

Detective Sergeant John A. Cameron | Cincinnati Police Division



Badge: 36

Age: 52

Served: 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ years

January 14, 1910 to April 26, 1935

OFFICER

John was born November 24, 1882 in Cincinnati. He attended Cincinnati public schools for eight years and then took a job as a painter.



In 1909, John was awarded the prestigious Carnegie Medal for saving a life during a fire the year before.

John joined the Cincinnati Police Department as a Patrolman on January 14, 1910. He served in Districts 8 (2616 Vine Street) and 10 (Colerain at Adelaide). Patrolman Cameron then went to Traffic Bureau (City Hall). On October 16, 1926, he was promoted to Sergeant and assigned to District 1 (City Hall). Two years later, he was assigned to the Crime Bureau (City Hall) as a Detective Sergeant.

Detective John Schmitt was younger than Sergeant Cameron, but he had worked ten years in District 10, and both had been transferred to the Crime Bureau near the end of 1928. In a brawl at the Cat and Fiddle at the end of 1934, a bullet fired at Detective Schmitt was deflected by his diamond tie pin – a gift given to him by his mother.

Each man had shown courage and bravery throughout his career and neither one flinched at danger.

INCIDENT

On April 26, 1935, a tipster warned Detective James Gorman that Crane and Breed Casket Company Treasurer E. T. Mossman would be robbed of his payroll that afternoon when he returned to the plant from making the bank run. The bandits' plan was to grab

the bag of money as Mossman got off a streetcar in front of the casket company at 1227 West Eighth Street. Two years earlier, the informant had helped law enforcement send escaped convict Clay Fogelmann to face death in the electric chair for a murder and robbery that he committed in North Carolina. Therefore, he was considered reliable. Presumably, it was Sergeant Cameron who decided to stake out the area of the casket company.

Sergeant Cameron and his partner, Detective Schmitt, led a contingent of Cincinnati's most seasoned detectives to the 1000 block of West Eighth Street. Cameron and Schmitt parked their vehicle and began their vigil. Other detectives including Martin Steiner, Elmer Zwissler, and Benjamin Schaefer posted themselves in doorways nearby.

Sergeant Cameron and Detective Schmitt saw a suspicious looking brown and tan vehicle cruising in the area and trailing streetcars to the factory. They followed it and forced it to the curb at 1013 West Eighth Street.

Leland English, the driver, and his passenger Lindsey G. Cyrus made it clear they were not going to cooperate. Detective Schmitt jumped out of the police car and pointed his pistol at Cyrus, ordering him to, "Put 'em up." Cyrus then seized the detective's wrist with both hands and shoved the pistol into the air.

By this time, Sergeant Cameron quickly parked the car and ran to the suspect vehicle. Detective Schmitt, still held by Cyrus, shouted to Cameron to take the gun and shoot him. Cyrus then opened his car door with his knees and fell onto the pavement, involuntarily pulling Schmitt on top of him. Cameron managed to fire four shots. Unfortunately, one of those shots hit Schmitt in the hand.

Cyrus fell to the sidewalk and 'played possum.' Meanwhile

English fled. Detective Schmitt gave chase “through yards and over fences.” With Schmitt gone, Cyrus regained his footing, ran to his car, grabbed his pistol, and shot at Sergeant Cameron, striking him in the forehead, killing him.

FUNERAL

Detective Sergeant Cameron left a wife, Josephine Cameron, and two sons, John A. Cameron, Jr. and Donald C. Cameron. He was buried in Section 52, Lot 104, Space 29, Spring Grove Cemetery on April 29, 1935 at 3 p.m.

INVESTIGATION

Lindsey Cyrus, also wounded by bullets from Sergeant Cameron’s gun, sped away.

Meanwhile Detective Schmitt, despite a gunshot wound to his hand, caught Leland English on West Ninth Street near Freeman Avenue. Fire Marshal Harry McNay and officers on duty at Fire Company 2 and Ladder Company 6 at the northeast corner of that intersection took charge of the prisoner and hurried the wounded Schmitt to the hospital.

After his encounter with the men on duty at the fire companies, the much-subdued English admitted that he visited the plant that same day and had known that Friday, the day of the attempted robbery, had been pay day. In addition, he leaked enough information on Cyrus to Detective William Cleary to enable Cleary to identify English’s partner as one Lindsey G. Cyrus – formerly a resident of Staebler Street in Cincinnati, but now in the shoe repair business in Morrow, Ohio – by linking Cyrus to a Cincinnati daughter, Christine Heflin, 1912 State Avenue.

English eventually admitted to Sergeant George Schattle, after several failed attempts to convince Schattle of his innocence, that the hold-up had been planned. English said he and Cyrus had been drinking and that Cyrus had unfolded plans for a payroll robbery.

Two cars of heavily-armed, well-chosen officers made the 38-mile trip to Morrow to find Cyrus: Detective Captain Patrick Hayes, Detectives William Cleary, Walter Carney, Andrew Beard, Adolph J. Mezger, George Lutz, and Michael McShane, Patrolman Timothy O'Leary, and Deputy Sheriff Frank R. Mann. They met up with Warren County Sheriff William Hufford and Morrow Marshal Gus Slack, who knew Cyrus, and went in search of the murderer.

Cyrus was driving a different car than the one in which he had escaped from Cincinnati. He started to park in front of the shoe repair shop, but just as Slack spotted him, Cyrus also spotted Mezger and Slack in Slack's car and quickly drove away with Detectives Mezger and Slack close behind. Cyrus fired at Mezger and Slack, shattering the car's windshield, but narrowly missing the detectives. The Cincinnati officers responded with machine gun blasts.

Cyrus rolled out of his car, writhing. Police officers on the scene didn't know the extent of Cyrus's wounds at this time and were not going to be fooled again by his feigning incapacitation. His failing to follow directions prompted the officers to answer with another blast from a machinegun. Still cursing, Cyrus raised his revolver and fired off his last two shots.

Cyrus was finally taken into custody, still fighting every step of the way. Lutz attempted to encourage him to make a confession. Cyrus replied by taking a swing at the detective, knocking off and breaking his glasses. Lutz's face was bruised

by the blow.

As they drove the still-agitated Cyrus to General Hospital, Mezger had to wrestle him to the floor. Finally the Sheriff's employee driving the car had to pull over to the side of the road so that both men could then shackle him to the foot rest.

JUSTICE

Lindsey Cyrus confessed to Detective Walter McArthur that he and Leland English had planned to hold up the payroll messenger of the casket company. After Cyrus' death-bed confession, both he and English, who was being held at Station X, were charged by Detective Chief Emmett D. Kirgan with murdering a police officer in the commission of a crime. Lindsey Cyrus died at General Hospital at 9:17 pm on April 27, 1935.

Leland English's case went to trial in July 1935. The jury acquitted him of participating in Sergeant Cameron's death.

At the same time that police charged the two with the attempted robbery of the casket company and the murder of Cameron, they also blamed them with a December 8, 1933 robbery of the Ansonia Copper and Iron Company, 621 Evans Street.

EPILOGUE

His son, John Jr., married the following Wednesday.

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

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