Police Officers Dennis Ed “Denny” Bennington and Robert Thomas Seiffert | Cincinnati Police Division



Police Officer Dennis Bennington

Badge: 82
Age: 27
Served: 9½ years
July 20, 1969 to March 6, 1979

Denny was born June 18, 1951 to Robert J. and Ruth (Obermeyer) Bennington. He attended and graduated from Courter Technical High School. He then married his childhood sweetheart, Linda Godfrey, on March 1, 1969.

Denny joined the Cincinnati Police Division on July 20, 1969 as a Police Cadet. While attending the University of Cincinnati and earning an Associate Degree in Police Science, Cadet Bennington worked at Central Station (City jail in City Hall)

and District 6 (3295 Erie Avenue).

While a Cadet, he was also an avid duck hunter and once featured in the Cincinnati Enquirer.

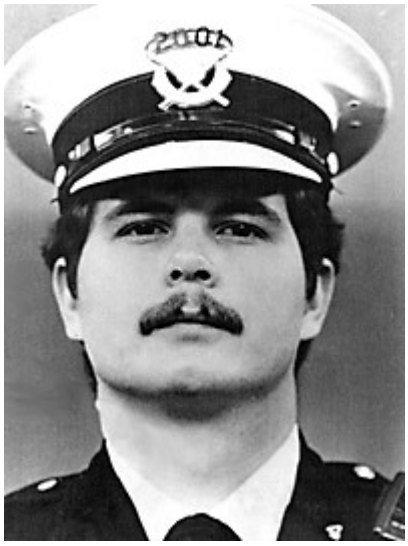
On October 29, 1972 he was promoted to Police Recruit. The recruits were seated alphabetically. Recruits Dennis Bennington, Charles Burdsall, and David Cole were seated together and would eventually start calling themselves the Three Musketeers. Within 6½ years, all three would be shot and killed in the line of duty.

On February 25, 1973, he graduated 14th in his class of 72, was promoted to Patrolman, issued Badge 82, and assigned to District 6. A year later, he was rotated to District 7 (813 Beecher Street). On July 20, 1974, he served as a pallbearer for Patrolman David Cole who was killed on Florence Avenue. Officer Bennington was later transferred to District 4 (4150 Reading Road).

For several years prior to 1978 and decades thereafter, the Cincinnati Police Department deployed a Robbery Task Force to focus on the annual increase in robbery offenses during the Christmas Holidays each year. Traditionally, the better officers were assigned to the task force beginning the day after Thanksgiving and ending the day after Christmas. During 1978, Officer Bennington was named to the Task Force and partnered with Officer Robert Seiffert.

By March 1979, Officer Bennington had served 9½ years and received six letter of appreciation and/or commendation, including three official commendations from the police chief or bureau commander. Reading from his personnel file, Acting Police Chief Lawrence E. Whalen described him as “an excellent all-around police officer who needs no supervision.”

He had also been married for ten years and considered first and foremost a family man. He spent most of his free time with his children. The Bennington family was featured in The Cincinnati Enquirer during 1977 as a family of campers. He also played ball in the street with his children and the other children in the neighborhood, in addition to hunting and fishing.



Police Officer Robert Seiffert

Badge: 735
Age: 31
Served: 8 years
February 28, 1971 to March 6, 1979

Bob was born March 5, 1948 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Edwin J. and Margaret M. Seiffert. He attended Collingswood High School in Collingswood, New Jersey, was known for attending almost every major high school sporting event and graduated in 1966.

After high school, he took a position as a technician for Dynasil Corporation of America. Dissatisfied with his job, he went back to school in September at Glassboro State College and

majored in Mathematics, until 1967.



During 1967, Bob joined the United States Army. After basic training, he was assigned to Rotary Wing Flight Training, which he completed during October 1968 in Savannah, Georgia. He then served as a helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War. He had been given nearly no chance of surviving his tour of duty and was shot down twice; once being wounded. He was then assigned as an Assistant Corrections Officer at the United States Arsenal Stockade in Fort Knox, Kentucky where he worked as a Counselor. During 1970, he also attended the University of Kentucky in Fort Knox. Chief Warrant Officer Seiffert was honorably discharged during January 1971 with a Purple Heart and Silver Star.

Robert joined the Cincinnati Police Division on February 28, 1971 as a Police Recruit. He was promoted to Patrolman on June 27, 1971, issued Badge 735, and assigned to District 4 (7017 Vine Street).

He married Janet Margaret Schutte on July 3, 1971.

Officer Seiffert transferred to District 1 (310 Ezzard Charles Drive) on May 25, 1975. Seven months later, with a reputation of being an honest cop, he was transferred to the Vice Control Bureau which had experienced a scandal. He transferred back to patrol in District 5 (1012 Ludlow Avenue) during June 1976.

On March 12, 1978, he transferred back to District 4. Also during 1978, Officer Seiffert earned a spot on the annual Robbery Task Force.

By March 1979, he had served his country and community eleven years and earned five letters of appreciation and/or commendation. Reading from his personnel record, Acting Police Chief Lawrence E. Whalen described him as "an outstanding officer in all respects, extremely knowledgeable, and looked upon by younger, less experienced officers for guidance."

He was married almost eight years and his neighbors depicted him as a good father who loved his children, very religious, sports minded, and an award-winning racquet ball player. He had earned the silver medal in the previous year's Ohio Police Olympics. He kept himself in "super shape" in order to best perform in his dangerous job. At his church, he coached the sixth- and seventh-grade St. Aloysius Gonzaga soccer team, was a religious education teacher, and was involved in their baptismal program. He spent a lot of time with the neighborhood children and they seemed to always congregate in and around his yard.

On March 5, 1979, Officer Seiffert, his wife, and children celebrated his 31st birthday and were "the happiest [they had] ever been." Officer Seiffert went into work his 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. shift.

MURDERER

A contemporary of the two officers, Gregory Daniels was born about 1951. Based on his very early adult criminal record, we assume he had a juvenile record that we are not privy to. At 18, he was arrested in 1970 for abusing a dog and was sentenced to time in the Workhouse. Two months later, he returned to the

Workhouse for Disorderly Conduct. During 1971, he was arrested for robbing the Vine Street Five and Dime. While awaiting trial in the court holding room, he escaped and detectives were required to file warning shots to recapture him. He was sentenced to 1 to 25 years in prison for the robbery and an additional 1 to 5 years for the escape – to be served consecutively. He served less than 25 months and was placed on parole on November 6, 1973.

While on parole, he was indicted for Aggravated Robbery and Carrying a Concealed Weapon in 1974. He was acquitted of Robbery and the judge reduced the weapons charge to a misdemeanor and sentenced to six months in the Workhouse. His parole was not violated. During 1974 he was arrested again for Assault and did another six months at the Workhouse. He still was not violated. During 1976 he was indicted on charges of Kidnapping and Aggravated Robbery, but the charges were dropped when the complainant could not be found to prosecute – and still he was not violated. Nor was he violated for a Theft charge in 1974. He then left the scene of an auto accident and then reported his car stolen. He was found guilty of Making a False Police Report and sentenced to the Workhouse. But he was permitted to serve his days on weekends and then after two weekends, he was put on probation.

He was still preying on the community during December 1978 and committed another street robbery. The case was assigned to the Robbery Task Force, Officers Bennington and Seiffert, for investigation. Daniels eluded efforts to locate and arrest him until after the task force was disbanded. But Officers Bennington and Seiffert never forgot.

INCIDENT

Months later, on March 6, 1979, at 1 a.m., Officer Seiffert saw a car driven by a man who he believed was Gregory Daniels. On a car-to-car radio channel, he contacted Officer Bennington:

Seiffert: Do you know this guy on sight?
Bennington: Yeah.
Seiffert: I'm going to stop him at Oak and May Streets.
Bennington: Okay, I'll be there in a second.

With no reliable witnesses, police surmise that Officer Seiffert pulled Daniels over on westbound Oak Street west of May Street. Both Daniels and Officer Seiffert got out of their cars and Officer Seiffert asked for his identification. Daniels said it was in the car and he reached into the car just as Bennington arrived eastbound on Oak Street, stopped directly across the street from the car, and got out of his car shortly after 1 a.m.

Daniels pulled a revolver from the car, pointed it at Officer Bennington, fired, and struck him in the middle of the chest, destroying the top of his heart and knocking him to the ground. Daniels then, while getting back into the car, fired over his shoulder at Officer Seiffert. Officer Seiffert saw the threat and dove behind Daniel's car. It was not an aimed shot and highly improbable that it would find its target. Nonetheless, it did, striking Officer Seiffert in the head behind the left ear. Then his head struck the 10" curb breaking his neck.

Officer Bennington, though mortally wounded, got up, and drew his revolver. Daniels shot him again, this time in the shoulder. As Daniels pulled away, Officer Bennington fired several shots, striking Daniels in the head and killing him instantly. With his lifeless foot on the accelerator, the car sped into a steel utility pole near Reading Road. A passenger, Sharon Johnson of 2226 Vine Street, was pinned in the car and

suffered wrist and hand injuries and a slight wound to her head from a bullet fragment.

Bethesda Hospital Security Officer Walter Noonan heard what he thought was a firecracker explode, then another, then four or five, and then a loud crash. He ran outside to find the car bent around a utility pole with the driver bent forward on the steering wheel. Fellow Security Officer Rodney Best joined him, and they found Jones screaming that her leg was stuck. A passerby told them that he would go up and tell the police officers that he assumed were up with the police cars that had their oscillating lights flashing. Minutes later, the passerby returned part of the way and excitedly screamed for help because the two officers were dead in the street.

Officer Noonan sprinted to the scene and saw a Queen City Metro employee getting out of one of the cruisers. He had come across the scene as well and intended to contact Police Communications using an in-car radio – but there was none. Officer Noonan grabbed Officer Bennington's microphone and called for assistance.

Four minutes later, when Police Officer Art Evans was first to arrive, he found Officer Bennington dying face down in the street, Officer Seiffert dying in the gutter, and Gregory Daniels dead in the driver's seat of his car against a pole down the street from the officers.

Canine Officer Thomas Martin responded from a cemetery on Victory Parkway. When he arrived, the officers were on the ground. Officer Bennington was closest to the entrance of Bethesda Oak Hospital (less than a block from the shooting) and Officer Martin picked him up and carried him in.

DEATHS

Medics could not get enough blood into Officer Bennington, considering all that he was losing. Doctor Gonzalez pronounced him dead at 2:27 a.m.

At the hospital, a supervisor directed Officer Martin, who lived near Officer Bennington, to bring Mrs. Bennington to the hospital. Officer Bennington had two minor children, so Officer Martin took them to his own home and Mrs. Martin took care of them while Mrs. Bennington went to be with her husband.

Police Officer Michael Broering transported him to the morgue.

Officer Seiffert was transported to University Hospital. Dr. Greiner pronounced him dead at 3:09 a.m. Police Officer Tom VonLeuhrte transported him to the morgue.

FUNERALS

Officer Bennington was survived by his wife of ten years, Linda (Godfrey) Bennington; children, Tina Bennington (9) and Tim Bennington (7); parents, Robert and Ruth (Obermeyer) Bennington; and sister, Marilyn Kumpf. On March 7, District 3 Police Officer James Brown and friend of the family, retrieved from Officer Bennington's locker personal items and a clean uniform in which to be buried. He then went to the Homicide Unit to pick up Bennington's wallet and wedding ring and brought them to his widow. Visitation was held 5 to 9 p.m. on March 7, 1979 at T. P. White Funeral Home on Beechmont Avenue. Cincinnati Archbishop Joseph Bernardin celebrated a Mass of Christian Burial at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, March 8, 1979 at Our Lady of Loretto Church at 4927 Eastern Avenue. Officer Bennington was buried in Gate of Heaven Cemetery.

Officer Seiffert left a wife of almost eight years, Janet (Schutte) Seiffert, and children, Laura Seiffert (6), Heather Seiffert (3), and Robert Seiffert (1). Cincinnati Archbishop Joseph Bernardin celebrated a Mass of Christian Burial at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 8, 1979 at St. Aloysius Church. Officer Seiffert was buried on March 9, 1979 in St. Aloysius Cemetery in Bridgetown.

EPILOGUE

Within 24 hours, the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission published a public service announcement urging police officers to remain calm. Such was the environment Officers Bennington and Seiffert left their homes and families in which to serve their community.

During 1972, Detective Howard Smith had died after being shot during a bank robbery. Patrolman David Cole and Sergeant Charles Handorf were shot and killed in separate incidents during 1974. Officer William Loftin and Sergeant Robert Lally were shot and killed in separate incidents during 1975.

During 1976, the Cincinnati Police Division employed 1162 police officers. City Hall was having financial problems and after assessing personnel, properties, and programs the City Council chose to reduce by more than 20% those personnel and programs dealing with the protection of lives, liberty, and property of its citizens. They laid off more than 200 Police Officers plus upwards of 100 Police Cadets.

After several recommendations by Cincinnati, national, and federal law enforcement personnel, agencies, and studies to upgrade the nearly century-old technology .38 Special revolver, City Council stood fast on the revolver, the caliber, and the

anemic ammunition. Then they closed the Division's target range and assured a lack of general proficiency in the Division's depleted ranks.

They purchased vehicles at low bid and without modern safety equipment such as screens between the drivers and prisoners, mounted spotlights, shotgun racks in the cab, etc.

Worst, the modern ballistic vest was available for more than a decade and still not issued to its officers who were dying by handguns at an unprecedented rate.

Then Officer Charles Burdsall was shot and killed in 1978. There were still ninety officers laid off and the City refused to rehire them. One of those who were not rehired was John Bechtol who then in October 1978 died in the line of duty as a Delhi Police Officer.

The murders of Officers Bennington and Seiffert brought the froth to a full boil. A group of 600 wives, tired of sending their husbands off to the perceived killing fields, marched on City Hall and made demands for their spouses' safety. They also met with the police chief and some called for his resignation. City Councilmembers made busywork of proposals and motions, passing the hot potato around to various committees, and ultimately claimed that they should not act until a Police Safety Task Force filed its report. That was scheduled after the 1979 budget was due, assuring the matter would be kicked down the road for another year.

Linda Bennington never recovered from the loss of her life-long friend and husband and on October 10, 1983, 4½ years after her husband's murder, she ended her life.

Orphans, Tina (14) and Tim (12) Bennington, were initially raised by their grandparents, Ruth and Robert Bennington; but

Robert died three years later and Ruth six years later after that. Tina attended Purcell-Marion High School and played on their softball teams and became a nurse. Tim joined attended Purcell-Marion and then entered the Army Cadet Corps at the Millersburg Military Institute near Paris, Kentucky. Both now live locally with spouses and children of their own.

Though he would never know his father, Officer Seiffert's son named his son Robert Thomas Seiffert in honor of his grandfather.

Some of the artifacts from the incident, including the murderer's revolver, are on display at the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum. If you know of any information, archives, artifacts, or images regarding these officers or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at Memorial@Police-Museum.org.

© This narrative was further researched and revised on January 27, 2020 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Historian, with some assistance from Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Joseph W. Hall (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Bereavement Committee Chairman. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.