

Patrolman Patrick Riley | Cincinnati Police Department



Badge: 89

Age: 26

Served: 1½ years

October 2, 1885 to March 8, 1887

OFFICER

Patrick was born on January 2, 1861 in Ohio to Irish immigrants, Henry and Mary Ann Riley. By 1890, when he was 9, his father had passed away and he and his two-year-old brother, Henry, were being raised by their 40-year-old mother. By the time he was 19, he was working on the riverfront as a laborer.

Patrick joined the Cincinnati Police Department October 2, 1885. Six months later, on March 31, 1886, Cincinnati dismissed the entire 400-man police department and on April 1 went about hiring a new, 300-man, non-partisan department. Many did not return, but Patrolman Riley was rehired on July 9, 1886.

By 1887, he was living with and sole support for his mother at

No. 20 Ringgold Street in Pendleton. He was assigned to the Hammond Street Stationhouse, very highly respected, and, according to an Enquirer reporter, had a thousand friends.

On Monday, February 28, 1887 Patrolmen Riley was at the Hamilton County Jail, seemingly in a depressed mood. Turnkey Charley Whalen inquired, and Patrolmen Riley related to him that he had had an ominous dream foretelling of his death within a week.

INCIDENT

Five days later, at 4:30 a.m. on March 5, 1887, though off duty, Patrolman Riley went with rookie Patrolmen [Samuel T. Corbin](#) and Frank Morgan to conduct a raid on Louis White's Saloon and "crap house" on Rat Row at No. 97 East Front Street. The officers went to Central Station to get a patrol wagon and drive to the saloon. Along the way, they found and picked up rookie Patrolmen Thomas M. Higgins and Frank Kruse who patrolled a beat adjoining Corbin and Morgan's.

When they neared White's Saloon, they split up and walked quietly to the front and rear. Patrolmen Kruse and Morgan went to the front with Patrolman Riley following. As they ran across the street, Patrolman Kruse leapt over a puddle in the street and onto the sidewalk. His Merwin and Hulbert .38 caliber revolver came out of his breast pocket, fell to the ground, landed on its hammer, and discharged. Kruse stopped, picked up the revolver, and ran into the saloon. The patrons, having heard the gunshot, stampeded from all exits of the saloon.

Patrolman Kruse did not know that the discharged bullet had found Patrolman Riley several feet behind him. It had struck him in his abdomen, an inch from his navel, and ranged upward to his back. Patrolman Riley didn't know either. He heard the

shot and felt the searing pain. He began to stagger and, five seconds later came to the realization, exclaiming, "Oh, I'm shot!"

A citizen, James Stamp, saw this and went to Patrolman Riley who told him to examine his revolver thinking that it was the one that had discharged. Stamp advised that all the cartridges were intact and then helped the wounded officer to Johnson's Saloon, across the street from White's. Stamp suggested he call for a wagon and Patrolman Riley said, "No, the wagon is coming."

As officers came from the now empty White's Saloon, they found Patrolman Riley wounded at Johnson's Saloon and rode with him to the Hammond Street Stationhouse; then to Central Station, where he was met by Police Surgeon Armstrong. Dr. Armstrong cut the bullet out of his back but determined the wound to be likely fatal having traversed front to back and through his intestines.

Patrolman Riley was removed to City Hospital and officers were sent to retrieve his aged mother shortly after 6 a.m. Superintendent Philip Deitsch visited; in part as an essential piece in his investigation of the incident, but also to arrange for a private room.

DEATH

Patrolman Riley writhed in pain and his mother tended to him throughout. By March 8, 1887 the news was reporting that Patrolman Riley was close to death. At 6:20 p.m., surrounded by close friends and relatives, he passed away from acute peritonitis. Patrolman Kruse was inattentive at best since the incident and inconsolable when he received word of Patrolman Riley's death.

Patrolman Riley was survived by his mother, Mary Ann Riley (57). A wake was held at 8:30 a.m. on March 10, 1887 at his Uncle Pat Gorrien's home at 133 Smith Street. So many passed through the home that the church services were delayed, and the line of would-be viewers was finally interrupted.

Along the route to the Church of the Atonement on 3rd Street, both sides of the streets were so crowded that passage was difficult. Pallbearers included Lieutenants Duffy and Heheman, Sergeant Hanrahan, and Patrolmen Kruse, Morgan, Higgins, Weining, and Booker. Inspector Hadley, commanding the First Company and the regimental band, was also in attendance. Each officer wore a black and white mourning ribbon bow above their badge.

Father Sullivan of St. Edward's parish celebrated the funeral Mass. After the Mass, the coffin was brought out of the church and the upper portion was removed so that more throngs could pass by the remains. It was then loaded on the hearse and the procession was escorted to Eighth and McLean. From beginning to end, due to its length and the number of people lining the route, it took the procession one-half hour to pass any point. The hearse and pallbearers carried Patrolman Riley to his final resting place in Section NEP, Lot 30 South, Grave 19 in St. Joseph's (New) Cemetery in Price Hill.

NOTE

Firearms were not a standard part of a policeman's tools in most agencies until the late 1880s. If they carried a firearm, due to their relatively small salaries, they carried old, cheap, and often unreliable revolvers. Being in its infancy, the concept of armed law enforcement officers did not immediately push

holster technology for concealed carry and officers merely placed their revolvers in their breast pockets. Naturally, a number of these were dropped and physics dictated that they fall toward the heavier end, landing on the hammer, and discharging the firearm. This circumstance caused four Cincinnati officers' deaths: Patrolmen Patrick Riley in 1887, [William Sanders](#) in 1888, [Henry Roese](#) in 1890, and [Luther Brooks](#) in 1901. There were at least five other cases reported (and probably many unreported) where revolvers dislodged and accidentally discharged; some causing injury to officers or bystanders. In the first decade of the 20th Century, the hammer block safety was invented, and no more officers died from accidentally dropped revolvers.

If you know of any information, artifacts, archives, or images regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at Memorial@Police-Museum.org.

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