

Acting Detective Albert W. Wegener / Motorcycle Patrolman George LePoris | Cincinnati Police Department



Acting Detective Albert W. Wegener | Cincinnati Police Department

Age: 38

Served: 11 years

September 19, 1906 to November 12, 1917

Al was born on Christmas Day 1878 in Cincinnati to German immigrants Joseph and Barbara (Ulich) Wegener. Joseph died when Al was six years old. As an adult, he worked as a shoemaker.

On September 6, 1905, Al joined the Cincinnati Police Department as a Substitute Patrolman. On September 7, 1906, he was promoted to Patrolman.

When William Jackson was named Police Chief, he initiated

wholesale transfers of personnel effective February 1, 1911. Patrolman Wegener was transferred from District 1 (9th Street Station) to the Traffic Squad (City Hall). On March 16, 1912, he was appointed Acting Detective.

By then end of 1917, Detective Wegener and his partner, Detective William Sweeney, ran the Pawn Shop Detail and were renowned for their recovery of stolen property.



Motorcycle Policeman George Le Poris | Cincinnati Police Department

Age: 28

Served: 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ years

August 4, 1915 to November 12, 1917

George was born September 17, 1889 in Blue Ash to French immigrants Samuel (a house painter) and Regain Le Poris. As an adult, George worked as a conductor.

On August 4, 1915, George joined the Cincinnati Police Department as a Substitute Patrolman. He was almost immediately promoted to Patrolman on August 26. By 1917, he was assigned to a motorcycle.

MURDERER

Fred Clifford was born January 4, 1890 to Edward and Sarah (Curtsinger) Clifford. He was a problem for Louisville law enforcement since adolescence. Then, at 17, on February 5, 1907, he and Charles Snitz assaulted a crippled boy, striking him with a revolver. Twelve days later, Clifford and five members of a street gang were arrested for grand larceny and stealing from train cars of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. Nine days later, he was indicted by the Grand Jury for Shooting at Without Wounding. On March 21, 1907 he went to trial for the grand larceny. He pleaded guilty and was sent to the School of Reform in Lexington. On April 29, 1907, he was back in court on trial for another grand larceny.

We do not know the length of his actual sentences, but they totaled less than 1½ years. At 19, in Indiana (though it is usually a parole stipulation to not leave the state), on November 16, 1909, Fred married Lena Gahm Donderhide of Louisville. He listed his date of birth in 1888, making him 21. Miss Donderhide claimed to be 18.

On August 9, 1910, their first child was born, Lucy Josephine Clifford. They were living at 1206 Dunesnil in Louisville and he was working as a reed finisher. He was also working with a gang of thieves again stealing items from railroad cars. During January 1911 he was caught and arrested again. We assume he went to prison because we do not see any record of him for six years.

On June 5, 1917 he was back in Louisville living at 543 A Second Street with his wife and two children (3 and 6) and working as an assistant manager for the Leslie Judge Company. He filled out his World War I draft registration and, on the line inquiring as to any exemption from the draft, he wrote "dependent relatives". We do not know if he was dodging the draft, but it appears he left Louisville for Cincinnati.

WEGENER INCIDENT

During the later months of 1917, several Cincinnati downtown businesses had been robbed and the description of the robber was similar in each robbery. One of these stores was Metzger's store on West Liberty Street on November 6, 1917. Detectives Wegener and Sweeney went around to the various pawn shops describing the robbers and the property they took.

On November 10, 1917, several of Metzger's watches turned up at various points throughout the city. Detectives Wegener and Sweeney planned to cover all pawnshops thoroughly on the next day of business, Monday, November 12, 1917. Detective Wegener remained at police headquarters to take calls from the west end stores (just a few blocks south of City Hall) and Sweeney was stationed on Vine Street where he could care for the pawnshops in that section of the city.

Shortly after 11:30 a.m. a call was sent to detective headquarters that the man who had pawned one of the stolen watches two days before was in the pawnshop of Walton Levi, at 515 Central Avenue. Detective Wegener immediately hurried to the shop.

Upon his arrival, the suspect and Detective Wegener seemed to recognize each other. The suspect tried to escape, but Detective Wegener grabbed hold of his wrist. A terrific struggle followed and the suspect managed to pull one hand away. He then reached into his coat pocket, pulled a revolver, and shot Wegener above the heart. The shooter started for the door and as he went, Thomas Lawhorn, who was in the shop, picked up an ornament from a counter and threw it at the fleeing figure. It struck the man on the head and he turned and fired again, the bullet entering Detective Wegener's hip. Wegener managed to fire two shots at the man, but none are believed to have taken effect.

Detective Wegener was transported in an automobile to the General Hospital. He was physically unable to reveal his killer's identity.

The man ran through the streets, hatless, and a policeman two squares away, not knowing what had happened but seeing the running man, gave chase. The patrolman slipped and fell and Detective S. Jackson, who was in the vicinity, saw the man apparently running from the fallen officer, fired a shot as the fugitive ran down Fifth Street. The suspect then jumped onto the sidewalk, shielded unwittingly by pedestrians, and ran to Plum Street. At Third and Plum Streets, he hopped on the running board of an automobile and sticking a revolver in the side of the driver he ordered him to, "drive and drive fast."

The man drove through various streets until he reached an eastern section of the city, when he jumped off and ordered the driver to continue to drive away at a fast rate.

The driver did not report for nearly two hours the fact that he had driven the suspect. By the time the officers investigated the location, the suspect had disappeared. The vehicle in which the bandit rode contained blood from the wound on his head where the missile thrown in the pawnshop had hit him.

LE PORIS INCIDENT

Motorcycle Patrolman Le Poris, who when on duty primarily enforced speed limits, was downtown, off duty, and in civilian clothing. He had been in City Hall, heard of the murder, and joined the search. He was in the neighborhood of Pearl and Elm Streets when the report went out that the murderer had been seen in a building at the corner. Fearlessly, he entered the building in the hunt. Shortly afterward he emerged from a window high above the street with his gun in hand.

A cry from the street went up. "There he is," and an unidentified man, believed to have been a private policeman or railroad detective, fired at Patrolman Le Poris. Le Poris was about the same size as the murderer and was dressed in a blue suit the same as the bandit wore.

Several policemen, including Lieutenant Wolsefer, also shot at Patrolman Le Poris and he fell inside the window. Wulsifer ran up the stairs immediately and then learned the mistake that had been made. Two bullets had taken effect and Le Poris died at the General Hospital several hours later.

INVESTIGATION

Police searched day and night. They had an excellent description of the suspect. He was about five feet nine inches tall, weighed 150 pounds, had a medium complexion, dark hair, hazel eyes, and good teeth. More noticeable, he had "F. C." tattooed on his left forearm.

Then, a photograph from the Louisville Police Department identified the man who shot and killed Detective Wegener and who held up Metzger's jewelry store. It was Fred Clifford. Chief Carney of Louisville in his letter declared that Clifford was sentenced to eighteen months in the Kentucky State Reformatory for several holdups and had the reputation of being "quick on the trigger."

A warrant charging murder against Clifford was filed by Detective Sweeney following the identification of the picture by: Walton Levi, who owns the pawnshop in which Wegener was killed; Thomas Lawhorn, who was in the shop at the time of the killing; Samuel Blair, the chauffeur who drove the suspect around until he leaped off; John Jennings, watchman at the courthouse who saw the man running through an alley; Gus Rielag, a hat store proprietor where Clifford purchased the hat which was found in the pawnshop; Louis Pearlman, another

pawnbroker; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dessauer, who saw the man running at Fourth and Plum Streets; and the clerk at Metzger's jewelry store.

DEATHS

Detective Wegener died en route to the hospital at 12:55 p.m., due to a hemorrhaging lung.

Detective Wegener left a wife. His funeral was held at his residence at 903 Mound Street on November 15, 1917 at 1:30 p.m. Services were held at the Scottish Rite Cathedral at 2 p.m. He is buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Southgate. Pallbearers included Lieutenant Henry Pottebaum, Sergeant William Knight, and Acting Detectives William Sweeney and Fred W. Potts, Jr.

Though it seemed Motor Patrolman Le Poris would survive, his condition worsened about 6 p.m. and he died at General Hospital at 6:25 p.m. from a hemorrhaging right lung. The Coroner found that the two bullets that struck him were from the .32 caliber revolver used by Lieutenant Wolsefer.

He was predeceased three months prior by his father, Samuel Le Poris. Patrolman Le Poris was survived by his mother, Ragain Le Poris; wife, Grace E. Le Poris who, unbeknownst to them, was pregnant at the time of his death; and siblings, Louise Le Poris, Julius Le Poris, Evelyn Le Poris, and Regain M. Le Poris. The funeral was held at his residence at 6268 Savannah Avenue on November 15, 1917 at 1:15 p.m. Services were held at Spring Grove Cemetery's Norman Chapel at 2 p.m. He is buried in Spring Grove Cemetery. Pallbearers included Sergeant Edward Huber and Patrolmen Christian Beck, William Van Agthoven, and Louis Graf.

Police personnel were ordered to wear the badge of mourning for four days from November 13 through 16, 1917.

EPILOGUE

Patrolman Le Poris was also an artist of some note and drew several Indian heads and busts and a bust of then Police Chief, William Copelan.

Grace moved back into her family's home and little more than a month later, on December 20, 1917, her father, Lieutenant Otting, died from heart disease. On June 19, 1918, Mrs. Le Poris gave birth to Bernard Franklin Le Poris. By then, she had moved back into her home and she, her mother, Lena Otting, and sister, Mable Otting all raised raised him to adulthood.

Two other Cincinnati officers were killed at the same location where Detective Wegener was shot. [Substitute Patrolman James R. Gallagher](#) was shot and killed there on March 26, 1876. On April 25, 1916, 1½ years prior to Detective Wegener's killing, [Patrolman Samuel J. Robins](#) was shot and killed there and Detective Wegener shot and killed Robins' murderer. Nowhere else in the eight counties of Greater Cincinnati has so many policemen died.

Today, the [Greater Cincinnati Fire Department Memorial Park](#) sits on this site.

If you know of any information, artifacts, archives, or images of these officers or incidents, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at Memorial@Police-Museum.org.

© This narrative was further researched and revised on November 7, 2020 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President, and includes details provided in 2010 by Jennifer Baker, a reporter from the Cincinnati Enquirer. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.