

Courage, Sacrifice, Honor—These are more than words that tell of who Police Chief, Chester, Arthur “Chet” Calkins, was. Chief Calkins embodied these virtues as he helped to keep order in O’Neill, Nebraska for over 20 years.

His life was taken from him in the early hours of March 6, 1952.

While making his nightly rounds after a basketball game, Chief Calkins helped an elderly woman cross a slippery sidewalk and ensured 2 young ladies made it home safely. Later, he met with his brother, night policeman Walt Calkins. Together, they investigated a small group of men drinking in the rear of a store and spoke with a woman who had reported a stolen suitcase. Nothing seemed too unusual.

Around 2 a.m., Walt drove down 4th Street and noticed his brother’s car. It appeared to be empty, so Walt walked by and looked in the window. What he saw would shock, sadden and perplex the citizens of O’Neill for the next year, and for many years to come.

Chief Calkins had been shot 6 times at point-blank range by Joe McLimans, a Northwestern Railroad Brakeman from Long Pine, NE, after the Chief had questioned him about a robbery earlier that evening. McLimans had been drinking at several different bars between Bonesteel, SD, and O’Neill. When Chief Calkins ordered McLimans to accompany him back to headquarters,

McLimans opened the passenger side of the police unit, took out his gun and fired.

It took nearly a year before all of the evidence would convict Mr. McLimans. During that year, more than 20 sheriffs throughout Nebraska and South Dakota had offered their services to assist in piecing together this crime that took the life of a beloved and respected leader and protector of a small Nebraska town.

The story of this local hero may have faded from front page news, but Chief Calkins has left a legacy of valor in the pages of O'Neill's history. His family and friends keep his memory alive. Several of his descendants have followed in his footsteps, and have entered into law enforcement.

Chief Chet Calkins' name is engraved on the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington DC.

Chief Calkins was married to Hazel and they had 3 children, Harold, Jean, and Donald.