

Patrolman Donald Martin | Cincinnati Police Division



Badge: P338

Age: 29

Served: 5 years

April 30, 1956 to March 11, 1961

OFFICER

Don was born May 4, 1931 near Viper in Perry County, Kentucky, the fifth of seven children born to farmers, Claude and Alafair Mae "Allie" (Pennington) Martin. He attended two years of high school and the Ohio Mechanics Institute.

At seventeen, Don joined the United States Army on September 30, 1948, and was trained at Fort Samuel Huston in Texas and in Tokyo, Japan. He then went to war in Korea in the 8th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division. His regiment saw extensive fighting and tremendous losses in the early days of the war. Corporal Martin was honorably discharged on June 25, 1952 with a Combat Medical Badge (issued to those who rendered aid under fire) and Korean Service Medal with 3 bronze stars (each representing a major campaign).

On June 29, 1953, Althea Gail Langley joined the Cincinnati

Police Division as a Junior Typist. She was later promoted to Clerk Typist 2 and assigned as the secretary to the Chief of Detectives, Henry Sandman. On June 6, 1954, Don was working as a draftsman in Norwood when he applied for a marriage license to marry Gail. We are told that when the Chief of Detectives met Gail's husband, he convinced him to join the Police Division.

On April 30, 1956, Don was appointed as a Police Recruit. He was promoted to Patrolman on August 13, 1956, issued Badge 338, and assigned to District 4 (7017 Vine Street). He was rotated to District 1 on February 23, 1958 and again to District 7 (813 Beecher Street) on February 22, 1959. During his tenure in each district, his commanders, Lieutenant Elmer Ries and Captains Clem Merz, Theodore Bird, and Charles Kline, all commented about his effort toward improvement and affability. On December 31, 1960, he earned an excellent performance evaluation of 90% and had already received three letters of appreciation and/or commendation, including one from the Police Chief.

Unable to have children, Patrolman Martin and his wife applied to become adoptive parents. During the winter of 1960, while living at 4300 Foley Road, they were notified that a baby was available from the Protestant Orphan Home. On February 12, 1961 Mrs. Martin resigned from her job in anticipation of the new child. The growth in their family would require that they purchase an automobile.

INCIDENT

On the night of March 10, 1961, Patrolman Martin was working the night shift and requested of his supervisor, Sergeant Hike Bogosian, permission to, if the radio traffic was quiet, check out the Downtown Lincoln Mercury car lot on his beat at 715 Reading Road. Sergeant Bogosian approved his request and, at 3

a.m., Patrolman Martin radioed Communications that he would be on foot in the area. He parked his patrol car at the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco) parking lot at 721 Reading Road. (It should be noted that in 1961, police cars were equipped with a two-way radio and when the officer was outside the car, he was away from his only method of communication.) He exited his vehicle and walked onto the car lot.

That same night, Walter Baker Walls and Jesse James Walls had walked to a bar at the corner of Thirteenth Street and Reading Road because neither of their cars was operational. Walter Walls called his friend, Charles Herbert "Cadillac Charlie" Jillson, for a ride and he came with his Cadillac. The three of them went looking for a battery to steal. They found what they wanted at the Downtown Lincoln Mercury car lot. The Walls brothers entered the lot on foot while Jillson waited in the car. They were still there at 3 a.m. when Patrolman Martin entered the lot.

Patrolman Martin approached the two at the front end of a car with its hood open. Walter Walls pulled an Iver Johnson .38 caliber revolver from his pocket. Patrolman Martin saw the gun coming out and knocked it out of Walls's hand. The revolver landed on the ground and a violent struggle ensued over Patrolman Martin's Smith and Wesson Model 10 .38 Special service revolver, such that his blouse was ripped at the lapel and several buttons were torn from his uniform. Walter Walls, possibly with Jesse's assistance, gained control of Patrolman Martin's revolver and shot Patrolman Martin in the chest. Patrolman Martin turned and ran toward his patrol car with Walter Walls in pursuit and shooting him twice more in the back. Patrolman Martin slumped to the ground, held his hands up, and Walls took deliberate aim and fired another round into his back.

At 3:10 a.m., Charles Minnich, Jack Wenner, Hugh Moore, and Harold Stiver, all of Phillipsburg, Ohio, were northbound at 721

Reading Road when they observed the chase and fourth shot. After Patrolman Martin fell to the ground, Walls walked up and fired a fifth shot into his head behind his left ear. The Phillipsburg witnesses did not see this occur.

Observing the scuffle and homicide, Jillson drove away.

Seeing him drive away, Walter Walls fired the revolver's last round at Jillson's Cadillac. He then ran across Reading Road and up Dandridge Street. While going up a muddy embankment, he fell, pushing the revolver partially into the mud. Walls discarded Martin's gun and his own shirt and jacket into a trash can in the rear of 542 Dandridge Street.

Jesse Walls ran eastbound through the Nabisco lot toward the railroad tracks behind the Elsinore Warehouse.

Harold Stiver exited his vehicle and tried to assist Patrolman Martin who, amazingly, was still alive. The others drove to a gas station to call the police.

Sergeant Max Abel was the first car on the scene. Patrolman Martin was barely conscious and said, "I've had it." Those were his last words. He was transported to General Hospital at 3:19 a.m. where he was immediately taken to the operating room.

DEATH

Patrolman Martin never regained consciousness. He died during surgery at 5 a.m.

Patrolman Martin was survived by his wife, Aletha Gail (Langley) Martin, both his parents, and all of his siblings. His funeral was presided over by Reverend Arthur Scheidt at the Concordia Lutheran Church at 1524 Race Street. The pallbearers were

District 7 Patrolmen Jerry Berry, Carl Goodin, Milton Dills, John Edwards, Charles Veite, and Orville Clark. He was buried in the Arlington Memorial Gardens in Springfield Township. His headstone carries a brass disc bearing the seal of the Fraternal Order of Police, and upon it the motto "Justidus / Libertatum" – "Justice and Liberty."

INVESTIGATION

However, justice did not come quickly to Patrolman Martin.

Two-year Patrolman Lawrence E. Whalen and ten-year veteran, Patrolman Giles Prost were temporarily detailed from District 5 to a 100-man task force quickly created to solve the murder. They were assigned, with others, to slowly comb through the approximately two acres on the east side of Reading Road looking for clues, "no matter how small."

Patrolman Whalen found a small hole, about an inch in diameter, on a hillside just east of the road. To him, it looked like it might have been made by the end of the barrel of a revolver. He showed it to first-year Detective Perry Brunson who had just completed police evidence school, including a class on latex mold technology. Detective Brunson made a mold of the hole, while Detective Jerry Elam took photographs, and the mold was exactly the size and shape of the Smith and Wesson, Model 10 revolver that Cincinnati patrolmen were issued, including that of the blade sight at the end of the barrel (NOTE: The revolver and the mold are currently at the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum).

This was a big clue, which became even bigger when, traversing the apparent route of the man who ran with the gun, tripped up the hillside, and pushed the revolver into the ground, they

found it led to near 532 Dandridge Avenue where task force members found the revolver and a ripped jacket and sport shirt in a garbage can three blocks north of 721 Reading. This find caused the police to expand the search to a 75-block area from 12th Street to McMillan Street and Reading Road to Broadway.

The jacket in the trashcan was examined by the labs of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and found to have "Negroid" hairs attached, which initially sent the investigation onto an errant tangent. The trail ran cold.

More than a year later, Detective Jerry Schimph, Personal Crimes Squad investigator, was told by an informant that Walter Walls had bragged about killing the officer while in jail. By then, the 29-year-old Walls was in the Ohio State Penitentiary for the third time. During 1958, he was sent there for altering car titles. He was paroled in 1959 and sent back again during January 1960 as a parole violator. On February 23, 1961 he was paroled again – two weeks before killing Patrolman Martin. Three months after the killing, he was caught carrying a firearm and sent back to prison.

For many months, the Homicide Squad investigated the murder. When its commander, Lieutenant Charles Martin (no relation) died suddenly in March 1962, after his funeral, a sergeant found notes and reports from the killing on his desk.

On August 3, 1963 Detectives Schimph and Will Stagenhorst traveled to the Penitentiary, with a shirt that was found at the scene of the killing. The shirt fit perfectly, but Walls would not budge on his story. He admitted he had bragged about committing the murder, but that it was a false bravado.

None in Walls's family or friends would tell what they had heard because they feared for their lives. Walls had abused them mercilessly. They knew that he had already caught up with

Jillson in Kentucky and killed and buried him by the side of the road. Later, in 1969, Walls had his estranged wife killed after she charged him with Child Neglect. The only other witness was Jessie Walls who said nothing.

When Walls was released from prison on October 11, 1963 the detectives met him at the door and interrogated him again. Again, he held fast to his story. They did not attempt a polygraph because prison psychiatrists judged that he was not a fit candidate (which probably meant that he was diagnosed as a psychopath). The trail went cold again, though the detectives would forever believe Walls was the assassin.

Then, during February 2005, 44 years after the murder, a tipster called Crime Stoppers with information. The Crime Stoppers investigators brought it to the attention of their boss, the Major Offenders Unit Commander, Lieutenant Stephen Kramer, who took it to the Homicide Unit Commander, Lieutenant Michael Zwick. Lieutenant Zwick assigned two Homicide Unit investigators, Officers Kurt Ballman and Jeff Schare, neither of whom had been born yet when Patrolman Martin was slain.

Walter Walls had died six months earlier. Jesse Walls was also dead. The Homicide investigators talked to Walter's son and daughter who were, for the first time in their lives, not in mortal fear of Walter Walls. They related what they had heard over the years from their father and uncle. More importantly, they told of his assertion that he put the last shot into Patrolman Martin behind his left ear; a detail that had never been disclosed and therefore only the killer would know. The Homicide Unit and Hamilton County Prosecutor closed the case by the "death of the offender," Walter Walls.

EPILOGUE

Mrs. Martin, now without a job, a child, or a husband, was reinstated to her position with the Police Division on March 20, 1961. Her status was converted from "resigned" to "leave of absence" so that she did not lose her seniority benefits having been employed there since 1953.

Coincidentally, after Homicide Commander Lieutenant Martin died, his wife, Bernadette, was also hired into Sandman's office where she and the other Mrs. Martin worked together for a few months.

Gail Martin met Thomas Fegan at the coffee shop at City Hall and they married during August 1962. By 1963, Mr. Fegan was offered a job in Michigan, and they moved there and raised a family.

Once the case was solved, the evidence was released as artifacts to the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum and many of them are on display there.

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

© This narrative was revised February 27, 2025 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President/CEO, based largely on his research and anecdotal recollections of Cincinnati Police Chief Lawrence E. Whalen (Retired), Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Thomas Martin (Retired), and Cincinnati Police Officer Jeff Schare. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.