

Patrolman William Howard Deiters | Cincinnati Police Department



Age: 35

Served: 13½

March 20, 1905 to August 29, 1918

THE OFFICER

Howard was born October 18, 1882 in Cincinnati to William H. and Rosina "Rose" (Kuehler) Deiters. During 1900, he was 19, working as a carpet maker, and living at 1791 Sycamore Street with his widowed mother (38) and six siblings; John (16), Minnie (15), Charles (12), Arthur (9), Hellen (8), and Stanley (5). By 1902 he was an elevator man. The next year, he worked as a Clerk at the Alms & Doepke Company. By 1905 he was a printer.

Bill joined the Cincinnati Police Department as a Substitute Patrolman on March 20, 1905. He was promoted to Patrolman on

January 29, 1908.

On August 4, 1908, he married Sarah Coyne (25) of 618 East Pearl Street.

On December 9, 1912, Patrolman Deiters was injured on duty while chasing a man. He returned to duty almost a month later on January 8, 1913. On April 16, 1917, he was injured again, making an arrest. He did not return to duty for almost two months, until June 9, 1917.

By late August 1918, he and his wife had just celebrated their tenth anniversary with their two young children at 2139 Loth Street.

THE MURDERERS

Ludie Clifford Shelton was probably born June 2, 1898, in Tallassee, Alabama. At times, he also claimed to have been born in 1891, 1899, or 1900; born in Birmingham, Alabama or Knoxville, Tennessee; and used the names of James Shelton and Ludie Clifton Shelton (and probably others). Very little can be confirmed about his age or name. Even his death certificate lists most data as "unknown".

His criminal history is also a mystery and not well-reported by the papers of the time. There is an indication that he was in Cincinnati in 1918 "due to World War I," which may imply that he was dodging the draft. In his trial, it came to light that he was also an escapee from some prison and under indictment for another offense unrelated to that from which he escaped.

It was his intention during late August 1918 to add another offense, a robbery, to his legacy. In this venture, he intended to team up with an 18-year-old accomplice, William C. Chandler. We know nothing of him other than his name and age.

Shelton had a revolver for the robbery, but Chandler did not. Together, they decided to steal one.

INCIDENT

Late at night on August 28, 1918, Patrolman Deiters had just begun his shift out of the 5th District (1024 York Street) and was walking in the area of Liberty Street and Freeman Avenue.

According to Frank Lutmer, a Night Watchman, two men approached him at Liberty and Freeman. Another witness, Mrs. Millie Nolan of 1574 Freeman Avenue, was leaning from a window and heard one say, "There he is. Let's give it to him." According to Mrs. Nolan, they grabbed his wrists and one, later identified as Shelton, pulled a revolver and put it the officer's head. He announced their intent to rob him of his revolver.

Chandler searched the officer's pockets and found a hard, metal object, but pulled out a flashlight – not a revolver. With that, Patrolman Deiters attempted to grab his revolver from its holster. Shelton shot him in the chest and both men ran.

Joseph Kirchner of 815 Findlay Street heard the shot and ran to his side. Patrolman Deiters told him, "tell the wife and kiddies they got me." W. S. Schaufert, bartender at T. Heil's saloon on Liberty Street and Freeman Avenue, also ran to his side and Patrolman Deiters whispered to him, "Oh, Tip. Get them." Those were his last words. Kirchner tried to get the patrolman's pistol so he could pursue the suspects but was unable to remove it.

DEATH

Patrolman Deiters was rushed to General Hospital. The shot

had gone through his chin, down through his pericardium, and into his stomach. He died at 12:10 a.m. on August 29, 1918.

Patrolman Deiters was survived by wife, Sarah Deiters; children, Howard Deiters and Marion Deiters; and mother, Rosa Deiters; Services were held at 3 p.m. on August 31, 1918 at the Reformed Salem Church on Sycamore Street at Orchard Street, less than two blocks from where he grew up. He was buried in Carthage Road Cemetery (now Vine Street Hill Cemetery).

INVESTIGATION

Lieutenant John Ringer and Patrolman Busam of the First District happened by on a streetcar and saw the shot fired. They jumped off the streetcar and gave chase east on Liberty Street to Reider Alley and then north to Poplar Street where the suspects disappeared.

Police Chief William Copelan furnished descriptions of the suspects to police departments in nearby states: "No. 1, 5 feet 8 inches, 180 pounds, tan coat, light stripe, very black complexion. No. 2, 5 feet 11 inches, blue serge suit, checked cap, tan shoes, very light complexion."

An agreement between Patrolman Deiters and his wife initially slowed the investigation. Police hoped that she could solve the mystery occasioned by his last words to Joseph Kirchner and W. S. Schaufert, but she would not divulge what she knew, saying that it was "for the sake of the children".

Shelton (going by the name of James Shelton) and Chandler were found to match the descriptions and arrested August 31, 1918 in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Chief of Detectives William J. Love credited Detectives Frank A. B. Hall and John W. Thomas with obtaining the information causing the arrest of the two suspects.

When apprehended, Shelton was found to be carrying a bullet in his pocket similar to that which killed Patrolman Deiters. Shelton gave an address of 747 Carlisle Avenue in Cincinnati. Williams gave an address on Kenyon Street. Detectives Hall and Thomas brought them back to Cincinnati on Tuesday, September 3, 1918. Chandler admitted that he and Shelton shot the patrolman in a statement made to Chief Love.

JUSTICE

On September 5, 1918, during Coroner A. C. Bauer's inquest, Chandler declared that his partner, Shelton, did the shooting. Shelton refused to testify. Frank Lutmer of 1063 Wade Street, a night watchman, testified that he had identified Chandler and Shelton and saw Patrolman Deiters shortly before the patrolman was killed. Coroner Bauer referred the matter to the grand jury.

After the inquest, Shelton told Detectives Hall and Thomas that he wished to confess. In the presence of Coroner Bauer, he admitted to Chief Love that he shot Deiters. He claimed that he did not shoot to kill the policeman, but that he was nervous and did not remember pulling the trigger.

On September 17, 1918, the two were indicted for first degree murder. Shelton was charged with premeditated murder and a second count of murder committed in the perpetration of robbery. Chandler, who stole the officer's flashlight when he attempted to obtain his revolver, was indicted for robbery.

The two were tried separately. Williams was tried by Judge Buchwalter. Attorney Clifford McGary defended Chandler and Assistant Prosecutor Louis Fernberg represented the state. The jury found him guilty of robbery. Chandler was sentenced to the Ohio State Reformatory in Mansfield. We cannot find any information regarding his release or future incidents.

Shelton was represented by Attorney James G. Stewart and M. C. Lykins and prosecuted by Prosecuting Attorney Louis H. Capelle and Assistant Prosecutor Charles S. Bell. Shelton was convicted of Murder and Robbery on March 31, 1919, without a recommendation for mercy. It was the first time in 25 years that, in Hamilton County, a person was convicted of first-degree murder for having killed a man. He was sentenced to be electrocuted on July 16, 1919.

On July 21, 1919, having been given a stay of execution, Shelton sat in the death house awaiting execution with seven other murderers: Paul Chivaro for killing an Akron policeman; Walter Richardson a railroad detective; Frank Seinich a Civil war veteran; Peppro Coffarello and Vincent Damico for another Akron policeman; and Edward Ness for killing a baker. The seventh, James Morgan, stole a train and shot and killed the conductor.

Shelton received two stays of execution and was again scheduled to die on March 7, 1920. But, with only hours to spare, he was granted another stay so that the Supreme Court could look at his case. When he was advised of this, he shouted, "I'm tired of fooling around!" On May 4, 1921, the Supreme Court ordered a new trial on the grounds that the defense attorney was not permitted to plea to the jury for mercy.

On June 6, he was returned to Cincinnati for a trial set for August 5, 1921. He was found guilty and sentenced to die December 2, 1921. This was the first time in Hamilton County history that a man was convicted twice of 1st Degree Murder.

There were more stays based on appeals, the fifth being in March 1922. By then he had been sentenced to be electrocuted three times. Four times he had been granted stays by courts after the execution dates had been set. On March 20, 1922, the Court of Appeals affirmed the verdict and sentence and another execution date was set for July 27, 1922. His

attorneys immediately appealed to the Supreme court again. After ten months in Cincinnati, Shelton was returned to the Ohio State Penitentiary on April 27, 1922. Almost 8 months later, on December 19, 1922, in a unanimous decision written by Chief Justice C. T. Marshall, the Supreme Court upheld the conviction and sentence.

On January 25, 1923, Rev. Father Kelly, Catholic chaplain at the penitentiary, walked with Shelton to the death chair. One application of electricity was sufficient to cause his death. On Friday, January 26, 1923, at 12:08 a.m., almost 4½ years after the cold-blooded murder, Ludie Clifford Shelton was finally dead. He was buried on January 27, 1923 in the Mount Calvary Cemetery, 518 Mount Calvary Avenue, in Columbus, Ohio.

EPILOGUE

Patrolman Deiters was the eighth of nine Cincinnati Patrolmen shot and killed in a span of five years. Four others were shot, but not fatally, during those same years. He was the 50th City of Cincinnati law enforcement officer to die in the line of duty, but Shelton was the first person executed for the murdering a Cincinnati officer.

Patrolman Deiters's mother died on December 29, 1921, before justice was done for her son. Sarah died at 78 in 1960, having lost two sons and a husband during her life. She was survived by her daughter, Sarah, and a granddaughter, Antoinette Cianciolo. The information she had as to the motive for her husband's murder apparently went with her.

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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