Police Officer James Gary Weber | Cincinnati Police Division



Badge: P479
Age: 36
Served: 8 years
September 8, 1974 to September 8, 1982

OFFICERS

Gary was born February 25, 1946 to World War II Veteran James Joseph and Bette Margaret (Bushmiller) Weber. He attended Elder High School, graduating during June 1964, and went on to study Mechanical Drawing at the Ohio College of Applied Science until 1966.

On September 15, 1966 Gary enlisted in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War. He came out of Basic Training as an Airman (E-2), went to Tech School for 3 months, served as a

Crew Chief for 3 months, and then shipped overseas for almost 4 years. He was honorably discharged as a Staff Sergeant (E-5) on September 9, 1970.

During November 1970, Gary went to work in construction with the Cincinnati Gas and Electric Company. Staring in May 1974 he sold cars at Cones-Dever Buick on Ferguson Road for four months.

Gary joined the Cincinnati Police Division as a Police Recruit on September 8, 1974. He was promoted to Police Officer on February 2, 1975, issued Badge 479, and assigned to District 7 (813 Beecher Street). One year later, he was rotated to District 3 (3201 Warsaw Avenue). On December 6, 1976, Officer Weber and 123 other officers were laid off due to a City budget crisis.

Officer Weber accepted a position as a Corrections Officer at the Cincinnati Correctional Institute (formerly Cincinnati Workhouse) on Colerain Avenue.

He was recalled to the Police Division September 18, 1977 and reassigned to District 3. By September 1982, Officer Weber had served his country and community for 12 years and earned a remarkable 13 letters of appreciation and/or commendation.

September 8, 1982 was Officer Gary Weber's 8th anniversary on the Cincinnati Police Division.

Police Officer Charles Klug (40) also graduated from Elder High School, five years before Officer Weber, and had been on the Police Division 5 years longer. He had served in District 2 (314 Broadway), then District 1 (310 Lincoln Park Drive) when the two districts combined. Officer Klug transferred to District 3 during 1980. He also was a highly regarded officer and a member of the prestigious Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team.

KILLER

By day, Stephen Curry James of 344 Resor Avenue, was a professionally respected Sanitary Engineer for the United States Public Health Service at the United States Environmental Protection Agency. By night, he was recently divorced, commonly intoxicated, and often drove drunk.

INCIDENT

District 3 third relief officers were walking down the steps after roll call on the 2nd Floor on September 8, 1982 when, at 11:17 p.m., Police Communications dispatched Officer Weber (Call No. 302) to a report of Criminal Damaging at the Whippy Dip at 2790 River Road. The suspect was reported to be the operator of a 1968 Chevrolet Malibu parked across the street at 2787 River Road. Officer Klug (Call No. 302X), noting the proximity of the complainant to the suspect, advised that he would also respond to back up Officer Weber.

Upon arrival, the officers spoke to the complainant at the Whippy Dip. They then both walked across the street. The Malibu had a temporary license plate, so Officer Weber opened the driver's door to write down the vehicle identification number. Officer Klug held a flashlight directed at the vehicle identification number tag. That would be the last thought Officer Klug would have for months and the last Officer Weber would ever have.

Stephen James, highly intoxicated, drove his 1972 Chevrolet Corvette inbound on River Road at twice the speed limit; weaving in and out of spaces between other cars; and almost rear-ending

a car in the 2900 block of River Road. Just as Officer Weber closed the door on the Malibu, about 11:35 p.m., James slammed his Corvette into the officers and the Malibu.

The Corvette dragged Officer Weber 58 feet before striking a utility pole and ejecting Officer Weber. It careened off that pole and hit another. It then spun around counterclockwise twice before coming a rest in the middle of River Road, on fire. Officer Weber was probably killed instantly at the initial impact site from the blunt impacts to his head and extremities, skull fracture, and lacerations of the brain.

Officer Klug was knocked over the Malibu and landed on the sidewalk 12 feet away with fractures and injuries from his skull to his ankles. His legs were nearly amputated at the knees.

A citizen, William Kelly, observed the accident, tuned to Channel 9 (emergency channel) on his Citizen's Band radio, and called for assistance. He then helped James out of the burning Corvette and comforted Officer Klug as best he could until help arrived.

James tried to leave the scene when another citizen, Randal B. Atkins, using Officer Weber's handcuffs, secured him to a steel fence until officers arrived. Atkins also secured the officers' firearms and took alcohol from the Corvette to preserve it as evidence.

Police Officer Dean Ward (Call No. 316), operating a scout car, transported Officer Weber to University Hospital, where he was pronounced dead at 12:30 a.m., and then to the Hamilton County Morgue. Captain Donald Byrd, District Three Commander, and Sergeant George Bredestege, the only supervisor working in District 3 that night, went to Officer Weber's home to notify his wife, Judy Weber.

Responding EMS personnel and fellow officers had little hope that Officer Klug would survive. A Cincinnati Fire Paramedic Unit transported him to University Hospital. Police Officer Stephen Kramer (Call No. 307) responded to Officer Klug's home to notify his wife, Victoria Klug, and take her to the hospital, ostensibly for a final good-bye.

OBITUARY

Officer Weber was survived by his wife, Judy (Clevenger) Weber; children, Tara Weber (9) and Eric Weber (5); and parents. A visitation and FOP Services were held during the morning of September 11, 1982 at St. Aloysius Gonzaga Church in Bridgetown. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at 11 a.m. Officer Weber was buried on September 11, 1982 in St. Joseph's (New) Cemetery.

JUSTICE

Stephen James was charged with Aggravated Vehicular Homicide. About 9½ hours after killing Officer Weber, on September 9, 1982, he pleaded Not Guilty in front of Judge Richard Niehaus at his arraignment and bond was set at $7500 at 10%. He was released after paying $750. On September 15, 1982 he had a preliminary hearing in front of Judge Diedra Hair who found cause to bind him over to the grand jury and continued the bond. Three weeks after the crash, and about a week after Officer Klug awoke from his coma, on October 5, 1982, a Hamilton County Grand Jury indicted James for Aggravated Vehicular Homicide. On December 8, 1982, James pleaded No Contest to Aggravated Vehicular Homicide and was found Guilty by Judge William S. Mathews. On January 22, 1983, Judge Mathews

sentenced him to the maximum of 1 to 5 years in a state penitentiary. On or about January 26, 1983 he entered prison.

After 36 days in prison, James' attorney, Jack Rubenstein, filed for Shock Probation stating – incredibly – that James might lose his job if he remained in prison. Even more incredibly, on March 17, 1983, six months after driving drunk and recklessly, killing Officer Weber, crippling Officer Klug, and trying to run from the crash site, and having served only three months of a minimum one-year sentence, James was ordered released to a minimum-security, overnight facility in Cincinnati (like a hotel) where he would be released to work his job daily at the EPA.

However, there were no beds in the hotel, so Judge Mathews released him, on his own recognizance, until there was an opening. After meeting with the Weber and Klug families a week later, March 23rd, Judge Mathews reaffirmed his decision and James was still a free man. It is not known when, or if, room was ever made for James to be "incarcerated" overnight, but it is certain that within months, he was released outright on 3 years' probation without having nearly paid for his crimes.

EPILOGUE

The day after the crash, Officer Klug, though unaware, endured a five-hour surgery to repair some of the damages. It would not nearly be his last surgery, nor the longest. He hovered near death for weeks but did survive.

His injuries were such that he was eventually medically separated as a Police Officer. Having, in his mind, not given enough of himself to his community, he returned a week later as a Police Technician and earned a stellar reputation as a Desk

Man in District 3. He retired in 2005, having served Cincinnati for 36 years.

During 1995, Cincinnati Police Captain Christopher M. Robertson, Training Section Commander, and Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer, Assistant Planning Section Commander, citing a 1950 Cincinnati ordinance calling for the retirement of badges of officers who died in the line of duty, petitioned Police Chief Michael C. Snowden to retire Badge 479; which he did. Also, they requisitioned plaques for all Cincinnati officers who died in the line of duty since 1950 and erected a memorial at the Cincinnati Police Academy.

When the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum reopened in 2015 on Reading Road, Officer Klug began volunteering there and soon took over the Gift Shop.

Officer Klug has endured more than five dozen surgeries since the accident and has been near death several times. Dirt and infection in his body has remained during the intervening decades – sometimes dormant and sometimes flaring up. On July 13, 2015 Officer Klug had “minor” surgery on his left hand. His infections flared and by July 17, 2015 he was in the critical care unit at University Hospital with three types of infections coursing through his body, especially at his artificial joints and the hand. He endured two more surgeries, another one on his hand and one on his knee, to debride the infected tissue. He came away from these three surgeries with aspirational pneumonitis causing diminished lung function. He was sent home to recuperate for six months on intravenous antibiotics and oxygen. After two months the antibiotics were no longer overcoming the infection in his knee. On September 15, 2015 doctors cut yet again into his leg to remove and replace the artificial knee parts.

Before long, after yet another near-death experience, Officer Klug returned to the Police Museum to run the Gift Shop.

On May 5, 2017, Officer Klug was awarded the first ever Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 69 “President’s Award” at the 50th Annual Hamilton County Law Enforcement Awards.

Due to Officer Klug’s mangled and constantly deteriorating spine, doctors were forced to attempt a multilevel spinal fusion in his lower back that was not even available in 1982. On August 12, 2019, he underwent his 38th reconstructive surgery (of 61 total surgeries to date) to cut three vertebrae in half and replace the front halves with porous titanium created using three-dimensional modeling with magnetic resonance imaging. After three days in ICU, on August 15, 2019, he had another surgery to replace the back halves. In severe pain, he spent another three days in ICU. After a couple of weeks in hospitals, he returned home, but his rear incision became infected and, on September 22, 2019 had his 62nd surgery to remove and debride infected and/or dead tissue. Finally, he was well enough to go home, and for the first time in 37 years, without searing pain in his lower back and legs.

When not at his vacation home in Florida or in the hospital, he can be found most Tuesdays and Saturdays at the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.

By 2013, Stephen Curry James was an adjunct professor of physics and management at Xavier University and retired from the United States Public Health Service. Twice divorced, he married famed contemporary arts curator Suzanne Markette Weaver, curator of the San Antonio Museum of Art until May 2021.

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

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