

Patrolman Cleophus J. "Clay" Eifert | Covington Police Department



Badge: 53
Age: 39
Served: 9 years
December 7, 1936 to February 8, 1946

OFFICER

Clay was born on August 30, 1906 in Indiana to Sylvester Victor, a church organist, and Catherine (Thines) Eifert, both of Ohio. Sylvester was one of eight children born to German immigrant Joseph Eifert, who had settled and raised his family "on virgin land" in Mercer County, Ohio. Before 1910, Sylvester moved his family to a church in Covington.

In 1910 the family lived at 729 Bakewell Street and consisted of Sylvester, Catherine, sons Philemon (6), Cleophus (3), and Sylvester, Jr. (1), and daughter Valeria (2). In the second week of January 1913, young Sylvester, Jr. passed away from diphtheria. By the 1920 Census, the family had added daughters

Rowena (8) and Melania (4).

By 1930, Clay had married Catherine Bornhorst and worked as a bricklayer. In 1935, Clay was a member and elected to one of the Director positions of the Kenton County Young Men's Democratic Club.

On December 3, 1936, Captain John Putthoff announced the addition of Clay Eiffert of 601 W. Ninth Street and two others as Sub-Patrolmen to fill vacancies caused by the illness of several members of the Covington Police Force. He was appointed Patrolman on December 7, 1936.

Within a few weeks of hire, Patrolman Eifert was credited in the Cincinnati Enquirer with the arrest of a 24-year-old Bellevue man and recovery of a stolen car. In January 1937 he was credited with the arrest of a juvenile, later referred to as the "Party Burglar." The youth was sentenced to the Kentucky Reform School after admitting to taking purses in unoccupied rooms of 12 different homes he'd entered while guests were being entertained.

On January 22, 1937, during the Great Flood, "Patrolmen Stewart Selby and Clay Eifert commandeered a boat...and removed families on 18th, 19th, Oakland and Delmar Streets from their flooded homes."

In March of '37, he "rounded up" a steer that had escaped while being unloaded at a packing plant.

During 1940 Clay's family, now including Joan Eifert (9) and Paul Eifert (6), were living at 723 Dalton, three doors from his parents.

During the early to mid-1940s, Patrolman Eifert received recognition for his work in area newspapers, including several

articles that graced the front page. In September of 1941 he and several other officers disarmed a drunken man of a .38 revolver on Bakewell Street, with Officer Burgess requiring hospital treatment for injuries to his hand sustained during the struggle.

During 1942, on August 6th Patrolman Eifert and other officers arrested Charles Hopkins, 26, for Cutting with Intent to Kill, for stabbing 26-year-old Helen Bonneville with a butcher knife. In September he was credited with the arrest of a "serial" speeder who had eluded police by going "over 75 mph" on several recent occasions.

In November of 1943, Patrolman Eifert and two other officers located and arrested James Rankin, 34, who had fled the scene after hitting a 67-year-old woman crossing the street. A month later, he was elected as Chaplain of the Covington Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police.

Two valiant teenaged boys attempted to apprehend two men who had just burglarized a home in April 1944. One of the armed burglars, later identified as Henry Clay McMillen of Eastern Avenue in Cincinnati, fired at the young men as they gave chase. Patrolmen Eifert and Herman Case took the two teenagers in their patrol unit on a search. McMillen and his accomplice were located at Second and Madison. McMillen drew his revolver when the officers arrived but quickly dropped it. Both fleeing felons were apprehended and charged with the break in and McMillen additionally charged with malicious shooting. In July Patrolmen Eifert and Eilers provided information to detectives that resulted in the recovery of approximately \$1500 (about \$28,000 in 2026 dollars) in stolen property and the arrest of two Covington men who confessed to 15 Covington burglaries and 4 in Newport.

In the autumn of 1944, he was credited for saving a 34-year-old Norwood woman from more severe injury when she was thrown from her horse while riding in Devoe Park. As the woman lie on the ground suffering from several severe facial cuts, he jumped from his cruiser to corral the steed before it could step on the prone rider.

A stationhouse brawl in mid- March of 1945, involving a very disorderly prisoner, resulted in William Jenkins of Ohio, being "manacled to a bed in Booth Hospital." Patrolman Eifert was also treated for a black eye from his glasses being broken, and a severely injured right hand. In September, another stationhouse incident landed him on the front page of the Kentucky Post, when he was acknowledged for kicking the knife out of the hand of a Cincinnati man who had drawn it from his pocket and was threatening the arresting detective.

MURDERER

Thomas Wesley and Lillie Jane (Bailey) Rose married in Tazwell, Tennessee about 1923. They had two sons, William Thomas Rose on May 8, 1924, and Grover Cleveland Rose on October 18, 1925. While they grew up together in Tazwell and in the early 1940s moved to Monroe, Michigan, and both registered for the World War II draft as soon as they turned 18 years old, the two sons could not be more different.

William registered with an accurate address in Monroe, Michigan. He was drafted soon thereafter as were almost every able-bodied 18-year-old. He fought in the 135th Infantry. At 19, he earned campaign medals from Africa, Europe, and the Middle East along with a Bronze Star Medal and Purple Heart. He was honorably discharged two months short of his two years, possibly due to his wound(s).

Conversely, Grover registered with a fictitious address in his former hometown of Tazwell. When he was 19, he left Monroe, traveled back to Tazwell for a brief time and purchased a German Walther P-38 9mm semiautomatic 9mm pistol. What a 19-year-old needed a pistol for, we can only speculate. We cannot find any evidence that he used the firearm in any violent offenses or robberies. Nor can we find that he was employed anywhere. By the beginning of 1946, he was staying in a flop house in the "low section" of Covington at 114 W. 4th Street.

INCIDENT

On February 8, 1946, about 6 a.m., Patrolmen Eifert and Larry Olliges responded to a report by the landlady, Mrs. Ethel Peace, of a drunken man with a gun on the 3rd floor at 114 W. 4th Street – about $1\frac{1}{2}$ blocks from where Patrolman Eifert grew up as a boy on Bakewell and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from his current home.

When the officers arrived, Patrolman Eifert ascended the stairs as Lucille Coatney was descending. She repeatedly told the officers that a man had a gun. As he climbed the staircase to the third floor, Grover Cleveland Rose (20) appeared and shot him with the German Walther P-38. The bullet entered Patrolman Eifert's chest and passed through the great vessels of his heart and his spine.

Patrolman Eifert returned six shots, striking Rose in the leg. Patrolman Olliges stepped out of the line of fire and one of the persons in the house picked up Patrolman Eifert's service revolver and handed it to Olliges. Moments later, Rose attempted suicide but merely wounded himself in the chin.

Then, Arlyn "Pete" Bussell came running down the steps as Patrolman Olliges ascended them. The officer excitedly asked him

if he had done the shooting and Bussell ran back up the stairs. Olliges returned to the police cruiser to call for help. It's likely then that Bussell grabbed the gun and hid it.

Reinforcements arrived and found Rose searching the room which he and Bussell occupied. It is possible he was searching for his pistol, which was later found wrapped in a towel in the bathroom.

Patrolmen Eifert and Rose were rushed to Booth Hospital.

Arlyn Bussell (28), at the time a striking CIO steel worker from Monroe, Michigan, was taken into custody as a suspect in the shooting of Patrolman Eifert. Three disorderly women were also taken into custody: Lucille Coatney (18) of Monroe, her sister Helen Coatney (22) of Monroe, and Mrs. Jackie Holley (19) of the 4th Street address in Covington. All three were charged with Disorderly Conduct. Mrs. Holley and Lucille Coatney were additionally charged with Living in Adultery.

DEATH

Patrolman Eifert was dead upon arrival at the hospital at 6:15 a.m. Almost immediately after the shooting, Covington Police Chief Alfred Schild told the press that the shot that killed Patrolman Eifert was fired by Rose.

Patrolman Eifert was survived by his wife, Catherine H. (Bornhorst) Eifert; children, Joan Eifert (15) and Paul S. Eifert (12); father, Sylvester Eifert; and siblings, Philemon Eifert, Valaria Corby, Rowena Rolfes, and Melania Petzer.

Visitation was held at John J. Radel Funeral Home on February 10, 1946. The Covington Airie Eagles and Fraternal Order of Police conducted services that evening. A Requiem High Mass at

St. Aloysius Church and funeral services were held the next morning. Heis buried in Mother of God Cemetery in Covington.

JUSTICE

On February 9, 1946, Judge Eugene Benzinger of Covington Police Court, referred the case to Kenton County Grand Jury. Grover Cleveland Rose had told Kenton County Attorney James Quill that he had tried to take his own life and the wound to his face was the result of Arlyn Bussell trying to wrestle the gun from him. Rose and Bussel were charged with Murder and ordered held without bond by Judge William E. Wehrman. The three women were each additionally charged with drunkenness and Judge Wehrman set their bonds at \$5000 (about \$85,000 in 2026 dollars) each.

On February 13th Judge William Wehrman continued the cases until Wednesday, the 20th.

On February 20, 1946, Bussell waived a preliminary examination and was bound over to the Kenton County Grand Jury by Judge Wehrman and held in the Kenton County Jail under a \$25,000 bond (more than \$400,000 in 2026 dollars). With Rose still in the hospital, Judge Wehrman continued his case until March 6th.

All five suspects were indicted on various homicide and misdemeanor charges on February 26, 1946. Rose and Bussell were indicted for Willful Murder with the possibility of a death penalty. The three women were indicted for a breach of the peace.

On March 3, 1946, with Rose recovered enough to leave the hospital, Judge Joseph P. Goodenough arraigned the five in Kenton County Circuit Court. All five pleaded not guilty. Judge Goodenough scheduled the trial for April 2nd .

Rose's Murder trial actually began on April 3, 1946. Ulie J. Howard, Commonwealth Attorney, and James E. Quill, Kenton County Attorney, prosecuted.

Bussell testified that he and Rose were out and that he returned to the rooming house after Rose; that on the way, he passed Rose's girlfriend, Lucille Coatney (18), who said, "The police are coming." Bussell continued up the stairs and, seeing Rose, asked why the police were coming. Rose responded by threatening to kill the girls and "the first cop who comes up the stairs." As Bussell walked toward his room, he heard shots behind him and then Rose came to him in the hallway and said, "I just killed a cop. I might as well kill myself." At which time, he put the gun under his chin and pulled the trigger. Bussell grabbed the gun and the bullet went through Rose's chin instead.

The Prosecution rested their case the next day at 10:30 a.m.

The defense attorney, Stanley Chrisman, tried a few legal maneuvers, including requesting a preemptory dismissal of charges and a plea of temporary insanity, but the Judge did not allow them.

Rose testified that he and Bussell had been drinking for several hours prior to the shooting and that they then returned to their rooms to get money from Lucille. He said that when she refused, he went to bed. Lucille got out of bed and he followed her. He said his next memories were of him shooting himself and then waking up in the hospital.

The case was handed over to the jury that day, April 4th, at 2:30 p.m. The jury of ten women and two men deliberated for 1 hour and 20 minutes, returned a verdict of guilty with a recommendation of life imprisonment. Judge Goodenough announced that he would formally sentence him during the next week. Rose wept.

It was learned after the trial that Rose had passed notes through a Kenton County Jail turnkey to the three female witnesses telling them how to testify. On April 9, 1946, the turnkey, James Fox, was suspended. Detectives and the prosecutors discussed charging Lucille Coatney with Perjury, because on the stand she denied hearing Rose's intent to kill a policeman, though she had stated as such to responding officers on the night of the murder.

Instead, all four were released on April 17, 1946, on orders of Judge Goodenough. The women were each fined \$100 and costs and sentenced to 50 days in jail. Judge Goodenough probated the fines and sentences conditional upon them leaving town, ostensibly returning to Michigan, and never returning.

Bussell's indictment for Willful Murder was filed with the understanding that it could be reopened at any time and with the inference that he too was no longer welcomed in Kentucky.

Life imprisonment in Kentucky at that time meant a term of about eight years before parole was possible. On June 2, 1955, Covington Mayor, John T. Maloney, and the Covington Police Department were outraged to find that Rose was being recommended for parole. The mayor contacted State Parole Officer Robert Aldemeyer. James E. Quill, Commonwealth Attorney, contacted the State Parole authorities. During their annual state convention held in Covington that year, the Fraternal Order of Police also objected to the parole. The pleas reached the governor's desk who remanded them back to the Parole Authority for review.

On September 1, 1955, little more than 9½ years after the premeditated murder of Patrolman Eifert, Rose (29) was released on parole to his hometown of Tazwell, Tennessee on the condition that he stay there and have a job. Parole officials did not notify the courts, prosecutors, police department, or the people

of Covington.

About a year later, violating the terms of his parole, he married Anna Maude Williams of Miamisburg, Ohio in Wayne County, Indiana. At some point thereafter, he returned to Michigan where, at the age of 70 he died; almost 50 years to the day after taking the life of the 39-year-old patrolman.

EPILOGUE

In March 1946, the Covington Pension Fund Board voted unanimously to give Mrs. Cleophus Eifert a \$36 a month pension for one year. Catherine Eifert, after 40 years without a husband, passed away before her husband's killer, in 1986.

Patrolman Eifert's son, Paul Eifert, joined the Covington Police Department and had a highly successful career, retiring as a Police Captain. He also died before his father's killer, in 1995. Patrolman Eifert's grandson, Paul S. Eifert, Jr., also joined and finished his career as a Police Sergeant.

On May 8, 1998, Covington Police Chief Al Bosse retired Patrolman Eifert's Badge Number 53 along with the badge numbers of two other Covington officers who died in the line of duty.

Patrolman Eifert's great grandson, Chris Gangwish, also joined the Covington Police Department in 1999. He served both as a Community Relations Officer and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team Negotiator beginning in 2005. He was promoted to Specialist and beginning in 2006 served two terms as Vice President of the Covington Fraternal Order of Police. He served another term as President until 2010. He retired from the Department in 2015.

If you have information, artifacts, archives, or images regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at Director@GCPHS.com.

This narrative was researched and revised February 6, 2026, by Cincinnati Assistant Chief, Lieutenant Colonel Cindy M. Combs (Retired) with assistance from Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society Chief Executive Officer and prior information provided by Cincinnati Homicide Detective Edward W. Zieverink III (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Curator. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.