noted², and this dark event has become the defining moment of the 20th Century for handgun ammunition throughout both law enforcement and civilian ranks.

The FBI's C1 (reactive) squad in the Miami field office had been after a pair of savage armored car and bank stick-up artists for six months, and as their criminal acts increased in violence, more FBI man hours were devoted to apprehending them before they robbed and killed again.



In studying the felonious activities of the two well-armed killers, Miami Division Supervisory Special Agent Gordon McNeill and his crime fighters had discerned what they felt was a pattern which might finally give them the ability to close down the vicious duo which had been a two-person crime wave since the October 1985. Acting on their beliefs and information provided by one quick-witted and courageous citizen who'd followed the criminals from the site of a previous robbery and shooting, McNeill put his 14-man rolling stake-out team in [ten FBI fleet vehicles](#)³ in the field one morning and had them working a section of Metro-Dade County along the South Dixie Highway on the alert for a dark-colored 1979 Chevrolet Monte Carlo in which would be riding two white males between the ages of 25 and 40, professional criminals armed with an assortment of weapons which in the past had included shotguns, Colt's/Stoner pattern carbines, long-barreled magnum revolvers and on at least one occasion, a 1911-style .45 ACP pistol.

Sometime after 0900 hours that Friday, Special Agents Ben Grogan and Jerry Dove spotted the suspect vehicle and alerted SSA McNeill that they had surreptitiously slipped behind the black Monte Carlo on the South Dixie Highway. McNeill immediately alerted the rest of his squad that they had their bad guys and gave the coordinates as he, SA Richard Manauzzi in a solo car, SAs Edmundo Mireles and John Hanlon in another vehicle, and SAs Ron Risner and Gil Orrantia in a fifth sedan closed in on the mobile surveillance.

About the time that Manauzzi fell in behind Grogan's and Dove's vehicle with Hanlon and Mireles joining them, Platt and Matix got the notion that their game might be up. Using the classic counter-surveillance tactic of making three consecutive right-hand turns in the semi-residential neighborhood of [Kendell](#)⁴, the criminal duo confirmed their suspicions and instead of making a run for it back onto the South Dixie Highway, prepared to live it out with the five FBI agents in low speed pursuit.

At that moment, SSA McNeill arrived on the scene from the opposite direction and passed the "mini-convoy," observing passenger Platt in the

lead vehicle loading a high-capacity magazine into a Ruger Mini-14. McNeill would later state that driver Matix's intense demeanor appeared to be that of "a man on a mission."

Still, they *were*, after all, the FBI, and they already had the bad guys outnumbered six to two, with reinforcements rapidly closing in on the rolling scene. Besides, Grogan and Dove, in the lead pursuit vehicle, were both SWAT-qualified, and Grogan, widely acclaimed as the best shot in the Miami field office, had been, it was later said, preparing his entire law enforcement career for just such a situation as was now developing.

SSA McNeill evaluated the situation and made a judgment call that many have subsequently second-guessed... a felony car stop would be attempted.

It all went horribly wrong from there on in, for when the five vehicles had come to rest one block from the South Dixie Highway behind the Dixie Belle Shopping Center at 12201 SouthWest 82nd Avenue, Ben Grogan's glasses went flying in the impact of the crash, and SAs Manauzzi and Hanlon had lost control and possession of their issue Smith & Wesson revolvers. And as the bad guys both began shooting immediately, never was my colleague Mark Moritz' brilliant aphorism more chillingly brought home: "[First Rule of a Gunfight — Have a Gun!](#)"

Manauzzi, who had been driving the vehicle which had finally ridden the Monte Carlo off Southwest 82nd Avenue and into a large tree, his passenger side door just inches from the driver's side of the bad guys' car, was the first of the FBI agents shot, taking a 5.56mm round into his side and body as he dove unarmed out his door and onto the street.

While Platt with the Mini-14 was firing in front of his partner's face at Manauzzi, Matix brought his folding-stocked S&W Model 3000 12 gauge pump shotgun into action, turning and discharging a round of #6 shot at the white Buick to his rear, the vehicle in which Grogan and Dove had been riding.

Grogan, nearly blind without his corrective lenses, had dismounted and begun firing his S&W Model 459, discharging a total of nine rounds of issue 9 X 19mm Winchester 115-grain Silvertip hollow points at the recalcitrant felons inside the Monte Carlo. On the other side of their Buick, Jerry Dove was also shooting his Model 459. He would reload and shoot some more, a total of 20 rounds.

SSA McNeill had taken a position with the left front of his Olds angled into the rear of Manauzzi's vehicle. Managing to throw his (handgun-rated) soft

body armor quickly over his suit and tie, he exited his car, leaving his Remington 12 gauge in the back seat. Running over to the front of Manauzzi's car, he immediately went into action with his 2½-inch Model 19, firing across the hood and into the driver's window of the Monte Carlo.

Responding to a 1987 inquiry about his "cognitive thought processes during the event," McNeill stated that he had never felt calmer.

I was the calmest I had ever been when I exited my vehicle. I saw everything clearly in my peripheral vision, I did some shooting, I got shot, I bore down and took two more shots. When I realized that I was out of ammo and that it was still going on... *then* I got scared!

While McNeill was firing across the hood, SAs Mireles and Hanlon left their vehicle which had crashed into a concrete wall on the far side of the street, and rushed to aid their fellow agents under heavy fire. Hanlon, his primary weapon lost, retrieved his backup five-shot J-frame from an ankle holster and went to support Dove. Mireles, his Model 870 at port arms, came up behind McNeill just in time to take a .223 round in his left forearm, the shock of which impact toppled the 6'5" agent into the street where he quickly realized that his ruined left arm was all but useless. Platt's round, however, had not reached Mireles' chest where it had been aimed.

After McNeill expended his six rounds of 38 Special 158-grain +P, his right hand grievously wounded, he returned to his Olds sedan to reload as Mireles struggled after him. After only managing to get two fresh rounds into his gore-covered revolver, McNeill arose to reach in the back seat for his shotgun, took a .223 round in his neck, and fell over onto his back, paralyzed and out of the remainder of the firefight. He was intensely aware that he had just looked right into the face of Michael Platt and had the murderous thug smile at him as he squeezed off a fast three rounds at McNeill's head!

Platt had extricated himself from the penned in Monte Carlo and was able to move about as he rained fire upon the agents. What he would almost certainly have been unaware of was that he was already a dead man; from a distance of 30 feet, Jerry Dove had delivered a difficult hit on Platt while he was exiting the passenger window of his car. Mireles would later describe it as "a million dollar shot" on the scrambling Platt who had presented a narrow target profile exposed for such a brief time.

"Platt shot Hanlon in the groin and turned his attentions to Grogan and Dove, shooting the former multiple times in the body and the younger agent twice in the head."

Sometime during the preceding 45 seconds, Risner (another SWAT-qualified SA with an S&W Model 459) and Orrantia with a four-inch S&W K-frame, had rolled on the scene to take up a covering position across the road where they would fire approximately two dozen rounds between them, scoring two hits on the wily Platt from a distance of 30 yards. Orrantia would be wounded in return.

At that point, with McNeill paralyzed and helpless on his back, Mireles fighting the effects of his avulsed forearm, Grogan unable to clearly locate his target without his glasses, and Manauzzi still unarmed after losing control of his revolver from the impact of the improvised felony stop, the mortally wounded Michael Platt made his daring bid for freedom. Exsanguinating from the FBI hits, he slipped from the cover of the Monte Carlo and moved on the position occupied by Dove and Hanlon. The latter saw him coming and fired all five rounds from his backup S&W Model 36 Chief's Special before ducking down to attempt to reload. Before he could accomplish that, Platt was upon them, and stood over the helpless Hanlon with his folding-stocked Mini-14 aimed at his head. Then, changing his mind, Platt shot the FBI agent in the groin and turned his attentions to Grogan and Dove, shooting the former multiple times in the body and the younger SA twice in the head. Both men died on the spot, while Hanlon lay stricken beneath the rear bumper.

Military-trained, Platt having neutralized the more immediate points of hostile fire, then moved toward his ultimate objective, the open driver's door of the vehicle recently occupied by the two Special Agents he had just murdered. SAs Risner and Orrantia 25 yards across the street were now more concerned about hitting their comrades as Platt stepped falteringly among them.

But Ed Mireles by sheer dint of his formidable will had "regrouped," determined that the killer not escape. As Platt entered the FBI's Buick and his partner appeared out of nowhere to slip into the passenger's seat, Mireles carefully supported his Remington 870 on the right rear bumper of McNeill's Olds, and fired a round of 00 Buck at Platt, hitting him in the feet. As the man slumped into the driver's seat and sought to restart the car, Ed deliberately pulled the 12 gauge shotgun down between his thighs in his sitting position and with only one hand, worked the action to rearm his weapon, then painfully rolled out and somehow managed to fire at Platt. Four times Mireles did this.

Realizing that someone was posing a threat to his escape, a weakened Platt yanked Matix's six-inch Dan Wesson revolver from his partner's shoulder rig, slowly staggered from his victims' vehicle and attempted to neutralize this

last point of fire. There is some contention about which agent Platt was firing at, whether it was the incapacitated McNeill or the partially recovered Mireles, but he fired three .357 Magnum rounds at close range.

Miraculously, he missed.

Platt then lurched back to the Buick and flopped down in the front seat, trying to summon enough strength to get the car started and away from the killing field.

Mireles, however, was determined that this would not be an option. With great difficulty, he levitated himself from the ground and, discarding his Remington 12-gauge, walked stiff-legged toward the Buick as he withdrew his own S&W revolver and fired two 158-grain +P lead hollow points at Platt, three at Matix curled in a vain attempt to avoid the deadly fire, and a final one at Platt.

Five of the rounds struck home, Matix was killed on the spot, and Platt, the man who didn't die fast enough, died a little faster although he showed enough vital signs some minutes later that the responding EMTs dragged him from the Buick and inserted an endotracheal tube in his mouth, and an intravascular tube in his left arm.

But the firefight, the bloodiest in the FBI's history, was over.

The repercussions, however, were massive and as far-reaching as any other event in the annals of Law Enforcement....

About the Bad Guys

Michael Lee Platt: 6'0" - 173 lbs.

Born: 3 February 1954, San Diego, California
KOFA High School, Yuma, Arizona. Graduated 1972
Stellar 3-Sports Athlete
Miami-Dade Community College

U.S. Army (#526087944) from 27 June 1972-1 May 1979
Honorable Discharge; E-6
MOS: 11B10, 11B20, 11B30
Airborne Ranger trained at Fort Campbell: 9/73-5/75
Also served in M.P. Unit there with Matix. Service notation includes "High Combat Proficiency."

Married and divorced from first wife (unknown) in 1972
Widowed from second wife Regina E. Lylen Platt

Born: 13 September 1952
Married: 13 October 1975
Died: 21 December 1984
Cause of death: Suicide (shotgun to the mouth)

Third wife: Brenda
Married, January 1985

Brother: Timothy Lee Platt

At the time of his death, Platt lived at 15031 SW 88th Lane, West Kendall.

William Russell Matix: 6'1" - 147 lbs.

Born: 25 May 1951, Lewisburg, Ohio
New Madison High School, Ohio. Graduated 1969
Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, NY. Graduated: 28 December 1979
National School of Meat Cutting, Toledo, Ohio
Columbus Technical School, Aviation Maintenance Program: Fall 1983-Spring 1984.

Marine Corps (#2578943) from 7 October 1969-7 July 1972. Honorable Discharge; E-5
MOS: 3371 (Cook/Supply)
Tattoo on right forearm of Bulldog and "USMC" with his service number.

U.S. Army (#2578943) from 10 August 1973-9 August 1976. Honorable Discharge; E-5
MOS: Military Police, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Widowed from first wife Patricia Buckanich Matix

Born: 1953
Married: 1976
Died: 30 December 1983
Cause of death: Murder
One daughter: Melissa, born October 1983

2nd wife: Christy Lou Horne
Married: 17 May 1985
Son: 27 December 1985

At the time of his death, Matix lived at 15615 SW 85th Avenue, Southwood.

Both Platt and Matix died within 12 blocks of where they were then living.