

Biography - ALLEC, Eli and Andre

Tragic deaths still beg the question — why?

By JOE DUNCAN
Of the Herald-Republic

For years they were exclusive companions; shutting out the rest of the world. Then one gray Monday morning last winter, Union Gap police found the bodies of brothers Eli and Andre Allec side by side in their car.

Authorities ruled the deaths a homicide and suicide, the first of three such cases in Yakima County this year.

Eli, 59, was slumped over the steering wheel of their light-green 1975 Chevrolet Impala. His 56-year-old brother was in the shotgun seat.

Andre's left hand still clutched the .22-caliber rifle he used. There were no signs of a struggle; Eli apparently was asleep when shot or agreed with the action. After shooting Eli, Andre turned the rifle on himself.

Gripping the gun between his legs, he used a white curtain rod to depress the trigger he couldn't reach with his fingers. Life trickled out of the brothers through pencil-sized wounds in their foreheads.

"Look at the bullet holes," said Union Gap detective Rick Garcia,

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— Union Gap detective
Rick Garcia

jabbing a finger at color photographs of the bodies. "They are almost centimeter-to-centimeter in the same spot."

The color in the photographs is washed out. So are the bodies of the brothers.

If Garcia was the type, he might have shuddered. This case has that kind of effect on people. The sharp tragedy of senseless death pokes their consciences.

"I don't know the gentlemen from zip. They just seemed to be a couple of old guys that were living hand-to-mouth," said Garcia. "When I looked at it, this whole thing was more a tragedy than a homicide-suicide."

"I guess they were just out on the end of it. A hot meal and a couple of bucks in their pocket might have

held them over. Twenty bucks might have cured this whole problem."

Garcia's philosophical view of the deaths was pretty much the same as those who had contact with the brothers in the last few weeks of their lives. But until the bodies were found on Feb. 2 in Union Gap, no one understood how desperate the Allec were.

Probably, no one ever will.

In an interview before his accidental death earlier this summer, Emil Allec, cousin to Eli and Andre, recalled how the brothers slowly floated into the eddies of existence.

Born in the Outlook area, the brothers grew up in the Lower Valley and spent most of their early lives on the family farm near Prosser. Theirs was a close family, said Emil, who lived near Sunnyside.

Besides their mother, Blanche, and father, Eli Sr., Andre and Eli had an older brother, Victor.

Victor served in the Navy during World War II. However, he returned from the service an ill man and died soon after the war.

Among the bloodstained papers (See TRAGEDY, Page 2A)



(Staff photo)

Andre and Eli Allec are buried side by side in Prosser Cemetery. The brothers were found dead in their car on Feb. 2, victims of a homicide-suicide.

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[Click here to read the rest of the article.](#)

Tragedy/ from Page 1A

found on Eli and Andre were photographs of the USS Nicholson and a man in a Navy uniform, presumably Victor.

Andre finished high school, but Eli dropped out of school after the eighth grade.

The brothers were separated in the early 1950s by two-year hitch in the Army. Andre was discharged in 1953 and Eli got out in 1955. Both served overseas but apparently saw no combat.

Their older brother's death was followed in the early 1950s by the deaths of their parents. The brothers became even more reclusive.

"When they came out of the Army they did just general labor work," said cousin Emil. "Then I lost track of them. They wouldn't have anything to do with the rest of the family."

"I don't know how to put it, but they felt they weren't as good as other people or something."

He described Andre as more outgoing than his older brother. "Eli was a little more quiet, more slow-going," said Emil.

Neither brother ever married, although Eli was best man at Emil's wedding.

The last time Emil saw Eli and Andre was about 14 years ago. An auction was held to sell the Alice family farm near Prosser and Emil dropped by to see his cousins.

"They wouldn't even come out of the house to talk with me," Emil said. "They wouldn't associate with anybody and wouldn't tell anybody anything."

He heard the brothers were living in the Walla Walla area and twice drove there in unsuccessful attempts to find them. Then he picked up a Feb. 4, 1987, copy of the Herald-Republic and read about their deaths.

"It's a mystery. I don't want to doubt the police's word so I think they were both dispirited and just decided to end it. But they knew I was here. They knew they could have come for help if they needed it."

The brothers did look for help, and found some, but apparently not enough to keep them going. And one thing is clear: They never told anyone how just desperate they were.

"You sort of had to pull stuff out of them," recalled David Sall, a department service officer with the Disabled American Veterans.

"I think they didn't want to be perceived as begging," added Martin Day, Sall's partner in the DAV's Yakima office. "I didn't have a defeatist feeling from them."

Eli and Andre came into the DAV office in January, seeking help in applying for a veterans pension. They apparently had been in the Yakima area for several months and even rented an apartment.

After a couple of months they moved out and later told the local realtor handling the apartment they left because they couldn't pay the rent.

The brothers lived around Walla Walla before coming to Yakima. They apparently survived by working part time in canneries and doing piece work where they could find it.

Walla Walla physician Quentin Schwenke treated Eli for high blood

pressure. Eli also was a border-line diabetic and Schwenke put him on a special diet.

The doctor first checked Eli in July 1978.

"He walked in and said he wanted his blood pressure checked," Schwenke recalled. That was one of the longer conversations they had during the nearly six years Schwenke treated Eli.

The doctor said he never really knew much about Eli other than he wore clean, plain work clothes, had a general delivery address, followed his doctor's orders and always paid in cash at the time of appointments.

"I felt that he was a timid fellow and I was aware that he didn't have much money," said Schwenke.

In Yakima the brothers got temporary help at local social service agencies, such as the Salvation Army, and signed up for food stamps. Seeking a military veteran's pension apparently was their attempt to find a long-term solution to their financial problems.

Their training and work in assisting veterans have given Sall and Day the skills to recognize and help veterans depressed to the point of being suicidal.

"I didn't get that message from either one of them," said Day.

They noticed the brothers seemed disappointed — what amounted to a sigh — when they were told it would take nine to 12 months to get a federal Veterans Administration ruling on their application for a pension.

"But I didn't pick up on the real

seriousness of their situation. The next thing I know I'm down at my parents reading the paper and I read about this," said Sall.

The brothers were reduced to living in their car, which they had parked in a vacant lot behind the Valley Mall on the night they died.

Their belongings were neatly stored in paper grocery bags inside the car. Eli's bags were on one side of the back seat and trunk and Andre's were on the other. Items used jointly were in the middle.

Garcia said Andre's footprints were visible outside the vehicle. Police could see where he paced, as though he were thinking.

Once he made up his mind, Andre walked to the rear of the car and took out a rifle and four bullets. He put two bullets in the gun and two in his pocket as a reserve.

When found, the brothers had a \$1 bill, less than a dollar in change and some food stamps on them.

"These people generally don't come get help because they are not ambivalent about what they are going to do," said Bernadette Huard, a psychiatrist and associate director for acute care services for Central Washington Comprehensive Mental Health.

"Every case I've heard about like this guns were used. I've never heard of any survivors," she said. And, she added, older men have the highest suicide rate in America.

Huard said the case reminds her of ones involving elderly married couples. One member of the pair

becomes ill and the other decides they can't live without their partner. That dovetails with Garcia's view.

"I guess the impression I got was that you had two guys that were close and Andre, the one that did the shooting, knew Eli was sick," says the detective. "I think he (Andre) killed himself, not because he couldn't handle being down and out, but because he couldn't live without his brother."

The brothers were buried next to each other in Prosser Cemetery. Two simple grave markers were delivered this month by the Veterans Administration.

Money donated by the manager of City Towing, which hauled away the brothers' car, was used to pay for mounting the bronze plaques. They'll be placed side by side.